

SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF PAUL

Next to Jesus Christ Himself, no living man accomplished more for God than did the apostle Paul. What a rebuke his life is to the lazy, ease-loving, rocking chair type of Christianity which is so much in evidence today!

Few men have had more education and human ability on which to rely than did Paul, yet few if any have so completely placed natural talents and abilities at the disposal of the Holy Spirit.

Few men, if any, were beset with more difficulties of temperament and make-up, with more pressure and strain from circumstances, sufferings, and persecutions than was this mighty man of God, yet none were more victorious over them all.

Again, it is unlikely that any man, aside from the Lord Jesus was as well-rounded, balanced, and versatile in the realm of spiritual things than was the indomitable apostle to the Gentiles.

If we are to understand the epistles which he wrote and without which we could not either understand or apply the Christianity and truths of redemption found in the gospels, then we must of necessity know something of the life of this man Paul - Paul as energetic as Peter, as contemplative as John; Paul the mighty champion of true spiritual freedom; Paul a greater preacher than Chrysostom the Golden tongued orator; a greater missionary than Xavier or Carey or Martyn; a greater reformer than Luther; a greater organizer than Wesley; a greater theologian than St. Thomas of Aquinas or Finney; Paul the Spirit-filled slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I. SAUL'S EARLY LIFE AND TRAINING. Phil.3:4-6; Acts 22:3; 2 Cor.11:22.

1. Born and spent early years in Tarsus, heathen capital of Cilicia and center of commercial enterprise and political power. Born about 3 A.D.

2. At the age of five probably began to study Scriptures with parents at home and even before this would have learned special Scriptures such as Deut.6:4-9; 11:13-27; Num.15:37-41.

3. At six he entered the Rabbinical school.

4. At 12 or 13 he would be confirmed and become a "Son of the Law," by special examination and ceremony and admitted as full fledged member of the synagogue.

5. During his schooling he studied under Gamaliel, the greatest Jewish teacher of the times, and was doubtless destined to become a rabbi.

6. Saul spoke Greek, Aramaic, and also had a knowledge of the classical Hebrew which was no longer a spoken language.

7. According to his own record in Phil.3, he was -----

a. Circumcised when eight days old.

b. The son of Jewish parents who were members of the tribe of Benjamin.

c. Yet along with all this he was a freeborn Roman citizen. Acts 22:28

d. A pharisee of the strictest sect. (There were many classes of Pharisees. Saul belonged to the "Tell me anything more to do and I'll do it" class. There was an old tradition that if one person could only for one day keep the whole Law and offend not in one point then - so the Rabbis taught - the troubles of Israel would be ended and the Messiah would come. Paul was of the type of Pharisee who attempted to attain to this.)

e. Blameless concerning the Law of Moses

f. Ardently zealous in disposition as manifested by the way in which he opposed and persecuted the Christian whom he considered as the enemies of God and of righteousness.

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II. SAUL'S CONVERSION. Acts 9:1-19.

1. Saul may have been present and listened to Stephen's irresistible arguments and spirit when opposed by certain Jews. Acts 6:9-11.
2. If he was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin (There is good evidence in favor of this. Acts 8:1; 22:20; 26:10.) he was undoubtedly affected by Stephen's unanswerable sermon of defense. Acts 7:1-53.
3. He witnessed the death of Stephen, having voted in favor of it. Acts 7:58; 8:1.
4. Undoubtedly as a result of what he had witnessed he began to be troubled and came under conviction which at first he did not understand. This conviction caused him to redouble his efforts to stem the tide of Christianity and to persecute Christ's followers. Acts 8:3.
5. With this end in view he starts for Damascus and having leisure time as he traveled in which to think, he thinks about Stephen's testimony and victorious death. Acts 9:1-3.
6. Stricken with conviction he "falls under the power", receives a personal message from Jesus, realizes now that the Jesus whom he has persecuted is none other than the Christ the Messiah of Israel. He yields whole heartedly to the Lord but is deprived of his sight due to the brightness of the heavenly light and is led by others into Damascus where for three days he is so overwhelmed by his experience and so much in prayer that he does not eat or drink for three days. Acts 9:3-9.
7. Ananias is sent to him, lays hands on him and prays for him; he receives his sight, is baptized in the Spirit (We infer this though it is not mentioned) and then baptized in water.

III. SAUL'S ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING CONVERSION.

The exact order of events in Saul's life following conversion is to some extent debatable. The most probable order, however, is as follows:

1. Immediately after conversion Paul goes into Arabia where he spent quite a long period of time, praying, waiting on God, studying the Word in the light of his new experiences. It is not likely that Paul would have immediately begun to preach since his whole system of theology had to be revised. We cannot imagine what a tremendous adjustment and revolution must have taken place in his life following conversion Gal. 1:15-17
2. He returns from Arabia to Damascus where he begins to preach the gospel but is led to leave the city due to the fact that opposing Jews sought to kill him. Gal. 1:17-19 and Acts 9:20
3. The disciples in Jerusalem were suspicious of the former Christian hater but Barnabas vouches for him and introduces him to the apostles Peter and James. Gal. 1:18-19 and Acts 9:26-27.
4. Saul preaches in Jerusalem but violent persecution sets in and he is warned of God to leave Jerusalem and is conducted from the city back to his home town Tarsus in Cilicia. Acts 9:27-30; Gal. 1:21; Acts 22:17-21.
5. While Paul disappears from the scene for some years (from five to seven) God's program moves on. Some of the Christians who were scattered as a result of persecution in Jerusalem settled in Antioch and began to preach to the Greeks who lived there. A great revival broke out and the executive brethren at General Council Headquarters in Jerusalem sent Barnabas up to Antioch to superintend the situation. Barnabas being a wise man and a man of vision realized the need of an assistant who was qualified to minister to the Gentiles. At once the Lord brings Saul to his mind. He proceeds to Tarsus, enlists Paul and returns with him to Antioch where they minister together for a whole year. Acts 11:19-30.
6. Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem comes to Antioch and while there receives a Word of Wisdom, predicting a great famine. When the famine came the Christians in Jerusalem were especially hard hit, and the Christians of the

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Antioch assembly decide to send them an offering appointing Barnabas and Saul to carry this offering. This they do and then return to Antioch taking with them a young man named John Mark. Acts 11:27-30; 12:25

IV. SAUL'S DIVINE COMMISSION AND FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

1. The time comes when the leaders of the church at Antioch which became the missionary headquarters of the General Council of Assemblies of the First Century were led by the Holy Spirit to send Paul and Barnabas and young John Mark out on a missionary tour. Acts 13:4 to 14:28.

V. THE MEETING OF THE FIRST GENERAL COUNCIL. Acts 15.

A great doctrinal controversy arises in the church which threatens the very life, power, and existence of the church. Certain men were teaching that salvation was by grace plus law (that one must be circumcized in order to be saved). Many of the leaders of the church seemed inclined at first to share this view. Many were uncertain and shaky. Paul, standing alone, absolutely insisted that salvation was by grace alone and pointed to his ministry among the Gentiles in confirmation of his view. Had it not been for his uncompromising stand the Pentecostal Movement of the First Century would have degenerated into a purely Jewish sect and would have dried up and blown away spiritually. For additional information see Gal. 2:1-21.

VI. PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

This journey is described in Acts 15:35 to 18:22 and covered a distance of about 3500 miles which in those days was a terrific undertaking. Paul and Barnabas disagree over the matter of taking Mark with them and part ways, Mark going with Barnabas and Silas replacing Barnabas as Paul's co-worker.

VII. PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY.

This final journey is related in 18:23 to 21:15 and covered a period of about four years. At the end of this trip instead of returning to Antioch as usual, Paul is led of the Spirit to go on to Jerusalem notwithstanding the fact that prophetic utterances warn him that danger awaits him there.

VIII. PAUL WITNESSES BEFORE RULERS Chs. 22 to 26

IX. PAUL'S VOYAGE TO ROME Chs. 27 and 28.

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