

## The calling and preparation of Paul

By Pastor Rene Lussier

A church was looking for a new preacher, but had so far been unable to choose one. One of the board members was getting impatient as he watched the Search Committee reject one applicant after another. So fed up, he stood up and read a letter from yet another apparent applicant.

*The letter said: "Dear Gentlemen. I understand that your pulpit is vacant and I should like to apply for the position. I have many qualifications. I've been a preacher with much success and also have had some success as a writer. Some say I'm a good organizer. I've been a leader in most of the places I've been.*

*"I'm over 50 years of age and have been in the ministry nearly twenty years. During that time, I have never preached in one place more than three years. In fact, in some places I have had to leave town rather abruptly after my work caused riots and disturbances. I must confess that I have been in jail three or four times during my ministry, but not because of any real wrongdoing on my part.*

*"You also need to be aware that my health is not too good, though I still get a great deal done.*

*"The churches I have preached in have all been small, though most were located in relatively large cities. Although I always try to do my best wherever I'm called to serve, I must admit that I've not gotten along very well with the religious leaders in the towns where I have preached. In fact, some of those leaders have threatened me and even attacked me physically.*

*"I am not too good at keeping records either. I have been known to forget whom I have baptized. However, if you feel you would like to have me as your pastor, I shall do my best for you."*

The board member put the letter down, looked at the committee and said to them, "Well, what do you think? Shall we call him to be our pastor?"

The board members were shocked. How could they possibly be expected to call an unhealthy, trouble-making, who couldn't even remember who he baptized -- to be their pastor? They demanded the person's name.

And the board member simply smiled as he answered, *"It's signed, 'The Apostle Paul.'"*

- **In our last study of Acts, we saw how Saul of Tarsus was before his conversion and how he met Jesus as the Risen Lord—(Shortest life-changing conversation)**

4 "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Saul asked 2 questions: 5 "**Who are You, Lord?**" "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied.

1. **Lord, what do You want me to do?**
2. "Saul, realized he had not been doing God's will, but fighting against God's will?" *He had been kicking against the goads. It was in vain. He lost. God was using the goads to get him going in the way he wanted.*
3. **You persecute me** – Paul understood *"the unity of Christ to his church"*. This theme became one of the great themes of Paul's teaching...

- Jesus responds to Saul's question

Acts 22:10 (NIV) "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

"'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.'

- The Lord said: He would be told later...God first wanted him to learn to humble and submit himself and learn to trust him/
- The Lord also used another disciple to answer Saul's question...
- **Ananias is an obscure character**... He is only introduced to us in connection to Paul.

In the very early stage of Saul's Christian life, God chose to use Ananias. *Why is it important for us today?*

- He was important in the development of Saul's Christian life...
- God gave a **vision** to Ananias. He not only instructed him clearly but even told him that Saul had received a vision and what the vision was...
- V. 11 *"Go to that house, to the street, seek that man..."* v. 11 *...for he is praying:*
  1. Acts 9:12 (NIV) **In a vision he has seen** a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

**The Lord shared the secret of his heart with Ananias:**

2. Acts 9:15 (NIV) 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. 16 **I will show him** how much he must suffer for my name."
- The Lord said: 15 *"...This man **IS** my chosen instrument."*
  - In verse 16, God said *"I will show him how much he will suffer for my name"*. This part about suffering, God had not yet shown him, BUT he said: *"I will show him"*, in the right time.
  - In Acts 26:16, we find out that God has revealed part of it in the appearance...

Acts 26:16 (NIV) `Now get up and stand on your feet. **I have appeared to you to appoint you** as a **servant** and as a **witness** of what you have seen of me and what I will show you.

#### APPLICATION:

- Do we worry about the future? What choice to make? What is God's will for my life?
- There is something in that "I will show you..." for us:
- There is something God has shown us and there is certainly something that He will show us when it is the proper time...
- There is a "I will show you" **but for now**—Be the servant & witness of what you have seen of me.
- This is always applicable to all of us.

Paul's own conversion reminds us that to be Christian does not mean we have a guarantee to an easier life, but it does mean

1. that we will have a life with a true meaning;
2. a life which very often will require that we do the uncomfortable;
3. that we serve in areas where we don't feel completely adequate, and
4. that we accept the inconvenience of being followers of a loving Lord who works with imperfect people like you and me.

Being Christian is not easy, but it is a high calling to a very special purpose that only those who are willing to be converted can handle.

- Then Ananias said: "The Lord who appeared to you **sent me** so that you may...
- **1. See again** (experience his healing power) – Symbol of a new vision, new sight, new meaning and calling.
- **2. and be filled with the Holy Spirit.** Power to execute his mission

**NLT - For God is working in you, giving you the desire to obey him and the power to do what pleases him.**

- Ananias is used to bring the fullness of the HS on the man who was to be the pioneer missionary to the nations.
- **Ananias prophesied** about the plans of the Lord for his life

Acts 22:14 (NIV) "Then he said: 'The **God** of our fathers **has chosen you to know his will** and to **see** the Righteous One and to **hear** words from his mouth. 15 **You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.** 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

- What a great prophecy! What a special calling? But first thing first...
- See how rapidly **he was commanded to be baptized** right after his conversion.
- *To indicate the washing away of his sins (no condemnation, no guilt from the past*
- *Paul was a new creation, forgiven, accepted by the Lord he persecuted, justified*
- God had "broken" the arrogant, self-righteous and violent Saul; but it wasn't God's intention to leave him broken. God wanted to fill him so that he would be equipped and ready to serve

#### • APPLICATION

- *Ananias was a simple servant, a messenger, sent by the Lord to bring blessings...*
- *He is an illustration (pattern) of how he normally uses other Christians in our discipleship development. (How he wants to use US for the development of other new Christians.) They may become God's chosen instrument...*
- *Can we see our fellow-Christians as ministers sent by God to us and us sent by God to them to serve and bring God's blessings*

**Ananias objection:** *Even true disciples may have objections...*

Acts 9:13 (NIV) "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. 14 And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

- We can understand his objection.
- We also have all kinds of objections when it's time to minister, but Ananias was quick to obey...

#### Next picture is Paul in the synagogues of Damascus.

Acts 9:19 (NIV) and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. 20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. 21 All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?"

22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ. {[22] Or Messiah}

- He started from Jerusalem to put an end to this heresy about Jesus and He became the apostle of JC—preaching that Jesus is the **Son of God** and proving that Jesus is the **Messiah** (Christ). (29 times NT)

Such a complete and radical change for Paul

How important it is to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ.

John 20:31 (NIV) But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

#### **We will see Saul in Arabia (2years)**

Acts 9:19 ... Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus.

Acts 9:23 (NIV) After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him,

There is a time gap between these 2 verses. Saul did not stay long in Damascus right after his conversion

We learn it in Gal:

Gala 1:15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb 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. 18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's brother.

V. 23 **After many days**: Between his conversion in Damascus and his return to Jerusalem, about three years went by... V.18

- **This time in Arabia was a time of preparation...** (2 years)

By reading his letter to the Galatians along with Acts, we gain insight on how important this time has been in his preparation...

In Galatians, we find Paul defending his apostleship and his gospel against the influence of Jewish teachers promoting the law...

- The first thing he asserted in Galatians was that he did not receive the gospel from man...

Gala 1:11 (NIV) I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

- In order to emphasize this fact, he gave the testimony of his calling to mission:

Gala 1:15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb 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

- In his letters, Paul will often refer to **what he received from the Lord**

**Gala 1:12** I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.  
**1Cor 15:3** For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (Gospel)

**1Cor 15:51** Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed (Rapture, resurrection)

**1Cor 11:23** For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, (Communion, body of Christ)

**Eph 5:31** "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church. (marriage & mystic union of Christ with his church)

**Eph 3:3** that is, the **mystery made known to me by revelation**, as I have already written briefly.

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets.

6 This **mystery** is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

**Roma 11:25** I do not want you to be ignorant of this **mystery**, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written:

This time in Arabia was surely essential in the making of the new Paul. He had a time of intimate and personal learning from the Lord.

There he was renewed in his mind in what has been his theology (Pharisee), his beliefs (law), his culture (Greek education)...

- In Galatians, there are 2 mentions of **Arabia**—the first we just read, the second is found in 4:25. The context is:

Gala 4:22 (NIV) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. 24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar.

25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.

26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

**In these verses we see the result of his time in Arabia:** (Arabia is the place where the law was given)

- There he went to put Judaism in the light of the new revelation

There he received a great revelation that became his main message to the Jews.

- He now could see the new Jerusalem Free, with Jesus as king, with her gates wide opened to the nations of the world...

Paul discovered true freedom in Christ and he talked about it in Galatians:

**Gala 5:1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

**Gala 3:28 (NIV) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.**

### From Arabia to Jerusalem

Back in Damascus from Jerusalem

Acts 9:23 (NIV) After many days had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.

25 But his followers [**the disciples**] took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.

- We learn in 2Cor 11:32 that “In Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. 33 But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands.

The disciples he had come to arrest and put in prison were the ones who helped him escape...

NOTICE: The great apostle to the gentiles was not rescued by miracles but in a basket...

- *It was an indication of his future ministry: He who persecuted the church will understand persecution.*
- *He will find himself in circumstances which lack dignity...*

### From there to Jerusalem...

26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

29 He talked and debated [disputed] with the Grecian Jews, but they tried [took into their hand to get rid of him] to kill him.

**HE TRIED TO JOIN:** It was his only goal, he had his mind set to glue himself with them, to cleave to

- **FEAR:** 3 years had passed since they heard of him... We can understand their fear and besides, They heard a report, but it seemed that no one wanted to take any risk until Barnabas, (Son of Paraklesis) found him and introduced to the apostles...

- He was the guest of Peter for 15 days. From Galatians, we learn that he did not seek Peter's authority but he discussed with him...

**Next he went to the Grecian Jews where the conflict with Stephen emerged.**

- He had watched them throwing stones on Stephen and he himself agreed to his death.
- He came back and went to the same group and he did the same thing Stephen did... He took over the ministry of the man that he had consented to put to death...
- He tried to make amend for past mistakes and sins.
- **He disputed with them...** He continued the argument Stephen had started and **disputed** with them...
- **We see in Paul's example the difference between someone who has the Spirit and someone who has not...**

1Cor 2:14 (NIV) The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Roma 8:7 (NIV) the sinful mind {[7] Or the mind set on the flesh} is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

30 When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

- Once more he was helped by the disciples.

In Acts 22, we learn that the Lord had appeared to him.

Acts 22:17 "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance

1611 ekstasis {ek'-stas-is} Of a man who has an experience where his mind is fixed on things divine that he does not really see though he may perceive them within as realities shown to him by God.

18 and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'

19 "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20 And when the blood of your martyr {[20] Or witness} Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Paul's arguments- they will listen to me...

21 "**Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'**" (One more revelation)

The Lord H himself told him to leave for he had other work for him to do.

- Then we see him leaving for Tarsus

Acts 9:30 (NIV) When the brothers learned of this, **they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.**

- We leave him there until Barnabas will find him and bring to Antioch. Then from there we will see him in his missionary journeys fulfilling his calling from the Lord...
- So he is not running away from Jerusalem. He is obeying the Lord's directions

He probably thought that it was there the Lord wanted him to serve him until the Lord made it clear to him through an experience with the HS.

- *In Antioch, we will find Paul and Barnabas set apart by the HS.*
- *Later we will see the H.S. will prevent him to go certain places and go to other places instead.*

*Roma 8:14 (NIV) because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

We see the **activity of the HS** in selecting a particular man for a particular work.

- Saul of Tarsus was born of Hebrew parents raised in a Greek culture and a Roman citizen, but that was not all the equipping he needed.

He could not have done the work the Lord called him to do with that only...

- He had to have a personal encounter with the Risen Lord
- He had to receive the fullness of the HS
- He needed to spend time in Arabia (In quietness alone in conference with the Lord...)

*"God never uses for His great work any man who has not been definitely called and spiritually trained."*

Martyn Lloyd Jones

**CONCLUSION-** We saw the old Saul and the new Paul- trained and being equipped for his task

Phil 3:7 (NIV) But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish [dung], that I may gain Christ

I now consider... How many times do we see **"I consider?"**

The things that used to be important... I now consider- a loss... everything a loss... rubbish or dung

12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

**OBSERVE:**

Paul understood the **purpose of his salvation**—He used the expression in V. 12 ...that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... that for which Christ Jesus also apprehended me.

V. 12 NLT ... But I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be.

RSV V. 12... but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

Easy V. 12...But I continue trying to reach that goal and to make it mine. Christ wants me to do that. That is the reason Christ made me his.

**Application**

- *What about us? How do we measure?*
- *Can we or should we compare our spiritual experience with Paul's experience?*

Phillips translation...

3:15-16 - **All of us who are spiritually adult should set ourselves this sort of ambition**, and if at present you cannot see this, yet you will find that this is the attitude which God is leading you to adopt. It is important that we go forward in the light of such truth as we have ourselves attained to.

3:17-21 - **Let me be your example here**, my brothers: **let my example be the standard** by which you can tell who are the genuine Christians among those about you.

15 **All of us** who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. 16 Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.