

LESSON TWO

(1:11-24)

How Paul Became An Apostle (1:11-17)

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. 12 For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; 14 and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, 16 was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away in to Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Talk about an unlikely prospect for conversion! If ever there was a man who was a hopeless case, it was surely young Saul of Tarsus. In these verses Paul relates his background, conversion, and call to be an apostle. He was neither inclined toward apostleship on his own, nor was he led into it by other men. It was the hand of God.

V. 11 I Would Have You Know, Brethren - The fact that Paul calls his readers “brethren” is quite significant. Even though they were in the very process of falling from grace (Gal. 5:4), Paul still loves them enough to call them his brothers as he sounds the warning. Eight more times Paul will call them “brethren,” including the very last word before his closing “Amen” (6:18).

Not Man's Gospel - The whole point of proving Paul's apostleship was to prove the correctness of his gospel. Paul was not defending a wounded ego or damaged pride. He was confirming the authenticity of the true gospel - for the salvation of their souls! Furthermore, since the gospel Paul preached was from God, the false teachers of Galatia had no right to change it.

V. 12 I Did Not receive It From Man - Paul here uses a word which had the special meaning “to receive by oral tradition.” Much of the wisdom of ancient times was passed from one generation to the next by skillful oral instruction. Modern critics often say the Scriptures arose by this method as well. Paul says, “Not so!”

Nor Was I Taught It - This refers to the formal teaching of the classroom. Paul had been learning the tenets of Judaism this way at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), but this was not the way in which he got the gospel. While we learn the gospel from a human or written source, it was necessary that Paul, as an apostle, get the gospel directly from God.

Through A Revelation Of Jesus Christ - Paul's gospel was true because it was straight from Heaven. The word “revelation” means literally “uncovering” or “unveiling” and is the same term used of the Revelation to John (Rev. 1:1). It usually refers to truth passed from God to man, which man could not discover by his own devices.

V. 13 My Former Life In Judaism - Paul was certainly not proud of his old life, but he mentions it here to prove an important point: He was not sympathetic to the rise of Christianity. His stubborn heart was very much unwilling to believe the reported resurrection. He was not converted because of his softness, but rather in spite of his hardness.

How I Persecuted The Church of God Violently - From the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:1) until that day on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-6), Saul of Tarsus was “breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord.” With the zeal of fanaticism, he tried to erase Christianity from the face of the world.

And Tried To Destroy It - The King James Version says that Paul persecuted the church “and wasted it.” The tense of the Greek verb shows that he had not succeeded in destroying the

church, but was in the process of trying to do so. Jesus built his church upon the Rock, and the powers of Paul could not prevail against it!

And I Advanced In Judaism Beyond Many Of My Own Age - Paul must have been the star pupil of Gamaliel. It was too bad that he did not exercise the wisdom and restraint of his teacher (Acts 5:34-39). Perhaps Paul, like many an eager student, hoped to get extra credit for his work outside class. Read Paul's later evaluation of this period in his life in Phil 3:4-11.

So Extremely Zealous Was I - Paul here uses the same word that was applied to Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15). The political zealots with whom Simon was associated thought nothing of committing murder to advance their cause. Paul had reached the same point of blind fanaticism. How is it that people can expect to accomplish God's work with the Devil's tools?

The Traditions Of My Fathers - Have you noticed that Paul has referred to his old religious faith three times now, without ever connecting it to God or the Old Covenant? As a matter of fact, the Judaism of Paul's day was so encumbered with human traditions (Mark 7:8) that it scarcely resembled the covenant given by God at Sinai. Every legal system men have ever had demanded interpretations to guard against the loopholes, and additional rules to guard against the interpretations.

V. 15 But When He Who Had Set Me Apart Before I Was Born - God had plans for Paul before Paul was even born! Paul and his gospel were not "Johnny-come-lately." At just the right time in the sovereign providence of God, Paul was brought into the team of apostles. Please note in this verse two things Paul does not say: first, that God forced him into this plan; or second, that God deals with all people in this same way. God's appointment of Paul as apostle could have been refused or disobeyed (Acts 26:19). Whether God has chosen to operate so directly in every one of our lives is certainly open to discussion. Surely the case of Paul and his apostleship is more special than the average person's choice of vocation.

And Had Called Me Through His Grace - It must have taken a very special kind of grace for God to throw open His arms of love to a man in the very act of persecuting the church. It is the very nature of God's grace to smile down on people who are in no way deserving of His favor.

V. 16 Was Pleased To Reveal His Son To Me - The King James Version has a more literal rendering of the Greek: "to reveal His Son *in* me." Probably the intended meaning is best expressed in the New English Bible: "to reveal His Son to me and through me."

That I Might Preach Him Among The Gentiles - Paul was God's chosen instrument to carry the gospel to all people, especially the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Though the legalistic supporters of the Old Testament Law objected, the Jerusalem Christian leaders endorsed and supported Paul in this mission (Gal. 2:9). Paul's urgency in carrying out his commission can be seen in such passages as Rom 1:15; 1 Cor. 2:2 and 9:16; Col. 1:28. Even though Paul's great heart yearned for the salvation of his fellow Jews (Rom. 9:1-5), his preaching was primarily to Gentiles.

I Did Not Confer With Flesh And Blood - Following his baptism by Ananias (Acts 9:18) Paul did not seek out Christian teachers to learn the gospel from them. God's plans for him called for a period of three years away from the leaders of the church, as proof that his message was from heaven. The remainder of this chapter proves that Paul was never in a position to obtain his doctrine from other apostles, which would have made his a second-hand gospel.

V. 17 Nor did I go up to Jerusalem - The account in Acts 9 confirms that Paul did not go to Jerusalem for a long time after his conversion. When he finally did go to Jerusalem, the Christians were afraid to receive him. It even took the encouragement of Barnabas to get the apostles to accept him. Considering Paul's sinister background, their suspicions were understandable.

Into Arabia, And Again I Returned To Damascus - What Paul did in Arabia is not known. Since it is largely desert, he may have gone there for solitude and God's instruction. Since there are also some cities, he may have been preaching. What we do know is that in

Damascus he wasted no time, preaching immediately in the synagogues (Acts 9:19-25). The time spent in Arabia may have been a very small part of the three-year period mentioned in the next verse.

Paul In Jerusalem (1:18-24)

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. 20 (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was still not known by sight to the churches of Christ in Judea; 23 they only heard it said, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24 And they glorified God because of me.

V. 18 Then After Three Years I Went Up To Jerusalem - The Jews of Damascus had a fierce hatred toward this star Pharisee who turned Christian. Paul's escape in a basket lowered over the wall is related in Acts 9:23-25. From Damascus he journeyed south to Jerusalem and "went up" the long winding road that climbs to this mountain city.

To Visit Cephas - Cephas is the Aramaic equivalent of the Greek name Peter. Both names mean "rock." Paul's reason for this meeting was neither to seek instruction nor to apply for approval. He simply wanted to get acquainted with his fellow apostle.

And Remained With Him Fifteen Days - The brevity of this visit proves that Paul got no instruction in Christian doctrine from Peter. The time was simply too short.

V.9 I Saw None Of The Other Apostles - Either the other apostles were preaching elsewhere, or they were not so bold as the big fisherman to meet their former enemy. The important point here in Galatians is how little contact Paul had with other apostles.

Except James The Lord's Brother - During the earthly ministry of Jesus, James had been an unbeliever (John 7:5). After meeting the risen Lord (I Cor. 15:7), James became an important leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13-21). So far as history records, he was never appointed apostle. The following paraphrase, which fits the Greek perfectly well, is the probable solution: "I saw none of the other apostles, but I did see James the Lord's brother. (I mention him because he is also a leader of importance.)"

Do not forget that the whole thrust of this passage is how little contact Paul had with the apostles. They had received their gospel first-hand from Jesus, and so had Paul.

V. 20 (In What I Am Writing To You, Before God, I Do Not Lie!) - Paul has sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth before the court of his readers' judgment. The base accusations of the Judaizers evoked from Paul this unusually strong pronouncement of his truthfulness. The facts of his earlier life were points of evidence to prove the non-human origin of his gospel.

V. 21 Then I Went Into The Regions Of Syria And Cilicia - After spending two weeks with the Christians in Jerusalem, Paul was sent on to his home town of Tarsus (in Cilicia) as Luke relates in Acts 10:30. Some time later Barnabas took Paul back to Antioch (in Syria) to help in the work among the Greek-speaking people. Paul continued in this work for a whole year, teaching a large company of believers. It was here in Antioch that believers first came to be called "Christians" (Acts 11:25-26).

V. 22 And I Was Still Not Known By Sight - The many congregations spread throughout Judea still did not know Paul by sight (literally "by face"). By the time most of the province heard of his arrival, he was already gone. The quick, temporary nature of the visit is underscored.

V. 23 They Only Heard It Said - Imagine the surprise and wonder of the early Christians when the rumors from distant Damascus were confirmed by first-hand reports from Jerusalem! What they had not yet seen for themselves became the topic of all their conversations.

“He Who Once Persecuted Us Is Now Preaching The Faith - Many had persecuted the early Christians, but none with the zeal of Paul. Now that he was converted, he was preaching with a zeal few could match. What Paul preached was “the faith,” which here designates the gospel message (Jude 3). The word for preaching is actually “evangelizing,” the Greek word for the joyous shout of the king’s herald who has good news to tell.

He Once Tried To Destroy” - The King James Version has “the faith which once he destroyed.” As in verse 13, the better translation would show that Paul did not succeed in what he was attempting.

V. 24 And They Glorified God Because Of Me - It would have been quite human to resent Paul’s conversion and forgiveness of all past sin. But the Christians rejoiced and glorified God. Once they accepted him, it would also have been quite human to lionize him [to treat or regard as an object of great interest], making a great public show of their important new convert. Such a terrible sinner’s testimony would make an exciting program! However, they did not glorify and make much of Paul - they glorified God.

Paul was not seeking their favor. If he had been, he would no longer have been the slave of Christ (Gal. 1:10). Paul boasted of neither his former sin, nor his present conversion. He preached Christ and the people glorified God.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Paul take so much space to remind his readers of how he became a Christian and an apostle?
2. What is important about the use of the word “brethren” in verse 11?
3. Describe young Saul as a star pupil of Gamaliel.
4. Does sincere zeal make up for being on the wrong side?
5. Did God set us apart for anything before we were born?
6. What did Paul do immediately after his conversion?
7. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem, and whom did he see there?
8. Why mention James the Lord’s brother?
9. Was Paul wrong to have sworn with the formal oath form in verse 20?

10. What did Paul do in Syria and Cilicia?
11. What is the best response to gospel preaching?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is significant about Paul's use of the word "brethren" in Gal. 1:11?
2. Why was it so important for Paul to prove his apostleship?
3. What is special about the meaning of "receive" in Gal. 1:12?
4. How would you refute the notion that Paul received his Gospel through oral tradition?
5. What does the word "taught" refer to in Gal. 1:12?
6. What is the literal meaning of "revelation," and how does this relate to how Paul received his Gospel message?
7. Summarize Paul's former life in Judaism.
8. What is the danger of adding human traditions to the Word of God and giving these traditions equal authority with the Bible?
9. Was Paul's preaching primarily to the Jews or Gentiles?
10. Following Paul's baptism, how long was he away from the church leaders, and what does this prove?
11. What is significant about Paul mentioning Arabia, Damascus, and a period of 3 years in Gal 1:17-18?
12. What is the connection between the names "Cephas" and "Peter"?
13. How long was Paul with Cephas in Jerusalem, and what does this prove?
14. Does Gal. 1:19 teach that James, the Lord's brother, was appointed an Apostle? Explain.
15. Briefly discuss Paul's work in the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

16. How did the Christians in Judea respond to Paul's conversion?