

Sunday School Lesson “Bonus” 8-3-25

Saul of Tarsus / Apostle Paul

- About two years after the Resurrection of Jesus, we first read of the man “Saul of Tarsus” in Acts chapter 7; when those that stoned the Deacon Stephen, “laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.”
- Saul believed that people were saved by the temple sacrifices and obedience to the Law, and Stephen believed people were saved by faith in Jesus Christ.
- Saul believed this new Way was not compatible with Judaism, and it must be destroyed, or risk being destroyed by it.
- Acts chapter 8, tells us that Saul was a great persecuter to those of “The Way.”
- And in Acts chapter 9, we read of Saul, possibly in his mid-thirties, going to Damascus, with letters from the high priest, to arrest, and bring any of this Way, back to Jerusalem.
- As he comes near Damascus, a great light and the Resurrected Lord Jesus appear to Saul. Saul is blinded, and many believe this is the point that he believes on Christ and is saved.
- Saul is told to go into the city Damascus, and he will be told what he must do.
- Saul is in the city three days without sight, and neither eats or drinks
- Next the Lord sends the disciple Ananias to go pray for Saul.
- When he does, Saul’s eye sight is restored, he receives the Holy Spirit, and is baptized.
- Saul immediately begins to preach Jesus in the synagogue in Damascus
- If we are not attentive, we can think that this is the beginning of the ministry of the great Apostle to the Gentiles.
- But it is not – there is much preparation for Saul to go through: shaping, honing, a new faith must be learned, and an old faith unlearned.
- Based on Galatians chapter 1, Saul will leave Damascus and go to Arabia for 3 years, for a time of study and preparation.
- Galatians chapter 1 also says while in Arabia, Saul was taught by the Lord Jesus Christ.
- From Arabia, Saul will return to Damascus, and again preaches Jesus.
- Soon, he will head to Jerusalem, try to join the Apostles, but they are afraid of him – but Barnabas vouches for him.
- Because of a threat from the Jews to kill him, Saul will board a ship and head to Tarsus – the place of his birth, most likely his family is there.
- Saul is probably in his later 30’s when he arrives in Tarsus.
- He will spend 4-7 years there, some commentaries call this the “hidden years.”
- So from his later thirties, into his early forties, when most men are in their prime, Saul drops from the pages of church history.
- Saul is moved into “God’s Waiting Room.”
- It is during this time of waiting, that the Pharisee Saul is broken.
- Waiting is hard, but it develops patience. Waiting is often a method the Lord uses to prepare people for ministry.
- During this time Saul is given a revelation of Heaven.
- In 2 Corinthians 12:2-9, Paul says he was “caught up” to the Third Heaven.
- He uses the same Greek word here, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, when he writes “then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”

- Paul goes on to say that lest he should be exalted because of this revelation, there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him - to keep him humble.
- Many believe this to be a physical condition, some believe it was his eyes, his vision, but we are not told exactly what it was.
- God must have allowed this, as He also allowed Satan to touch Job.
- A vision problem would have been a serious issue to the Apostle who wrote half of the New Testament.
- Paul prayed three times for this “thorn” to be removed, but God says no, and promises Paul that His Grace will be sufficient.
- Whatever this “thorn in the flesh” was, it would be a part of Paul’s life until his execution in Rome, around A.D. 67, maybe for some 25 years.
- Comment: that says to me that healing is not always part of God’s plan.
- It has maybe been 7-8 + years since Saul was saved on Damascus Road.
- Through his time of preparation, Saul is now ready to be used by the Lord in ministry.
- While all of this has been going on in Paul’s life, the revival that began in Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost, has broken out in Antioch
- The church at Jerusalem sends Barnabas to investigate
- The Bible says “the hand of the Lord” was with them, and that a great number of Jews & Gentiles were saved
- I think Barnabas recognized this new church needed help with leadership and teaching
- So, it is not hard for me to believe that the Lord whispered to Barnabas – go get Saul
- The next thing we read is that Barnabas departed for Tarsus to find Saul
- He found Saul, and brought him back to Antioch, and for a year they and others will preach and teach to these new believers
- During a time of fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit said “now separate to Me, Barnabas and Saul for the work which I have called them.”
- During a time of great revival, growth, many being saved, the Holy Spirit says “time for a change”
- The church fasted, prayed, laid hands on them, and sent them out to minister
- In the middle of a great revival at Antioch, nothing wrong, God pulls out two special preachers / teachers from the Antioch church, and calls them to missions work

Note: it is in Acts 13:9, shortly after heading out on their first mission trip, that the Bible begins to call Saul as Paul (his Roman name) as he begins witnessing to the Gentiles.

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