

This study sheet belongs to:

Study 1. His Background and Early Life

READ: Acts 7: 57-60; 21: 39 to 22: 5;
Philippians 3: 4-8



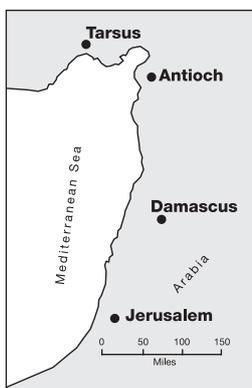
KEY VERSE:
PHILIPPIANS 3: 7

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.”

Paul is perhaps the most devoted follower whom Christ has ever had. No one has worked more tirelessly for his Lord than he. In this introductory Study, we focus on his upbringing. We must not be confused by the variation in his name - “**Paul**” is his Roman name, whereas “**Saul**” is his Jewish name, given to him perhaps in memory of Israel’s first king, Saul. He was of the tribe of Benjamin to which Paul’s family also belonged.

1. BIRTH and EARLY YEARS

His place of birth was Tarsus, the chief city of the province of Cilicia, in Asia Minor (now Turkey). His parents were strict Jews, although they lived far from their Jewish homeland, Israel. They tried very hard to follow the teachings of their faith, and to protect it from the inroads of the heathen world around them. As he grew up, Saul became a Pharisee - a member of the strictest section of the Jews’ religion. (See Acts 26: 5)



Though he was a Jew by parentage and religion, he was also, by birth, a Roman citizen. This highly valued right he inherited from his father. It worked to his advantage on several occasions during his life time. (See Acts 22: 25-29 & 25: 9-12)

As a boy, Paul would have attended the synagogue school in Tarsus. The main ‘text book’ would have been the Old Testament Scriptures. Thus, he became steeped in the history, customs and beliefs of his people. He would also have learned a trade, as all Jewish boys were required to do. For Saul,

the chosen skill was making tents from goats-hair cloth. This, too, was useful in later life. (See Acts 18: 3)

2. AT JERUSALEM

While still young, Saul came to Jerusalem where he was educated “**at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law . . .**”. (Acts 22: 3) Gamaliel was a most famous rabbi (or teacher) and it was a great honour to be one of his students. (See Acts 5: 34) Saul was outstandingly successful in his studies - the ‘top of his class’ as **Galatians 1: 14** would tell us! He grew more and more passionate about the Jewish religion, and prided himself on how diligently he followed all its rules! His ambition, most likely, was to become a rabbi - just as distinguished as his teacher, Gamaliel!

3. PERSECUTOR OF CHRISTIANS

Just at this time, the ‘infant church’ was taking root, proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, and boldly asserting that He is ‘the Christ’. To the mind of Saul, the very idea that one who had suffered a death cursed by the Jewish law, could be both Lord and Christ was blasphemous! (Deuteronomy 21: 22 & 23) So intense was his opposition to the beliefs of the Christians that he did his utmost to wipe them out. “**He made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.**” (Acts 8: 3) When they were facing sentence by the Jewish Council, he says, “**I cast my vote against them**”. (Acts 26: 10)

The first Christian to forfeit his life for his faith in the Lord Jesus was Stephen. When he was being brutally stoned to death, it is significant that “**the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul**”. (Acts 7: 58)

4. “A CHOSEN VESSEL OF MINE”

In these terms the Lord speaks of Saul, or Paul. (See Acts 9: 15) God was about to turn his life completely around, and use him powerfully to spread the gospel of the Lord Jesus! He can likewise use each of us, whatever our background and abilities, if we are prepared to yield our lives entirely to Him!

Study 1. His Background and Early Life

1 EXPLAIN SIMPLY WHY THE MAN WHO IS THE SUBJECT OF THESE STUDIES IS KNOWN BY TWO DIFFERENT NAMES IN THE BIBLE. 2

2 READ ACTS 26: 4 & 5, THEN ANSWER:-
 a. Who were the Pharisees?
 b. What term did Jesus use in **Matthew 23: 13, 14 & 15** to describe them?

 c. Why do you think He called them by this name?

 d. Not all Pharisees were evil! Write the name of one who **"came to Jesus by night"**: (John 3)

4

3 ANSWER TRUE OR FALSE-
 a. Saul of Tarsus was a Gentile.
 b. He had special privileges because of his Roman citizenship.
 c. He was a descendant of Levi.
 d. He was skilful in the making of tents.
 e. He received only a very poor education.
 f. He had a great enthusiasm for the religion of the Jews.

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4 A. EXPLAIN AS CLEARLY AS YOU CAN WHY SAUL, AS A DEEPLY RELIGIOUS YOUNG PHARISEE, WAS SO OPPOSED TO CHRISTIANS.

 B. SUGGEST SOME REASONS WHY SOME PEOPLE, TODAY, ARE OPPOSED TO THE LORD JESUS, AND HIS GOSPEL.

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5 READ ACTS 7: 57-60 AGAIN, THEN ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:-
 a. What name is given to a person who dies for his beliefs?
 b. What part did Saul play in Stephen's stoning?
 c. What were Stephen's last words?
 d. What impression do you think these words might have had on Saul?

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6 THE THINGS, WHICH PAUL LEARNED IN EARLY LIFE, PROVED USEFUL TO HIM IN HIS LATER WORK FOR GOD.
 a. In what way could this thought help you, in your present studies and training?

 b. Explain why God has a claim upon your whole life.

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7 IN 1 TIMOTHY 1: 12-15 PAUL WRITES ABOUT HIS EARLY LIFE.
 READ THE VERSES, THEN ANSWER THESE:-
 a. Write out, from **verse 13**, three words which show why he needed **"mercy"**.

 b. In what way was **"the grace of our Lord . . . exceedingly abundant"**?

 c. Copy out **verse 15**.

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Study 2. His Conversion

This study sheet belongs to:



KEY VERSE:
ACTS 9: 6

“So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’”

I. DANGER - PERSECUTOR AT WORK!

Following Stephen’s martyrdom, Saul’s opposition to the Christians intensified. He had many of them thrown into prison at Jerusalem. Others, however, managed to flee to outlying areas. Very courageously, they remained true to their newly found Lord, and proclaimed His message wherever they went.

(Read Acts 8: 1-4)

Saul, however, was determined to stamp out the new movement. He would pursue them, even as far as Damascus, 150 miles to the north-east! So, off he went, armed with letters from the High Priest, which would empower him to bring **“any who were of the Way, whether men or women . . . bound to Jerusalem”**. (Acts 9: 2)

We must admire the courage and faithfulness of these young Christians who were being so severely tested. The challenge for each of us is: Am I prepared to be true to the Lord, however difficult my circumstances may be?

2. THE PERSECUTOR ARRESTED!

His journey to Damascus would have taken perhaps a week. Picture him, as he walked along dusty roads, under the burning heat of the sun! We wonder what his thoughts were. Did he think about Stephen’s final words, and death? Perhaps he did!

With Damascus in sight, a momentous thing happened. (Read vs. 3-6 very thoughtfully, again!) In one blinding flash of light from Heaven, the persecutor was stricken down. At that instant, he realised what a great mistake he had been making. He had judged Jesus to be a blasphemer, a false Messiah, an imposter! But now His true identity became clear to him. Jesus is none other than the Lord in Heaven, now risen from the dead and exalted in glory. Furthermore, He is fully aware of

READ: Acts 9: 1-22

all Saul’s hatred and wicked intentions! There was only one fitting response to such an amazing revelation - **“So, he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’”** (Key Verse)

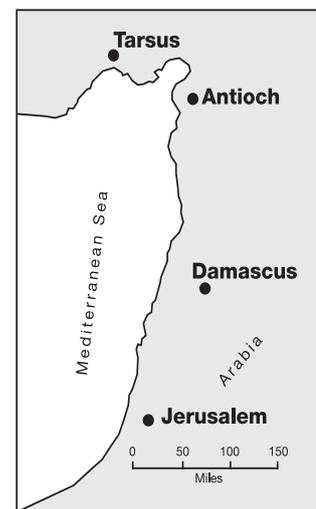
It was the turning-point in Saul’s experience! He never forgot what happened, and often spoke about it. (See Acts 22 & 26) The persecutor had been arrested by God Himself, and turned completely around! That is the Bible meaning of conversion; his attitudes towards himself and especially towards Jesus were totally altered. Today, we do not experience bright lights and voices from Heaven, yet conversion is a necessity for each of us. The essential elements are **“repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ”**. (Acts 20: 21) Have you, personally, realised your sinfulness, been truly sorry about it, and sincerely trusted the Lord Jesus, thereby entering into a personal relationship with Him?

3. THE PERSECUTOR TRANSFORMED!

Saul immediately obeyed the Lord Jesus, by making his way into Damascus. (vs. 6 & 8) He remained sightless, and ate no food for three days during which time he gave himself to prayer. Without doubt, he thought deeply about his experience outside the city.

The visit of Ananias strengthened Saul in his new faith; his eye-sight was restored and, without delay, he was baptised as a believer in the very Person against whom he had fought so vigorously. Fearlessly, he began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. (v. 20)

The transformation was amazing. What a clear demonstration of the power of Christ and His gospel! Is similar evidence to be seen in **YOUR** life today?



Study 2. His Conversion

1 USING ACTS 8: 1-4 TO HELP YOU, WRITE A SENTENCE TO SHOW TWO EFFECTS, OR RESULTS, OF SAUL'S PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS. 2

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2 A. IN PREPARATION FOR HIS JOURNEY TO DAMASCUS, WHAT DID SAUL OBTAIN FROM THE HIGH PRIEST IN JERUSALEM?

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B. WHAT AUTHORITY DID THESE CONFER ON SAUL?

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3 SOMETIMES 'GOOD' COMES OUT OF 'EVIL'. WHAT 'GOOD' CAME OUT OF THE PERSECUTION WHICH SAUL INFLICTED UPON THE CHURCH? (ACTS 8: 4 & 11: 19-21 MAY HELP YOU!)

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4 AT THE BEGINNING, BELIEVERS WERE SOMETIMES KNOWN AS FOLLOWERS OF "THE WAY". SEE ACTS 9: 2, 19: 9, 19: 23, 22: 4. LOOK UP JOHN 14: 1-8, SELECT ONE VERSE FROM WHICH THIS DESCRIPTION MAY HAVE ARISEN, AND WRITE IT OUT. 2

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5 A. USING YOUR OWN WORDS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, WRITE A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF SAUL'S EXPERIENCE AS HE APPROACHED DAMASCUS.

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B. WHY IS 'CONVERSION' A NECESSITY FOR EACH ONE OF US?

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6 A. BY WHAT MEANS DID THE LORD SPEAK TO ANANIAS?

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B. WHY WAS HE SOMEWHAT UNWILLING, AT FIRST, TO DO AS THE LORD WAS ASKING HIM?

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7 A. READ ACTS 9: 17-22 AGAIN, AND LIST A NUMBER OF CHANGES IN SAUL WHICH SHOW THAT HE WAS TRULY CONVERTED, OR SAVED.

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B. WHAT MARKS OF GENUINE SPIRITUAL CONVERSION WOULD YOU EXPECT TO SEE IN A YOUNG CHRISTIAN TODAY?

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Study 3. Preparation for Future Service

This study sheet belongs to:



KEY VERSE:
ACTS 9: 22

READ: Acts 9: 20-30; Galatians 1: 15 to 2: 2

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.”

The change in Saul (Paul) was outstanding! He at once began to preach that Jesus is **“the Son of God”**. (v. 20) All who heard him were amazed and were unable to refute his powerful words. Not everyone who is converted to Christ is expected to be a public preacher! All of us, however, should be ready to be a witness for our Saviour. (See 1 Peter 3: 15)

We do not have full details of Paul’s movements after his conversion, but we do know that he spent time in the following places:-

1. IN ARABIA

This desert area lies east and south of Damascus. Paul refers in **Galatians 1: 17** to his time there, but he does not say why he went. Perhaps it was a time of preparation for the work which God was committing to him - the task of preaching Christ **“among the Gentiles”**. (Galatians 1: 16 & 2: 2) Preparation for serving the Lord is necessary, and we should never think of it as wasted time. Your present studies or training may well be a part of God’s plan for your future service!

2. BACK TO DAMASCUS

In **Galatians 1: 17** he returned to Damascus, only to find that the Jewish leaders were intent upon killing him. Read again about his escape, in **Acts 9: 23-25 and 2 Corinthians 11: 32 & 33**.

3. IN JERUSALEM

After leaving Damascus, Paul paid a short visit to Jerusalem. What a changed man he was! About three years earlier, he had set out for Damascus with plans to arrest believers in the Lord Jesus. Now he himself was a convinced believer! He must, however, have been disappointed to find that the Christians in Jerusalem were afraid of him! It was Barnabas who came to his aid, by assuring

the church of the reality of his conversion. (See **Acts 9: 26 & 27**) Before long, other difficulties arose, this time from unbelieving Jews who were plotting to kill him. (v. 29) It became necessary for the Christians to escort him to Caesarea, and put him on board a ship bound for Tarsus.

4. AT TARSUS

This was his home city! Here he remained for perhaps the next ten years. He was actively involved in the evangelising of Gentiles - the special task to which God had called him. (**Acts 26: 15-18**) In the place where he had spent his early life, he was able to preach the gospel. Here is a reminder to us that, if we cannot be good witnesses for the Lord at home, we need not think of being missionaries abroad!

5. IN ANTIOCH

While Paul was at Tarsus, others had brought the gospel to Antioch, about 100 miles away. God blessed their efforts and **“a great number believed and turned to the Lord”**. (Acts 11: 21) When news of this wave of blessing reached Jerusalem, Barnabas was sent to Antioch, with a view to helping the newly formed church. On his arrival, Barnabas realised that the task was too great for him alone. He needed a helper, so off he went to look for Paul at Tarsus. When he had found him, he brought him back to Antioch, and for a year Barnabas and Paul worked together, teaching the new Christians the truths of the gospel. (**Acts 11: 22-26**)

Paul’s years of preparation were now almost completed. Through various stages, God had brought him to Antioch, which, in due course, would be the starting-point of wider service for his Lord.

The question he had asked on the Damascus road was still uppermost in his mind: **“Lord, what do YOU want me to do?”** (Acts 9: 6) Does that question influence and regulate **YOUR** life?

Study 3. Preparation for Future Service

1 EXPLAIN, AS CLEARLY AS YOU CAN, WHY "ALL WHO HEARD (PAUL) WERE AMAZED". (ACTS 9: 21)

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2 SUGGEST SOME WAYS IN WHICH A YOUNG CHRISTIAN TODAY CAN BE A WITNESS FOR THE LORD JESUS.

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3 READ GALATIANS 1: 15 TO 2: 2 AGAIN, THEN ANSWER BRIEFLY:-

- a. To whom had Paul been called to preach the gospel?
- b. Name the two men whom he says he met on his first visit to Jerusalem.
- c. How long did his first visit last?
- d. How many years passed before he came back to Jerusalem?
- e. Who accompanied him on his second visit?

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4 A. WHY DO YOU THINK THE JEWS AT BOTH DAMASCUS (ACTS 9: 23) AND JERUSALEM (ACTS 9: 29 & 30) WERE PLOTTING TO KILL PAUL?

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B. HOW DID HE ESCAPE FROM THEM AT DAMASCUS?

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C. HOW DID HE ESCAPE FROM THEM AT JERUSALEM?

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5 PAUL HAD MANY FRIENDS WHO HELPED HIM IN VARIOUS WAYS:-

- a. Write a sentence to explain how Barnabas proved himself to be a true friend.

- b. When human friends failed, the Lord was still faithful! Read what Paul wrote at the end of his life, in **2 Timothy 4: 16-18**, and write out the first sentence of **v. 17**.

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6 A. EXPLAIN WHY PAUL LEFT TARSUS TO GO TO ANTIOCH. (ACTS 11: 22-26)

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B. WHAT NEW NAME CAME INTO USE AT ANTIOCH FOR PEOPLE WHO BELIEVED IN JESUS?

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7 SAUL/PAUL WAS BEING PREPARED, AT EACH STAGE, FOR HIS LIFE'S WORK. SUGGEST SOME WAYS BY WHICH A CHRISTIAN TODAY CAN BE MADE READY FOR THE TASK GOD HAS FOR HIM.

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Study 4. The First Missionary Journey

This study sheet belongs to:



KEY VERSE:
ACTS 13: 2

“As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”

Saul and Barnabas, as we have seen, spent a busy and useful year at Antioch, teaching the young church. But now it was time to move on. The leaders of the church sensed that God was calling Barnabas and Saul to a wider field of service. The **Key Verse** expresses clearly what the Holy Spirit was saying to them. It was not long until the two of them were on their way, with the full approval of the entire church!

God still calls! He does so in a variety of ways. Some, like Barnabas and Saul, are called to go overseas with the gospel; others remain at home, serving the Lord among their own people. For each of us, the important thing is to be living each day in close fellowship with Him, always ready to obey whatever directions He may give us.

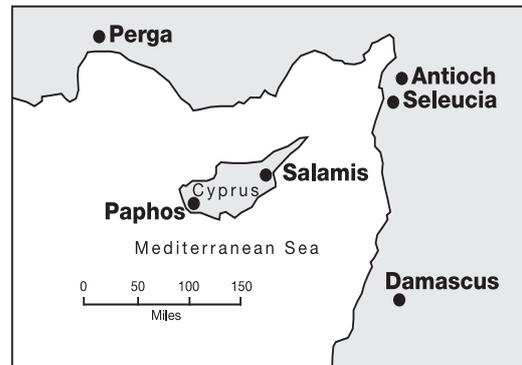
Two points deserve special notice:-

- i) Barnabas and Saul were **“sent out by the Holy Spirit”**. (v. 4) This means, at least, that they had a deep conviction that God had called them. This would be a source of strength to them in all that lay ahead.
- ii) They had the support and encouragement of each other. It is always a good thing to have the fellowship of others, in our work for the Master!

The first stage of their journey was to go to Cyprus, the large Mediterranean island which, in fact, was Barnabas’s birth-place. (Acts 4: 36) They were accompanied by a younger man called Mark (sometimes John Mark, or simply John) It is good to know that, whatever our age, there is some part we can play in spreading the gospel!

On disembarking at Salamis, they set about the task of preaching the gospel. Their normal practice was to go to the Jewish synagogues (‘meeting-

READ: Acts 13: 1 - 12



places’) where they would have opportunity to speak. They would try to convince the Jews that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, or Christ, and that He truly is the Son of God, who had died, but is now risen and exalted in Heaven.

When they came to Paphos, they met the Roman deputy, or proconsul, a man called Sergius Paulus. He was a non-Jew (a Gentile), and was very interested in hearing the missionaries’ message. But a certain Bar-Jesus, or Elymas, did his utmost to prevent the deputy from hearing. This Bar-Jesus was, most likely, employed by Sergius Paulus, as an advisor. He claimed to have powers of magic, and to be able to predict the future. If his employer became a Christian, Elymas could very well find himself out of work! For this reason he did all he could **“to turn the proconsul away from the faith”**. (v. 8)

It was a clear case of the power of God and the power of Satan confronting each other! Which would win? Paul, **“filled with the Holy Spirit”** (v. 9), pronounced God’s judgment on the evil Elymas who was temporarily blinded. The proconsul, without further delay, believed in the Lord Jesus and became, perhaps, the first Roman ruler of high rank to become a Christian. What a triumph for the gospel of Christ!

The age-old conflict between God and Satan still rages, in many different forms. The challenge of this incident is: On which side am I? For which master am I working - God or the devil? The case of Elymas shows clearly what a serious thing it is to try to hinder other people from hearing and believing the gospel! If we do so, we are leaving ourselves open to God’s judgement!

Study 4. The First Missionary Journey

- 1** A. **HOW MANY "PROPHETS AND TEACHERS" ARE NAMED IN ACTS 13: 1?**
- B. **NAME THOSE WHOM GOD WAS CALLING TO A NEW ASPECT OF HIS WORK.**
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C. **IN WHAT WAYS DID THOSE REMAINING AT ANTIOCH EXPRESS THEIR ONENESS WITH THE TWO WHO WERE LEAVING?**

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- 2** A. **1 PETER 2: 9 TELLS US THAT EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS BEEN CALLED "....."**
- SUPPLY THE MISSING WORDS.**

B. **1 PETER 5: 10 SAYS THAT GOD HAS CALLED US TO "....."**

FILL IN ABOUT 7 MISSING WORDS.

C. **READ AGAIN THE KEY VERSE, AND EXPRESS IN YOUR OWN WORDS TO WHAT BARNABAS AND SAUL WERE BEING CALLED.**

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- 3** **ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ISLAND TO WHICH THE MISSIONARIES CAME-**

- a. What was its name?
- b. Why would Barnabas especially be interested in going there?
- c. In what sea is it found?
- d. What two towns, or ports, on the island are mentioned in the Bible Reading?
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- e. Who was the deputy, or proconsul?

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- 4** **GIVE ONE GOOD REASON WHY IT IS IMPORTANT FOR BELIEVERS TO BE LIVING IN CLOSE FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD.**
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- 5** A. **WHAT NAME IS GIVEN TO A JEWISH MEETING-PLACE?**

B. **WHY DO YOU THINK THE GOSPEL WAS PREACHED AT THE BEGINNING "TO THE JEW FIRST", AS ROMANS 1: 16 SAYS?**

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- 6** **TRUE OR FALSE?**

- a. Elymas is another name for Sergius Paulus.
- b. Bar-Jesus was a Jewish false prophet.
- c. Elymas was opposed to the Roman proconsul hearing the gospel of the Lord Jesus.
- d. Sergius Paulus was not interested in what Barnabas and Saul preached.
- e. The Roman proconsul was convinced of the truth of the gospel, and became a believer in Christ.

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- 7** A. **WHY DID PAUL SPEAK SO STRONGLY TO ELYMAS IN V. 10?**
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B. **IN WHAT WAY WAS ELYMAS PUNISHED FOR HIS WRONG-DOING?**

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C. **WHAT WARNING DO YOU THINK THIS INCIDENT HAS FOR US TODAY?**

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Total marks
for this Unit

Return your study sheets to:

25

Total marks
for this study