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THE LIFE OF APOSTLE PAUL

by

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Perhaps the life of no other personage of the Bible, excepting that of Jesus, is treated with as much detail in the Bible as that of the Apostle Paul. Nearly all the original materials for his life are contained in the Book of Acts and in the 14 Epistles Paul wrote.

Paul became an apostle "not from ~~of~~ men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal. 1:1).

A Jew by birth (Acts 21:39), Paul could boast that he was of the tribe of Benjamin, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5). He was born in Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 22:3), the chief town of Cilicia in Asia Minor, renowned as a place of education under the early Roman emperors.

~~of~~ Brought up in accordance with the strictest precepts of the law, Paul first studied in Tarsus, before being sent to Jerusalem for his education, "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel was, at that time, one of the most eminent of all the doctors of the law.

Among the Jews of those days, a liberal education was often accompanied by instruction of some mechanical trade; therefore, Paul learned the art of tent making (Acts 18:3).

In some manner (the Bible does not define), Paul's parents had acquired the Roman franchise, and Paul was "born a citizen" of Rome (Acts 22:25-29).

His Jewish name, ~~Saul~~ ^{Saul}, meant "mighty"; his Latin name to which as a Roman citizen he was entitled, was Paul, meaning "small" or "little." It is

significant that he was not commonly ~~is~~ called Paul until after his conversion, perhaps indicating his own change in attitude (Acts 13:9).

Paul's Conversion

Until his conversion on the road of Damascus (Acts 9:3-10), Paul bitterly opposed and persecuted the early Christians, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1-2). He was one of the witnesses of the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7:58, Acts 8:3), even condoning it to the extent of holding the garments of those that stoned Stephen (Acts 22:20).

He would probably have continued his ~~persecution~~ ^{persecution} indefinitely if Christ had not had need of him. As he marched toward Damascus, toward his conversion, he was armed with the authority from the chief priests, indicating very strongly that he was already a member of the Jewish law-making body -- the Sanhedrin (Acts 26:10-12).

Paul's conversion is related in detail three times in Acts, first by the historian Luke (Acts 9:1-9), then in two addresses made by Paul; the first at Jerusalem (Acts 22:6-11), and the second, before Agrippa (Acts 26:12-18). Here are the leading features which led to his conversion: A sudden light from heaven and the voice of Jesus Christ; Paul struck to the ground and blinded; his complete fast for three days; then, after three days, the coming of Ananias, the messenger of the Lord, who baptized him (Acts 9:3-18).

His Training

It was in Damascus that he was received into the Church by Ananias, and there, to the astonishment of all, he proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of

God, From all indications, this was all he did -- or could -- preach at that time, but having a thorough background in the O.T. Scriptures, he was able to prove Jesus to be the Messiah through them.

The next period of his training is related in his letter to the Galatians. Paul wrote: "But when it pleased God . . . to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia" (Gal. 1:15-17). In Arabia, Paul was personally taught of Christ (I Cor. 9:1, Gal. 1:12), probably for about 3 years (verse 18).

Afterwards he returned to Damascus, where the Jews caused him to flee the city by night (Acts 9:23-25). Then he went to Jerusalem, seeking to join the apostles -- a no easy task as they were afraid of him. Barnabas "took him, and brought him to the apostles" (Acts 9:27), but soon the anger of the Jews forced Paul to retire to Tarsus, where he remained for several years.

Barnabas then brought him to Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:25-30), where they ministered together for a full year before going to Jerusalem. There Paul was finally ordained (Acts 13:3).

For fourteen years (Gal. 2:1), Paul was merely being apprenticed to the ministry. Only now was his work of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles about to begin.

His Journeys

Paul's so-called "missionary journeys" begin shortly after his ordination. Actually they were a series of evangelistic meetings with the purpose of raising up and strengthening churches throughout Asia Minor.

The first trip centered around the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derby where Paul and Barnabas raised up churches, leaving only when the irate Jews expelled them (Acts 13:50). They visited again each church (Acts 14:21-23), and ordained elders to watch over the flock. They returned afterwards to Antioch of Syria to minister to Church there.

At this time there arose the question of whether the Gentiles should be circumcised, and Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem, the headquarters Church, to discuss the question (Acts 15).

After this matter was settled, Paul and Barnabas planned a second trip to "visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do" (Acts 15:36). However, because of a disagreement, they separated. Barnabas took Mark; Paul took Silas. When Paul had visited again the churches, this time in company with Silas and Timothy (They had met the latter at Lystra -- Acts 16:1), he had a vision calling him to go over into Macedonia (Acts 16:9). They established churches in Philippi and Thyatira, but again encountering persecution -- this time from the pagans -- they left for Thessalonica. The Jews, in turn, chased them from town into Berea, then to Athens, where Paul preached his famous sermon on Mars Hill.

Corinth was the next stop. Paul remained there a year and a half. The Jews brought him before the judgment seat, and had him beaten. This did not deter Paul, as he remained "yet a good while" (Acts 18:18), before he left for Ephesus, and then to Jerusalem for a feast.

After the feast (probably the Feast of Tabernacles), he stayed a while at Antioch of Syria, and began another -- known as the third -- visiting journey to the churches of Galatia and Phrygia, then to Corinth and Ephesus, where he stayed for two years (Acts 19:10). After this, he left for Macedonia

and Achaia (Acts 19:21) and then back to Jerusalem, meeting much persecution on the way (Acts 19 and 20).

Mission Accomplished!

For Paul, this return to Jerusalem was the beginning of the end! He was arrested and sent to Caesarea (Acts 21:17; 23:35) where he remained a prisoner for two years, appearing before various governmental heads, following which he was sent to Rome to appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:12). On the way Paul and those who were with him suffered shipwreck, but finally reached Rome where they were met by a few "brethren." Paul was allowed to dwell by himself with only a soldier to keep him (Acts 28:16), and lived there two whole years "preaching the kingdom of God . . . with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (verse 31).

Thus ends the biblical account of Paul's life.

Tradition claims that he was ultimately released from Rome, and went on yet another journey, visiting the churches he had founded, and perhaps even going to Spain (Rom. 15:28) as he had planned, and even Gaul. It is said that Paul was captured and taken to Rome, where he was martyred, perhaps blamed in connection with the burning of Rome, like the other Christians!

Whatever his end, he was able to write to Timothy before his death, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (II Tim. 4:6-8).