

CHAPTER 12

THE APOSTLE PAUL

We have studied all twelve of the Apostles including the man who took the place of Judas (see Chapter 11 on Matthias). In this chapter we want to study a man who was not one of the original twelve apostles but who was called of God to be a very special Apostle. He is a man whom we have all heard of and know of: THE APOSTLE PAUL. The New Testament tells us more about the Apostle Paul than it does about all of the other 12 disciples put together! To study this man's life in detail would require a book, not just a brief chapter. What we want to do is to remind ourselves about this remarkable man and take a look at his life through seven very interesting windows. First let's take a look at...

1) His Jewish Religion

Paul actually had two names. He is called SAUL, and he is also called PAUL. Before he was saved, we find that he was usually called SAUL. After he was saved, we find that he was usually called PAUL. We will do the same thing in these notes. *Note: Prior to Acts 13 he is called "Saul." Starting in Acts 13:9 and following this he is always called "Paul."*

Saul of Tarsus was a very religious Jew. Are you a religious person? Do you go to church more than once a week? Do you give thanks before eating meals? Do you read the Bible? Do you pray?

Saul was a very religious Jew. He describes his religious life in Philippians 3:4-6. He came from a religious Jewish home; he was circumcised as a little baby; he did everything that a religious Jew was supposed to do; and he did so well at keeping the Ten Commandments that no one could accuse him of breaking any of them (see Phil. 3:6). We also know that Saul was a _____ (see the last word in Philippians 3:5). If you want to know what most Pharisees were like, read Luke 18:10-12. They were very religious men who thought they were very righteous! Saul was this kind of man. Did Saul think of himself as less religious or more religious than most of the Jews of his day (Galatians 1:14)? _____

Is it possible to be RELIGIOUS but not RIGHT? Is it possible to be RELIGIOUS but not SAVED? Is it possible to do all kinds of religious things **outwardly**, but **inwardly** have a heart that is polluted by sin and not right with God? Saul was such a man. He thought that he was pleasing and serving God, but he was actually **fighting against God!**

2) His Monstrous Acts

According to his own words, what did Saul do when he was a religious but unsaved man (see Galatians 1:13; Phil. 3:6 and 1 Corinthians 15:9)? _____ Saul was a great enemy of the Church. Saul wanted to prevent the spread of Christianity by imprisoning and sometimes killing Christians (Acts 26:10-11). At this point in his life, Saul did not believe that Jesus was God.

Courageous Stephen was the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54-60). On the day that Stephen was stoned to death, who was standing by giving his approval (Acts 7:57-58)? _____ Soon this young man

became a leader in the persecution of believers (Acts 8:1). He would search houses for Christians whom he would drag away to _____ (Acts 8:3). When it came to hurting and harming the disciples of the Lord, Saul was like a fire-breathing dragon (see Acts 9:1).

In 1 Timothy 1:13 Paul describes the kind of man he was in those days before he was saved. Notice the three words that he uses:

1. A Blasphemer.

To "blaspheme" means to speak against someone with hateful and hurtful language. What wonderful Name do you think Saul spoke against (Acts 26:9)? _____ He not only blasphemed Christ, but he **forced** others to do the same thing (Acts 26:11). Do you know people who speak with evil and hateful language against the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know people who curse by using the name of the Lord Jesus?

2. A Persecutor.

The basic meaning of the word "persecute" is the word "pursue" which means to run after or to chase after as a hunter chases a fox. To persecute means to run after someone with the intention of **harming** that person. Saul persecuted and chased after every believer he could find (Acts 26:11). When he was saved, Saul discovered who it was that he was really persecuting. Who was He persecuting (Acts 26:14-15)? _____ When you harm the body (**the Church**) you harm the Head (**the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church**).

3. Injurious.

Saul was injurious. This word means he was violent and "mad" (Acts 26:11) and aggressive, seeking only to harm and to injure. He was glad to see them put to death (Acts 26:10), and he was glad to punish them whenever he could (Acts 26:11). If you had been a Christian living back then, it would not have been very safe to be around the fire-breathing dragon named Saul.

If you had been a believer living back in those days, you probably would have thought of Saul as the very **last** person who would ever be saved. You would have probably said something like this: "God is able to save sinners, but there is no way that this man will ever get saved. He is the church's greatest enemy. He has made up his mind to destroy us all, and nothing or no one will ever change his mind. There is no hope for this man." The possibility of Saul being saved is like the possibility of the big bad wolf being friendly to Little Red Riding Hood! It seemed impossible.

Are there people you know whom you have given up on? Have you said, "That person will never change. That person will never be saved." Are there people at your school whom you think will *never ever* become Christians? The same God who wonderfully changed Saul and turned his life completely around is the same God who can change lives today. Why not begin praying for some of these people you had "given up" on. With God all things are possible. Don't ever doubt the saving ability of God. He's the One who mercifully saved Saul and who because of His mercy is able to save great sinners today (see 1 Timothy 1:15-16)!

3) His Amazing Conversion

Saul was **converted**! He **turned** about and changed his direction. He had been going the wrong way, but suddenly something happened that made this man do a complete turn around! The conversion of Saul is described in three places in the book of Acts: Acts 9:1-9; Acts 22:1-11 and Acts 26:1-18. What happened on this important day? What did Saul see? What did Saul suddenly realize that he had not realized before? Was Saul willing to follow and obey Jesus as LORD (Acts 9:6)? _____ What did Saul do soon after he was saved (Acts 9:18)? _____ Have you done this? Have you been converted? Have you changed your direction? Has God saved you and "turned you about"? What direction were you going? What direction are you going now? Saul was a changed man. Are you a changed person?

4) His Remarkable Ministry

Soon after Saul was saved, what did he do (Acts 9:20)? _____
 _____ Why were the people so amazed when they heard this man preach the gospel (Acts 9:21)? _____
 _____ Saul the great enemy of the church had become Paul the great Apostle of the Church. Paul's life was completely changed. He was a "new _____" (2 Cor. 5:17). He had a wonderful testimony of what Christ had done for his soul. Here is what the believers said about him: "that he which _____ us in times past now _____ the faith which once he _____" (Galatians 1:23). What made such a big difference in this man's life? He had met the Lord Jesus Christ! Have you?

The Lord had a very special ministry for the Apostle Paul. Although Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles, God made him a special apostle (see Galatians 1:1; Romans 1:1). The risen Christ made a special appearance unto him (Acts 9:5; 1 Cor. 9:1; and 1 Cor. 15:8 says, "And _____ of all He was _____ of me also"). Christ also taught Paul in a very special way (Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:3-5,7-9). The word "APOSTLE" means "one who is SENT." God sent Paul on a very special mission, and Paul has been called "the _____ of the G _____" (Romans 11:13). Throughout the Roman empire Paul preached to the Gentiles (those who were not Jews; see Ephesians 3:8) and told them about the Christ who could save them and make them members in His body, the Church. Saul the Persecutor hated any who would boldly preach Christ. After he came to know Christ, he became a bold preacher himself, perhaps the greatest preacher the church has ever known.

Paul's ministry was truly remarkable. As we read the New Testament, we discover that Paul becomes the main figure and the main character. For example, the first 12 chapters of the book of Acts are mostly about Peter, but the last 16 chapters of Acts (from chapter 13 on) are all about the Apostle Paul and his missionary journeys. You can look at a Bible map which shows the three missionary journeys of Paul to get an idea of all the places where this man went. Also we should remember that almost half of the books in the New Testament were written by Paul. The history of the Church would have been quite different if it had not been for the ministry and labors of this dedicated servant of Christ.

God had a purpose in saving Paul (or Saul). God did not save him for nothing, He saved him for something very important and very wonderful. According to Acts 9:15, why did God save Saul?

 According to Acts 26:16-18, why did God save Saul?

Are you saved by God's grace? _____ If you are, God has saved you *for something*. God has a special purpose for you. God has a special way in which He wants you to serve Him. God wants to use your life in a special way, even as He used the life of Paul in a special way. The question is this: Are you willing to let the Lord use your life in any way that He chooses? Have you given your whole life to Him and said "I'll do what You want me to do and I'll be what You want me to be and I'll go where You want me to go"? Have you ever said what Paul once said in Acts 9:6, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to _____"? Are you a CLEAN vessel for the Lord to use (Acts 9:15)?

Remember, Paul was not some kind of a "SUPER CHRISTIAN." He was a person just like you. He had a sinful old nature just like you (see what Paul said in Romans 7:14,18,24,25). Paul became the great man that he was, not because he was intelligent or wise, but because he had a great God whom he trusted. Is this same great God available to you today? _____ Can you trust Paul's God today? _____ Can Paul's God make you a great servant of Christ? _____

5) His Great Suffering

Soon after Paul was saved, God told him what to expect in his lifetime: "For I will show him how _____ he must _____ for my Name's sake" (Acts 9:16). Many believers had suffered and even died by the cruel hands of Saul the Persecutor. When Saul became Paul, he too had to learn that the life of a believer will sometimes involve suffering. In Paul's case it involved **much** suffering.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 Paul tells us about the different ways in which he suffered. It is almost hard to believe that any man could have gone through all of these things. Let's consider this list:

2 Corinthians 11:23

labours— Paul knew what it was to labor and work hard for his Lord.

stripes— A zebra has stripes. Paul had red stripes which came to his body as a result of being whipped.

prisons— Paul knew what it was like being on the inside of a prison (see Acts 16:19-24). His only crime was that of preaching Christ. He was imprisoned more than once.

deaths— Paul came close to death frequently. He faced the possibility of death many times.

2 Corinthians 11:24

How many times did Paul receive 39 lashes of the whip from the Jews? _____ Once would be bad enough!

2 Corinthians 11:25

How many times was Paul beaten with rods? _____ How many times was he stoned? _____ Most people never live to tell about being stoned! Read Acts 14:19 which tells about the time Paul was stoned. How many times did Paul suffer shipwreck (2 Cor. 11:25)? _____ On one of these occasions he spent a day and a night swimming in the Mediterranean Sea!

2 Corinthians 11:26

The word "perils" means "DANGER." How many times do you find this word in this verse? _____ Paul's life was in constant danger, but Paul had a great God who delivered him from all of these things. Paul could say with David, "The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their _____" (Psalm 34:17).

2 Corinthians 11:27

Paul knew what it was like to be weary, to suffer pain, to be hungry and thirsty, to stay awake at night, to go without food, to be cold, and to be without clothing.

This list that Paul gives is truly amazing. We should remember also that Paul wrote this list during the early part of his ministry (about 55 A.D.). Paul still had about 10 more years of suffering ahead of him, and thus there are many things that he later suffered that are not found in this list in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27. (A later list would include three more imprisonments and one more shipwreck and many other things).

After thinking about such a list of sufferings, you might think something like this: "Paul must have been one miserable person! He must have felt like quitting and giving up. He must have felt that being a Christian and being an apostle was not worth all the pain and suffering." Actually we find that the very opposite was true. When Paul was suffering in a prison in Philippi, do we find him complaining about his pain and sufferings (Acts 16:2-25)? _____ Did Paul experience the things mentioned in Romans 8:35? _____ Could these things separate him from his Saviour? _____ Paul triumphantly said: "Nay, in _____ these things we are _____ than _____ through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37). In the middle of his countless sufferings, Paul was a "super conqueror"! He was so thankful for what the Lord Jesus Christ had done for him that he was willing to go through anything for His Saviour.

The Christian life is not always an easy life. If you are really saved, there could be some real difficulties ahead for you. The devil's world does not always make it easy for God's child. The path of suffering has been the path for many believers down through the years. Is it possible to rejoice in the midst of suffering and persecution (Acts 5:40-41)? _____ What did the Lord Jesus teach us about those who are persecuted and abused (Matthew 5:10-12)?

Not only did Christ give Paul many opportunities to rejoice in sufferings, He also gave Paul some amazing privileges. For example, did you know that Paul actually took a trip to heaven? You can read about this amazing trip in 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. Is it possible that someday you will take a trip to heaven (John 14:3; 1 Thess. 4:13-18)? _____

6) His Courageous Death

The last book in the New Testament which Paul wrote was 2 Timothy. It was written shortly before his death. Was Paul ready to die (2 Tim. 4:6)? _____ Was Paul afraid to die (2 Tim. 4:7-8)? _____ According to Philippians 1:21,23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8, what did physical death mean to Paul?

Did Paul look forward to being with the One who had saved him? _____ Those who live well are those who are ready to die well (see 2 Tim. 4:7).

The man responsible for the death of Paul was the Roman emperor by the name of Nero. In the year 64 A.D. during the reign of Nero, fire broke out in Rome. For six days and nights the fire burned. The greater part of the city was laid in ashes. The rumor that Nero himself had caused the city to be set on fire aroused great hatred in the people of Rome against their emperor. To turn the Roman citizens' hatred away from himself, Nero accused the Christians of having set fire to Rome. The accusation certainly was not true, but large numbers of Christians were arrested and a terrible persecution followed.

Many Christians were crucified. Some were sewn up in the skins of wild animals and then big dogs were let loose upon them so that they were torn to pieces. Women were tied to mad bulls and dragged to death. After nightfall Christians were burned at the stake in Nero's garden (human lampstands). It was during the reign of this man that Paul and Peter were put to death. Paul was a Roman citizen and thus he could not be crucified as Peter was. Instead, he was executed with a sword (perhaps his head was cut off like John the Baptist).

If you were to die today, would you go to be with Christ? Are you sure? How do you know this?

7) His Eternal Reward

What did faithful Paul expect to receive from his Lord (2 Timothy 4:8)?

Paul tells us about his future hope in Romans 8:18. The word "worthy" is a word that is used in **weighing** things and shows that the scale is balanced and that the scales are even. Here we are told that the sufferings are **not worthy** of the glory, a phrase that indicates an unbalanced condition. On the one side of the scale you have a very tiny and insignificant particle of dust which represents all the sufferings of this life (and Paul had quite a list of sufferings which we have already studied). On the other side of the scale you have a huge piece of cast iron weighing a billion tons. The sufferings become like nothing in comparison! Compare what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17. The sufferings are **light** and **temporary**. The glory which will be ours in the future is **heavy** and **eternal**. *We need to learn to see things from the viewpoint of eternity!*

