

# **The Man called Paul\***

## **Background**

The man we know as Paul was born Saul of Tarsus. Saul is the name that is used of him up to and including a short time after his conversion. In Acts 13:9, in recording the confrontation that Paul had with Elymas the sorcerer, Luke said, *Then Saul, who also is called Paul ....* From that time on, Luke refers to the apostle as Paul instead of Saul. From then on, all biblical references to him are as Paul except in those times when Paul gives his own testimony, and he refers back to the times when the Lord and Ananias said, "Saul." He starts each epistle with "Paul."

The reason Luke chose this point in writing the book of Acts to stop referring to the apostle as Saul is not recorded, but Paul was the Roman form of his name. It is possible this name was given to him at birth for use in the Gentile world since his father was a Roman citizen. As Paul was called to give the gospel primarily to Gentiles, *from now on I will go to the Gentiles* (Acts 18:6) ... *from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you* (Acts 26:17), using the Roman form of his name was probably more acceptable to those he was trying to reach. In what became Paul's last letter, he told Timothy *I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles* (2 Timothy 1:11).

At the point in history when Saul of Tarsus was born, he had the best of both worlds. As a Roman citizen, he was accepted by the Romans and had all the rights due a citizen of Rome. As a Pharisee, born of the tribe of Benjamin, he was among the most respected of the Jews.

It might be said that he was "born with a silver spoon in his mouth," as he had all the advantages of an influential family and came from the richest heritage of his race. Being blessed with a great mind, he was also given the best education available. His personality was such that he had the determination and energy to focus on those things he believed were important to his God, his faith, his country, his family, and himself, and to carry through on those beliefs. In short, he had everything going for him.

## **The Persecutor**

As an Israelite, Saul was so determined to stamp out any movement that threatened his religion he personally persecuted followers of the man called Jesus. He obtained permission to wipe them out. In many ways, Saul's persecution of the Christians could be compared with Hitler's persecution of the Jews. In his thinking, all Christians must be destroyed. However, one day on the road to Damascus, where he planned to continue his rampage against believers of Christ, the Lord Jesus Himself confronted him.

The first recorded prayer of Paul that we find is the conversation he had with the risen Lord on that road to Damascus. Having obtained permission from the government officials to persecute the believers of Christ, he was a man with a mission. It is possible to visualize his determination as he devoted his life to wiping out this new "sect."

However, when Saul first heard the voice of the Lord, he was afraid. In response to the voice from heaven saying, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?* (Acts 9:4), he asked, *Who are*

*You, Lord?* When Jesus identified Himself, Saul *trembling and astonished* [responded], “*Lord, what do You want me to do?*”

### **A New Man**

In between Saul's first and second questions, a change had come over him. When he discovered the God he was defending was the same God he was persecuting, Paul had only one option: to give everything he had to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. From that moment on, Saul's heart, mind and life belonged to Jesus.

At that point, he became the apostle Paul. No longer did the voice of the Lord generate fear in his heart, but loyalty. That day started many years of communicating with the God he loved and served. His first prayer was, *Who are You, Lord?* but among his last prayers was *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief* (1 Timothy 1:12-13).

Faced with the fact of the sacrifice of Jesus on his behalf was all it took for Paul to live the rest of his life in obedience to His will. His prayers were always reverent but bold, knowing that his faith was in a God who loves, forgives, and desires to communicate with His children.

In Saul's conversion experience, he discovered an important truth for himself that he later communicated to his brothers in Christ. Only someone living outside of the will of God would perceive God's voice as threatening.

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October 2013

\* This devotional is an excerpt from *The Prayer Driven Life*.

*The Prayer Driven Life* examines the prayers of the Apostle Paul. Although many people would admit that there is value in prayer, few can say that prayer is the driving force in their lives. Those who can make that statement have an intimate relationship with God. Often they leave a lasting legacy for others.

Paul is an excellent example of someone whose life was driven by prayer. Using his prayers as a backdrop, *The Prayer Driven Life* examines essential questions about prayer. What is it? Why should you pray? What difference does it make in your life?

The real value of Paul's prayers is that they help you get to know God better. From the moment he met God's Son on the road to Damascus, Paul's life was driven by prayer. In prayer, he communicated with God and obtained guidance for his life.

So can we.