

The Early Days

Gal. 11 & Acts 9:19-31

INTRODUCTION:

The validity of Paul's ministry has always been called into question. Why? Because Paul gave the commentary of the person and work of Jesus. He developed the applications and implications of Jesus ministry. ***Get rid of Paul and you can redefine Jesus.***

But as long as Paul is considered a true messenger of God on par with the O.T. prophets the message of Christianity is crystal clear.

This week I have received an email from the leader of one of the Christian apologetics organizations on the campus of the University of Alabama in Huntsville indicating that the Society of Non-Theist (or Atheist) were seeking to bring in **Scott Savage** the **Alabama Director for American Atheist**. The main thesis of his presentation is simply that Jesus of Nazareth never existed but rather was the mental portrayal of Paul the Apostle. He has a youtube video and everything - quite an accomplishment.

So this man Jesus never fed 5000, never raised Lazarus from the dead, never called the storm and most certainly never died on the cross nor was he raised from the dead. But rather was the mental portrayal of this misguided Jewish Rabbi named Paul. ***(Do you see how it works? Discredit Paul you can redefine or even erase Jesus)***

Oh but you know better. If you have been in this series you do. You know that Paul had no motive for falsifying information about Jesus.

- He was trained by the most immanent **Jewish Rabbi Gamaliel**
- He had surpassed many of his **contemporaries in Judaism** - life was good for him.
- He personally **waged war against Christianity** - do you know how hard it is for a man to admit defeat? To confess that his entire ideology was misdirected?

For Paul to take up Christianity was the **most humiliating** decision he ever made.

Savage goes on to propose that all of the other so-called Apostles simply built their teaching around that of Paul.

Now if there were any credence to this hypothesis one would assume that the *Alabama Director of Atheist* would not be the first to propose it. Certainly Paul's contemporary enemies would assume the same was true. No doubt they would level this argument against him at every opportunity.

BUT NO - in fact their chief argument against Paul was that his Gospel was not original but rather he was a secondary teacher of the true Apostles. That was the main charge against Paul in the early days. **So much of Paul's writings are dedicated to defending his true Apostleship.**

That was the purpose **Galatians 1:11–24 (NASB95)**

¹¹ For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹² For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; ¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

What is he saying? I had no inherent motivation to even entertain Christianity as a viable religion. Life in Judaism was good!

¹⁵ But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles.

Do you see that Paul was simultaneously saved and called into ministry. Now someone said, "Did God just save him? Did Paul have to respond at all? YES! **Acts 26:19 (NASB95)** ¹⁹ "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, - indicates personal response to the Gospel.

WELL HOW DID PAUL RESPOND? Did he go down to Jerusalem to learn the Gospel from the real Apostles???

^{16b} I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; ²³ but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they were glorifying God because of me.

Do you see the the contemporaries of Paul were attacking him for getting his Gospel from others. Now back Scott Savage. Why would the main attack against Paul's ministry be that he was a secondary teacher if there was no Gospel before Paul?

The Gospel pre-ceded Paul.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:7–9 (NASB95)

⁷ then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; ⁸ and last of all, **as to one untimely born**, He appeared to me also. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

So Paul came into the Kingdom a little late compared to the other Apostles and differently from the others.

- Why then did he grasp the Gospel so clearly?
- And of all places how did he learn of it in Damascus?
- And how did he become preeminent among his Apostolic brothers.

The only explanation is that **something extraordinary must have happened**. We believe that what Paul said happened, actually happened. He personally encountered the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.

We dealt with that account in great detail last week. **But what happened next in his life gives further credence to the encounter.**

1. Paul Gets Active

We notice that after his conversion Saul stayed on in Damascus for several days. **Acts 9:19** and he took food and was strengthened. Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus.

We can assume that during this time Saul **fellowshipped** with the people of the Church at Damascus.

We also see that Saul didn't waste any time. 20 and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God."

Luke tells us here that the key point of Paul's sermons were related to the sonship of Jesus. This title speaks of the deity of Jesus as the very image of God (cf. John 10:31–36).

This was the key doctrine that motivated the Jews to call for the death of Jesus.

John 10:30–39 (NASB95)

³⁰ "I and the Father are one." ³¹ The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. ³² Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" ³³ The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." ³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Has it not been written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'?" ³⁵ "If he called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken)," ³⁶ do you say of Him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'?"

So Jesus called Himself God's Son - that was interpreted by the crowds to be equate to equality with the Father - thus the charge of blasphemy.

No doubt Paul had been among those who hated Christ's claim to Sonship. But now he was convinced and now he preached it himself. Something dramatic has happened.

21 All those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?"

It was here in the city of Damascus that Paul began to **recognize his particular gift mix**. He had the unusual ability to use logic and reason from the scriptures to make an apologetic point as we see in **verse 22** But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by **proving** that this Jesus is the Christ.

proving - Greek word meaning to put side by side and draw comparison in order to draw conclusions. Most likely was lining up the prophecies about Messiah on one side and the facts of Jesus life on the other and calling them to decide.

This was the same as he did in - **Acts 17:2-3** (NASB95)

2 And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 **explaining and giving evidence** that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ."

Arabia (Approximately 18 Months) -

From Damascus Paul felt the need to journey into Arabia. It seems that this journey occurred between verses 22 and 23. Luke's phrase **when many days had elapsed** marked out a time period that is more specifically defined in the statement of **Galatians 1:17**: "Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia.

Three years in Jewish terms means any part of of three years. From other calculations it seems that this period in Arabia was around 18 months.

It is implied that Saul spent those years learning from the Lord and preaching in the kingdom of **Nabatean Arabia**. (*This is an area not to be confused with the territory of modern Arabia, but located from nearby Damascus*)

What occurred during this time in Arabia? We really don't know. However we can assume from **2 Corinthians 11:32-33** that Paul continued doing what he had done in Damascus - preaching Christ. ³²In Damascus the ethnarch under Are-tas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, ³³and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.

For some reason Are-tas was displeased with Saul, perhaps because he had stirred up some discontentment in the people of Arabia with his preaching.

Then in Acts 9 -Paul Returns to Damascus

23 When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; 25 but his disciples

NOTE: At this point Saul had HIS Disciples. His ministry had no doubt bourn fruit. Perhaps some that accompanied him to Damascus from Arabia.

...took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

So Paul immediately started using his particular gifts to serve his Lord.

PAUL GET'S ACTIVE - BTW, you ought to do the same thing.

- Were you saved last week? Whom have you told about Christ this week?
- You have no training? Neither did Paul. **It takes a measure of understanding** to trust Christ, and it takes the same measure to share Christ. Just tell what you know!

Get Active.

2. Paul Gets Associated

Acts 9:26 begins - When he came to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

What a trip this must have been. Saul the Persecutor was now returning Paul the preacher. **Alexander White** writes, *"Imagine the courage he must have needed to face the widows and the orphans of those men he had put to death previously."*

Why did he go to Jerusalem? Jerusalem was the Mother Church from which all other Churches sprang forth. This was ground zero for the Gospel. This was the home of the Apostles. If Paul were going to go forth as a preacher, it was necessary that he do so with the blessings of Jerusalem.

But it seems Jerusalem was not quite ready to believe in Paul's conversion.

27 But Barnabas Just then comes a man named Barnabas.

I pray that soon after you were saved you met a Barnabas. His name means the son of encouragement. He represents those who have not yet grown bitter in his journey.

ILLUSTRATION: Have you seen someone who truly met Jesus? We had one girl

who walked in here, having never been to a protestant church saw the words on the screen and said, “**Cool Karaoke**”

At my first church we had a guy named Ray. Ray was a new christian and it was easter sunday. I ran into him between services and he said, “How was the first service?” I answered, “It was awesome, Mrs Anna sang, “**Were you there?**”. He looked at me strange and said, “No dude of course I wasn’t there - how was it?”

That’s the kind of people we are reaching. Now they are happy as a Lark and they don’t know nothing! They don’t know the difference between a baptist and an Episcopalian. But they know Jesus, they love Jesus!

Some of you are saying, “Well I don’t know what they are so happy about give it time - they will be just as miserable as the rest of us.”

Oh not if they meet a Barnabas.

27 But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.

Barnabas was doing what he did best. He saw spiritual potential in Paul and came along side him to support and develop this young man.

28 And he was with them, moving about freely in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord.

So we see that **Paul Get’s Active, Paul gets associated**. BTW, it’s good for you to plug in. God makes Christians in one sense totally complete in Jesus Christ, in need of nothing, but in another very real sense he makes them incomplete so that there biggest and best ministry will only happen when they are depending on one another.

Listen you need a local Church and a local church needs you. If there is any truth to what we preach then it would make perfect sense for you to reorganize your schedule.

- The Local Church is MORE important than football.
- The Local Church is MORE important than deer hunting.
- The Local Church is MORE important than what’s going on at the office.

The Local Church is Jesus’ idea - and

- It’s worthy of your total commitment.
- It’s worthy of your financial investment
- It’s worthy of your volunteered service

You are a part of a **BODY**. It is essential that every member of the body shows up and reports for duty.

ILLUSTRATION: What if you got up to go to work tomorrow and your hand said, "I think I'll stay at home, I'm not in the mood to work today. Or what if your foot said, "You know it's deer season, I'd like to work but man I need to be in the woods"

Paul Get's Active, Paul gets associated

3. Paul Gets Alone

Acts 9:29–30 (NASB95)

²⁹ And he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic Jews; but they were attempting to put him to death. ³⁰ But when the brethren learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus.

The next 10 years of Paul's life we have no record of. According to the text it was spent in his home in Tarsus. Perhaps the fact that we have little information on this time frame is indicative of the fact that we should recognize that Paul was developed in obscurity.

Paul needed to obtain his Master of Divinity from **Wilderness University**.

- *You Enter the Wilderness at God's Direction...*
- *You Experience the Wilderness at God's Design...*
- *You Exit the Wilderness ready for God's Destiny...*

It is in the darkness of the wilderness that your faith develops.

ILLUSTRATION: I really enjoy Photography. I love capturing a moment, with the perfect lighting and the right angles, but I am limited to the use of a digital camera. I wish that I knew enough about a regular 35mm Camera to really take advantage of all you can do with a camera.

Steve Wagners says, *"That the key to successful photography is the developing process. In order to properly develop the film, it must first be taken into a darkroom. Then, several different chemicals are added to enhance the quality of those prints. Only after the proper steps have been taken, and all the right chemicals added, is it then safe to expose that film to the light, in order to produce the final beauty of those prints. The amazing thing is that, the light, which at first, would have greatly damaged that film, is now the key to bring out it's final beauty."*

Dr. H.B. Smith explained it well, by saying, "It is in God's darkroom that the true test, and the validity of our spirituality is made known. Faith is like film: IT ONLY DEVELOPS IN THE DARK!!

From what we can tell he entered this phase in his life around the age of 36 and emerged at 46. There are a few things we believe happened during this period that served to shape Paul.

During this period:

- **Paul's Conversion Becomes Told Abroad - Galatians 1:21–24 records,** ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; ²³ but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they were glorifying God because of me. "
- It seems that the multiple shipwrecks Paul testified to occurred during this time.
- In **Philipeans 3:8** Paul tells us that he suffered much loss for the sake of Christ. What does that mean? Perhaps he was disowned by his parents? Perhaps he lost a wife? We don't know, but it seems that he suffered much loss during this period.
- **2 Corinthians 11:24 records.** ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. The thirty nine lashes was a form of punishment performed by a synagogue. It must have taken place during a time when he still submitted to the discipline of a synagogue.
 - Deut. 25 refers to this practice. where Moses allowed for 40 lashes, but as was the custom of the Jews, they built a hedge around the law and they laid down a max. of 39 so that the law would not be surpassed accidentally if someone lost count.
- It seems during this period Paul received his **vision of Heaven**

2 Corinthians 12:1–4 (ESV)

¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

- It seems he also received his thorn in the flesh. **2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

It was not until he was 46 that Paul planted any church or accomplished any significant ministry that we read about in scripture.

Why? Because he got three things right.

1. He Got Active
2. He Got Associated
3. He Got Alone

BTW, Do you get alone with the Lord?

Someone said, *"Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live the Christian life."*

Try it, find a place, find a time, take a bible and get alone. Read and pray. Doesn't have to be a large portion, just a few verses. Then go about your daily routine and think about what God said. You will find that it will revolutionize your life.

Paul was a true Apostle - his authority in our lives and our Church is on par with that of any biblical writer. When you read the words of Paul you read the Word of God.