

The Epistle to the Galatians
Lesson #3 • Galatians 1:13-24
Saul Who Became Paul
• H A N D O U T •

Galatians 1:13-14 • For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it? I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Q: Do you think Paul was telling his readers anything they didn't already know? Do you think they knew that Saul – his Hebrew name – was once a persecutor of the Christian church?

Q: Why did Paul begin this part of the letter by writing about his personal past?

This passage, below, from Acts, gives us a distinct picture of the fanatical passion that drove Saul before he encountered the Risen Christ on the Road to Damascus and was changed into the Apostle Paul:

Acts 7:49-8:4a • While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Q: How would knowing about Paul's past stop the churches of Galatia from abandoning the true Gospel message in favor of embracing heretical teaching?

Paul reveals some details about his call from God to be an Apostle to the Gentiles ...

Galatians 1:15-17 • But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Q: What are the three things that God did on Paul's behalf?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Q: Why does Paul make the point that he didn't consult anyone, nor did he go to Jerusalem to see the Apostles, but instead went immediately to Arabia before returning to Damascus?

Q: What was it that the Lord revealed to Paul?

**Before we continue our study in Galatians
let's take a side-road and read about the details of Paul's actual conversion.**

Acts 9:1-9 [NLT] • Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them – both men and women – back to Jerusalem in chains.

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.

Q: What motivated Paul to commit himself so fervently against the Followers of the Way?

Q: A bright light and a voice from heaven stopped Saul and company in their tracks as they neared Damascus. What was seen and heard?

Q: Saul had just been struck down by a light and addressed by name from a voice from heaven. What is his response?

Q: Why does Paul address the "voice" as "lord" but still has to ask who it is?

- Q: The voice identifies Himself as Jesus whom you are persecuting. Why was that even necessary? Shouldn't that have been obvious to Saul?
- Q: Why would Saul be rebuked for persecuting the crucified Jesus but say nothing about Saul's actions toward the Followers of Jesus?
- Q: What is it that the Lord does at this point that utterly convinces Saul that he has had an encounter with the Risen Lord?
- Q: How do we know that Saul was severely traumatized by these events?

Acts 9:10-16 • In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered.

The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

"Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on Your Name."

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry My Name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for My Name."

- Q: What do we learn from this passage about Ananias and Saul's Commission from the Lord?

- Q: This passage in Acts 9 tells us that Ananias was a Jew of Damascus who believed in Jesus. In Chapter 22 Ananias is called a devout observer of the Law and highly respected by all the Jews. Why are these two descriptions important to understanding Saul's conversion?

► Ananias was obedient and went to Saul. He called him "brother Saul" and explained that the Lord Jesus who appeared to him as he traveled into Damascus had sent him. Saul's sight would be restored, and he would be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Ananias laid his hands on Saul, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, ending his blindness. Saul got up, was immediately baptized and then ate food to regain his physical strength. He then began to fellowship with some of the Believers.

Q: What is significant about the sequence of events in this narrative?

At this point, the sequence of events in Saul's life must be patched together from Luke's account in Acts and Paul's letter in Galatians. Luke is writing a detailed account of the acts of the Apostles. However, Paul's purpose for writing about his conversion to the Believers at Galatia is to declare that the Gospel message he preached came directly from the Lord Jesus and not from any training he received from others, including the other Apostles.

► From Acts 9 we learn that Saul stayed with some Believers in Damascus for a few days and then, to everyone's astonishment, Saul began to preach in the Damascus synagogues about Jesus being the Son of God and the long awaited Messiah, risen from the grave. Of course he was recognized for his past, vicious behavior, thus shocking many with his new message where he indicated he had been wrong when he was persecuting the Christians and that Jesus had called him to proclaim the truth.

Even though Saul was a Pharisee and extremely well trained in the Law, several of the Jews were unhappy with Saul's preaching. Within a few days they began to hatch a plot to kill Saul. The Governor, serving under King Aretas, set up guards in the city of Damascus for the purpose of arresting Saul. Saul found out about the plot and some fellow Believers took him, by night, and let him down through the wall in a large basket, allowing him to escape.

Saul is now the "persecuted" where just a short time before he was the "persecutor." Saul left Damascus and went to Arabia.

Three years go by. From Luke's account in Acts 9, it was then that Saul tried to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he had really become a Believer. But Barnabas sought Saul and brought him to the Apostles in Jerusalem. However, it is not clear whether he actually saw any except Peter and James, the Lord's brother. In any case, according to Galatians, Saul stayed with Peter for 15 days.



Q: Where in Arabia did Saul go?

Q: Why would Saul choose Arabia?

Q: Why would Saul go with Barnabas to meet the Disciples in Jerusalem after they had refused to meet with him because they were afraid of him?

Q: Considering what we have studied from Luke's account in Acts and the letter to the Galatians, how would you summarize and explain the difference between the zealot, Saul, who was on the road to Damascus and the Apostle Paul, who wrote 13 of the 27 books in the N.T.?



Next Time • Lesson #4

~~ Paul in Syria and Cilicia~~

Galatians 1:20-24

