

## LESSON 26

# PAUL - His Early Ministry & Period of Preparation

**References** : Acts . 9 : 19 - 31, 11 : 19-30

**Memory verse** : Acts. 8 : 15, 16

**Objective:** To be convinced that God wants us to do a ministry which is in perfect harmony with His will. God will prepare and use those who yield to God for such a blessed ministry.

**Introduction:** How was Stephen's death ? Saul who eye witnessed the death of Stephen was led to conversion. What were his experiences near Damascus? The converted Saul took baptism and prepared himself for the Lords ministry. The following ten years was a period of preparation for a larger and wider ministry. We have in this lesson, the systematic yet concise descriptions of this preparatory period.

God's purpose of calling Saul was mainly to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to the principal cities of the then civilized world and make the Gospel clear to the Jews and the Gentiles. Moreover, it was intended by God that the teachings of the New Testament be laid down by Paul. It was intended as well that he might carry out the building of the church of God as a wise architect. Paul had accomplished this through his missionary journeys and through his writings.

### 1. IN ARABIA (*Gala. 1: 15-18*)

After Sauls conversion, he stayed in Damascus only for a short while. Now he needed a lonely place for reflective thoughts and evaluation of his new experience and Christ's vision. His experience, in fact was not transitory or by chance. Neither was it a hallucination. He had to



obtain a clear picture of the fact that he and the ministry to be performed through him was included in the programme of the Eternal God. To Put it briefly, Saul needed a solitary place. So he went to the Arabian desert on the south eastern part of Palestine, where he spent about three years with the Lord. From that solitary experince, Paul received what he states; "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you". For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received" (I Cor. 11:23, 15:3, Gal. 1:11). Saul returned from Arabia with the deep conviction that the gospel was entrusted to him and with a strong determination to venture out ( 1 Thes. 2:3, 4: Eph. 3:7, Colo, 1: 25, 29, I Tim. 1:11, 2:7, 2 Tim. 1:11)

## **2. BACK TO DAMASCUS (Acts. 9: 19-25, 2 Cori. 11:32, 33)**

Saul returned from Arabia to Damascus. He started preaching in the Jewish synagogues that **Jesus is the mesiah**. All were amazed by this. They couldn't just explain such a dramatic change in Saul's life compared to his past antagonism of Christianity. Saul proved and established the Messian- Ship of Jesus in the light of the Old Testament scriptures. Disappointed at this, the Jews plotted to kill him. They influenced the Roman Governor and kept watch of Saul day and night at the city gates to catch him. This plot was known to the believers and Saul was let down through the wall in a large basket by night. Notice, God's wonderful work! Instead of returning triumphantly after killing a lot of Christians, it happened that he escaped and fled from the city by the help of the Christains whom he would have persecuted. Though Saul had to flee from Damascus, he had a satisfaction inside his heart. He felt satisfied by the fact that he got saved inspite of his past serious sins, as well as the fact that God chose him to be a preacher of the gospel of Salvation.

## **3. AT JERUSALEM (Acts. 9: 26-30. Gal 1; 18, 21)**

Saul returned to Jerusalem from Damascus. Jerusalem was remembered in many ways. That was where he had his education in the Jewish law; where he grew up; where he was widely known as the strongest persecutor of the Christains three years back! Now he is in the same place. But a striking difference! Formerly he was persecuting Christains. Now he is propagating Christianity. He reached Jerusalem as a strong witness to Christ. But the Christians were a bit doubtful about Sauls integrity. So they would not accept him. It was Barnabas who commended saul to the Apostles and the Church in Judea. Hearing



the news of Saul's conversion, all praised God. He could not proceed with his witnessing in Jerusalem too far.

The Jews who were already enraged at hearing about Saul's conversion plotted to kill him as they met him in person. Saul knew that his association with the Church at Jerusalem would pose a threat to the very existence of the Church. Being in a dilemma Saul asked the Lord about it (Act. 22:17-21). The Lord directed him to move away immediately from Jerusalem. Then, the brothers of the Church accompanied him to Caesarea, from where he sailed in a ship to Tarsus his native place.

#### 4. AT TARSUS (Act. 9:30; 11:25)

The Lord spoke to Saul in Jerusalem that his ministry would be far off among the gentiles (Act. 22: 21, 9:15, 16). So he waited on the Lord for His proper time, when such a larger and wider ministry among the gentiles would be ripe. Probably Saul spent about eight years in his home land. During this period, he testified about the Lord in various parts of Cilicia where Churches arose (Act. 15:40). Meanwhile, he was being prepared spiritually and mentally for a wider ministry.

#### 5. AT ANTIOCH (SYRIA) (Act. 1:19 -30)

The believers who were scattered in the persecution following the death of Stephen came to Antioch also. They broke their usual boundary of evangelising the Jewish circles and evangelised the Greek people also. In the house of Cornelius, the door was opened to the Gentiles already. In that big city of about five lakhs people, a great number of people were subject to faith. When this news reached the apostles in Jerusalem, Barnabas was sent to Antioch. Observing the nature of the work and its possibilities of developments and expansion at Antioch, Barnabas understood that Saul was the right person for the field. He brought Saul from Tarsus. Thus after an obscure ministry of about seven years, Saul appeared on the arena. They worked together one year there. By their strenuous and systematic works in and out, innumerable souls followed the Lord. It is worth noting that the disciples of Christ were **first called Christains at Antioch** (Acts. 11:26). The pagans of Antioch gave this nickname to the zealous and strong followers of Christ. For the past two thousand years the followers of Christ are known by this name. There are two more references to this name in the New Testament. (Act. 26:28, 1 Pet. 4 :16)



The Church at Antioch was as faithful in financial matters as they were strong spiritual. When the believers in Judea fell victim to a great famine, the church at Antioch extended their hands of co-operation in financial matter. The collection they had raised was sent to Jerusalem through Saul and Barnabas.

### **EXCERCISE -26**

#### **Answer the following questions**

1. What was God's purpose of calling Saul?
2. Where did Saul go after his conversion? How many years did he spend there?
3. With what determination did Saul return from Arabia?
4. What did Saul do at Damascus?
5. How did the believers rescue Saul from the plot of Jewish people?
6. Who commended Saul to the apostles and the church in Judea?
7. How many years did Saul spend in his homeland?
8. Where were the disciples of Christ first called Christians?
9. Who helped the believers in Judea when they fell victim to a great famine?

