

C1 - The Life & Work of Paul

Study 1 - His Background and Early Life

BIBLE READING:

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

KEY VERSE:

“But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.”

Philippians 3: 7

Paul is one of the most devoted followers whom Christ has ever had. No one worked more tirelessly for his Lord than he did. 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 pagan world around them. As he grew up, Saul became a Pharisee - a member of the strictest section of the Jewish 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 was inherited from his father. It worked to his advantage on several occasions during his lifetime. (See **Acts 22: 25-29; 25: 9-12**)

As a boy, Paul attended the synagogue school in Tarsus. The main ‘textbook’ 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 goat-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, according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers’...”**. (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** tells 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

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. **“But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.”** (Acts 8: 3) When they were facing sentence by the Jewish Council, he said, **“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 garments at the feet of a young man named Saul”**. (Acts 7: 58)

4. “A CHOSEN INSTRUMENT 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!



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Study 2 - His Conversion

BIBLE READING:

Acts 9:1-22

KEY VERSE:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5: 17

1. 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 **"so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them 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. What must his thoughts have been as he walked along dusty roads, under the burning heat of the sun? Did he think about Stephen's final words, and death? Perhaps he did!

With Damascus in sight, a momentous thing happened. (Read **verses 3-6** carefully, again) In one blinding flash of light from Heaven, the persecutor was stricken down and a voice said **"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"** Saul replied, **"Who are you, Lord?"** to which the reply was, **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."** In an 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.

It was the turning-point in Saul's experience! He never forgot what happened, and often spoke about it.

(See Acts 22 and 26) He knew that his new allegiance was to the Lord Jesus and now he awaited further instruction from Him. **(Acts 22: 10)** The persecutor had been arrested by God Himself and turned completely around! That is the biblical meaning of conversion; his attitudes towards himself and especially towards Jesus were totally altered. Today, we do not usually experience bright lights and voices from Heaven, yet conversion is a necessity for each of us. The essential elements are **"repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ"**. **(Acts 20: 21)** Have you, personally, realised your sinfulness, been truly sorry about it, and sincerely trusted the Lord Jesus, so that you are now in personal relationship with Him?

3. THE PERSECUTOR TRANSFORMED.

Saul immediately obeyed the Lord Jesus, by making his way into Damascus. **(verses 6, 8)** He remained without his sight, 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 eyesight 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. **(verse 20)**

The transformation was amazing. Saul was a new creation in Christ. **(See Key Verse)** What a clear demonstration of the power of Christ and His gospel! Is similar evidence to be seen in YOUR life today?



Statue of the Conversion of Saint Paul by Bruce Denny in the Churchyard of St Paul's Church in Bedford Street, London.

Answer Sheet

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Study 1 - His Background and Early Life

Name: _____ Return address on back of answer sheet

Address: _____

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 and answer the following questions:

- a) Who were the Pharisees? _____
- b) What term did Jesus use in **Matthew 23: 13-15** 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. _____

□ /6

4. Answer the following questions:

- a) Explain 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.

□ /4

5. Read Acts 7: 57-60 again and 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? _____

□ /4

6. Read 1 Timothy 1: 12-15 where Paul writes about his early life. Answer these questions:

- a) Write out, from **verse 13**, three words which show why he needed "mercy". _____

- b) In what way did "**the grace of our Lord overflow**" to Paul? _____

□ /5

THINK: The things which Paul learned in early life proved useful to him in his later life for God. How is this thought useful or true in your own life?

TOTAL = □ /25

Answer Sheet

C1 - The Life & Work of Paul

Study 2 - His Conversion

1. Using *Acts 8: 1-4* to help you, write two effects, or results, of Saul's persecution of the Christians. _____

 /2

2. Saul planned to stamp out Christianity in Damascus.

a) What did Saul obtain from the high priest in Jerusalem before setting out on his journey? _____

 /3

b) What authority did these give to Saul? _____

3. Sometimes 'good' comes out of 'evil'. What 'good' came out of the persecution which Saul inflicted upon the church? (See *Acts 8: 4; 11: 19-21*)

 /2

4. At the beginning, believers were 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

5. Saul's conversion took place on the road to Damascus.

a) Using your own words as far as possible, write a brief account of Saul's experience.

b) Why is conversion a necessity for each one of us?

 /6

6. After Saul's conversion, Ananias helped him.

a) How did the Lord speak to Ananias? _____

b) Why was he somewhat unwilling, at first, to do as the Lord was asking him? _____

 /2

7. The Key Verse describes conversion in terms of the change in a person's life when "old things" are replaced by "new things". Reflect on the change in Saul's life and fill in some more details in the table below. Use *Acts 9:17-22* to help with the "new" behaviours and practices in his life. An example is given.

Saul's "old" life	Saul's "new" life
Judged Jesus wrongly	Knew the Risen Lord personally

 /8

THINK: In what way has your life changed since you have become a Christian? Is there evidence that you are a Christian?

TOTAL = /25

Answer Sheet

C1 - The Life & Work of Paul

Study 3 - Preparation for Future Service

1. Explain, as clearly as you can, why “all who heard him (Paul) were amazed”. (Acts 9: 21)

□ /2

2. Suggest some ways in which a Christian today can be a witness for the Lord Jesus.

□ /3

3. Read *Galatians 1: 15 to 2: 2* again, then answer briefly:

a) Who had Paul been called to preach the gospel to? _____

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? _____

□ /5

4. The Jews at both Damascus (Acts 9: 23) and Jerusalem (Acts 9: 29-30) were plotting to kill Paul.

a) Why do you think this was? _____

b) How did he escape from them at Damascus? _____

c) How did he escape from them at Jerusalem? _____

□ /4

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 explain what the Lord did for him. _____

□ /4

6. Read Acts 11: 22-26 and answer these questions:

a) Explain briefly why Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch. _____

b) What new name came into use at Antioch for people who believed in Jesus? _____

□ /3

7. Saul/Paul was being prepared, at each stage, for his life's work.

a) Explain some of the ways in which God prepared Saul /Paul after his conversion for his future service.

b) Suggest some ways God uses to prepare a Christian in today's world for His service. _____

□ /4

THINK: In today's Study there are two instances of Saul facing opposition as a Christian. Have you faced opposition for your faith in Christ? Spend time finding out about and praying for those who regularly face persecution for being believers.

TOTAL = □ /25

Answer Sheet

C1 - The Life & Work of Paul

Study 4 - The First Missionary Journey

1. Read Acts 13: 1-3.

- a) How many "**prophets and teachers**" are named? _____
- b) Name those whom God was calling to a new aspect of His work. _____
- c) In what ways did those remaining at Antioch express their oneness with the two who were leaving? _____

 /3

2. Read 1 Peter 2: 9-10.

- a) What name is given to Christians? _____
- b) What has God called us to? _____
- c) Read again the Key Verse and express in your own words what Barnabas and Saul were being called to. _____

 /3

3. Answer these questions about the island the missionaries came to:

- 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? _____
- e) Who was the deputy, or proconsul? _____

 /5

4. Give one good reason why it is important for believers to be living in close fellowship with the Lord. _____

 /3

5. Paul and Barnabas first proclaimed the Word of God to the Jews. (Acts 13: 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? _____

 /3

6. Answer TRUE or FALSE after each statement.

- 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. _____

 /5

7. Read Acts 13: 8-12 again and answer these questions:

- a) Why did Paul speak so strongly to Elymas in **verse 10**? _____
- b) In what way was Elymas punished for his wrong-doing? _____
- c) What warning do you think this incident has for us today? _____

 /3

THINK: Find out about someone who has left where you live to share the gospel with people in another country. How could you encourage this person in their work for the Lord?

C1 - The Life & Work of Paul

Study 3 - Preparation for Future Service

BIBLE READING:

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

KEY VERSE:

“But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus, by proving that Jesus was the Christ.”

Acts 9: 22

The change in Saul (Paul) was outstanding! He at once began to preach that Jesus is **“the Son of God”**. (verse 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. (See map in Study 1) 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. Studies or training may well be part of God’s plan for 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. (verse 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 Paul’s 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 being a witness for the Lord Jesus begins at home!

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 who believed 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) There is much benefit in learning from and having fellowship with others in service for God.

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 road to Damascus was still uppermost in his mind: **“What shall I do Lord?”** (Acts 22: 10) Does that question influence and regulate YOUR life?

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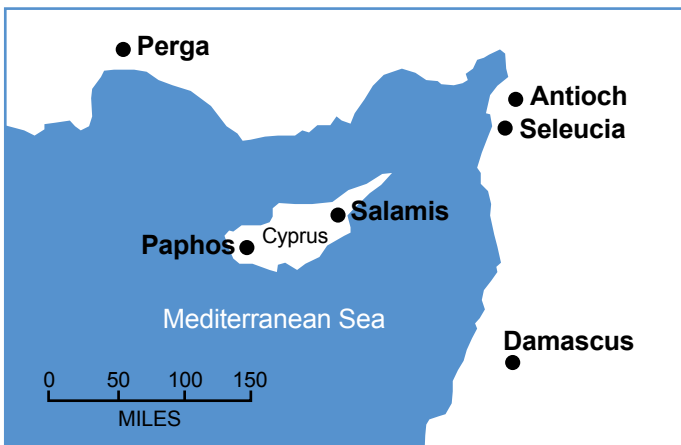
Study 4 - The First Missionary Journey

BIBLE READING: Acts 13: 1-12

KEY VERSE:
**“Set apart for Me Paul and Barnabas
 for the work to which I have called
 them.”**
 Acts 13: 2

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 take the message to places that were further away. 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 tell the gospel message further afield; 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:

- Barnabas and Saul were **“sent out by the Holy Spirit”**. (**verse 4**) This means they were sure of God having told them to go. This would be a source of strength to them in all that lay ahead.
- 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 birthplace. (**Acts 4: 36**) They were accompanied by a younger man called Mark (sometimes John Mark, or simply John). 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 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. 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”**. (**verse 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”** (**verse 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 judgment!



Ruins at Salamis (Source: Wikipedia)

This is the first of three units on **The Life & Work of Paul**.