

Who is Paul?

Dear Roderick,

Thank you for submitting your question, "Who is Paul?" to Christian Questions Radio. We hope our answer will aid you in your Bible study.

The Apostle Paul

The Apostle Paul is the most remarkable of all the Apostles. He was the one directly chosen of God to replace the betrayer, Judas.

Paul was also known as Saul of Tarsus. His father was a wealthy Roman citizen, and the name Paul was more commonly used in Rome. His family was strongly Jewish and of the religious Pharisees. Saul was well educated in a religious school attended only by the sons of the rich. Saul had advantages in every way: he was well educated, wealthy, extremely religious and honored by his family and countrymen. Acts 22:3

Because Saul was a very dedicated Jew, he served God with all the zeal and love that he could. But although he served God with zeal, it was not based on a knowledge of the wisdom of God. Rom. 10:2,3 He thought he was pleasing God when he severely persecuted the Christian Jews for what the law said was "heresy" punishable by death. He was responsible for giving the command to have the Christian disciple Stephen put to death by stoning.

The last act of persecution Saul would commit would be to order the Christians of Damascus to trial in Jerusalem. Saul set out with a group of men, probably soldiers and other religious men, on the road to Damascus to bring who they thought were hated Christians back to Jerusalem. But on the way, he was met with the most marvelous experience any human would ever know – an experience which would change his life forever!

As Saul traveled at around midday, suddenly there came upon the group of men a brightness that was even brighter than that of the sun. Saul and the others fell to the ground hearing, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul answered "Who are you, Lord?" The voice answered, "I am Jesus, the one whom you persecute." Saul replied, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" Jesus answered, "Arise and go into the city, and there you will be told what to do." Not only did Saul hear the voice of Jesus, but he saw Jesus in his glory as a Divine, Immortal Spirit Being! 1 Cor. 15:8 The other Apostles saw Jesus resurrected, but they did not see him as a Divine Spirit. Jesus chose to take on various human forms to appear to the others, so they would not be frightened. The other men who traveled with Saul did not see Jesus, they only heard his voice.

The brightness of this vision blinded Saul's eyes, but it opened his mind. When Jesus said to Saul, "Why do you persecute me?" He meant, "Saul, why do you persecute those who believe in me?" But why would Jesus come especially to a man like Saul of Tarsus who persecuted to death his followers? Why didn't he just honor the wishes of the Apostles and make Matthias the Apostle to replace Judas? God wanted to make a beautiful example out of Saul to show that He could take

even the most feared of men and change his misguided heart to one of the most loving and merciful! I Cor. 1: 26-29 God also wanted to show how he could prepare such a man from even before his birth and give him the qualities and advantages needed to perform the work of a great Apostle. Gal. 1:15 Even before Saul was born, his family was wealthy, well educated and religious. His father was a Pharisee, and so Saul became a Pharisee. Both were more familiar with God's law than most men. These qualities would make Saul naturally very useful in the spread of the Gospel to the Jews. But Saul would have to accept the call to leave all and follow Christ. God would not make Saul do anything. Saul had to choose for himself. Acts 9:1-8

Guided by the eyes of his traveling companions, Saul traveled on to Damascus as Jesus had asked. There he fasted and prayed earnestly to the Lord to show him what to do. Saul did not cry and say, "Oh, poor me, I've lost my sight!" No, he humbly waited for the direction of the Lord. And while he did, he received a vision that a man named Ananias would come to him to restore his sight. At this same time Ananias, a faithful disciple of Jesus, received a vision. The Lord said, "Ananias, arise and go to the house of Judas for there a man from Tarsus named Saul is praying. Go and restore his sight." But Ananias said, "Lord, this is the man who persecutes the saints in Jerusalem!" Yet the Lord replied, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake." And Ananias did just as the Lord had said. He went straight to Saul, and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me to restore your sight and fill you with the Holy Spirit." Just then, loose scales of skin fell from Saul's eyes and he regained most of his sight. Then he arose and was baptized. Saul was ready to serve the Lord and willing to suffer much for his name's sake. Acts 9:10-20 Saul immediately began preaching in Damascus,

proclaiming the name of Jesus in the synagogues saying, "He is the Son of God!" All were amazed to hear Saul, the persecutor of Christians, preach the very name he had despised. Soon the high priests of Damascus became hateful of Saul and plotted to kill him. But the Christians there helped him to escape the city and return to Jerusalem.

When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to work alongside of the other Christians there, but they were afraid of this persecutor who had sentenced their beloved Stephen to death! The Lord then provided for his disciple Barnabas to come to Saul's defense. Barnabas explained all that had happened to Saul and what a wonderful change the Lord had created in him. He showed how Saul was such a zealous witness for Jesus that he was almost killed. Then the Christians of Jerusalem understood and welcomed Saul into their fellowship. They witnessed the great power of their Almighty God!

But imagine how Saul's family and friends must have felt to see his conversion. They saw this power of God as the power of Satan overtaking their beloved Saul. "What an embarrassment you are to the holy nation of Israel!" they thought. Saul was then persecuted by his family, and all that he had as a Pharisee and son of a wealthy man was taken from him. Saul was left a man without honor in his family and country, and he went from riches to poverty for the sake of Christ. Acts 9:19-30.

Saul was not discouraged by this nor tempted to slow down his zeal for the Lord. No, he then traveled to Arabia to study the various prophecies and the law to see how they pointed to his Lord

Jesus and how they made clear God's plan. For three years he studied, becoming mature as a Christian and more capable as the chosen instrument of the Lord. Filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom of God's plan, he was anxious to return and teach this plan to all. It is interesting to note that three years is about the same amount of time in which the other Apostles studied and learned with their master during his three and a half year ministry. Studying God's plan and will is most important for every Christian. 2 Tim. 2:15