



THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

SESSION TWO: DAMASCUS TO THE DESERT

(Painting is “The Philosopher” or “Saint Paul” by Vincenzo Gemito, 1917.)

QUESTIONS:

- 1) By best estimates, it seems that Paul was younger than Jesus by about how many year?
- 2) Tarsus, Paul’s hometown, had how many residents in the first century?
- 3) How is it that the Jewish synagogue became an institution across Asia Minor and Europe?
- 4) Of the four major social/religious groups in Israel in the first century, Paul belonged to which group?
- 5) Paul was likely how old when he headed to Damascus to arrest early Christians there?
- 6) One of the major assumptions for this particular study, is that “justification by faith” is not Paul’s major theological theme. What is that theme?
- 7) While Paul certainly was a theologian, it can also be said that he was more of a what?
- 8) When Paul arrived in a town declaring, “Jesus is Lord,” by intention he was saying someone else was not. Who was that someone?
- 9) Emperor worship began with what important historical figure?
- 10) Inscriptions from the first century, discovered in the last 150 years, refer to the Roman Emperor as the “Pontifex Maximus. Wha does this phase mean?

RESOLUTION - REDIRECTION - RETREAT - RE-IMAGINE

Traveling with Saul of Tarsus from Jerusalem to Damascus, from Damascus to Arabia, from Arabia back to Damascus, from Damascus back to Jerusalem, and finally from Jerusalem to Tarsus.



RESOLUTION: SAUL AS A ZEALOUS PHARISEE

The Pharisees were “the pious ones,” committed to turning their nation back to God.

From Acts 7, 8 and 9: *“But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul...*

“And Saul approved of their killing Stephen...And going from house to house, Saul dragged off both men and women and put them in prison... breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”

In Paul’s defense, he was absolutely convinced of the rightness of his actions, seeing himself as one holding off the just punishment of God.

REDIRECTION: SAUL’S “CONVERSION”

Saul did not convert from Judaism to Christianity. Christianity did not yet exist as a distinct movement. Paul’s “conversion” was one of seeing Jesus as the Messianic fulfillment of all he had known and understood as a Jew.

Saul’s experience on the Damascus Road is provided three times in the Book of Acts: Acts 9; Acts 22; and Acts 26.

N.T. Wright’s hypothesis is that Paul was meditating on the leading mystical theme and Scriptural passage of the time: Ezekiel 1.

RETREAT: TO THE DESERT

Date	Event	Location	Text
C. 33	“Conversion”	Damascus	Acts 9:1-19
33	Earliest Preaching	Damascus	Acts 9:20-22
33-36	Retreat to Desert	Arabia	Acts 9:23a Gal. 1:17
36	Return from Desert	Damascus	Acts 9:23b-25 2 Cor. 11:32-33
36	Paul Meets Apostles	Jerusalem	Acts 9:26-28 Gal. 1:18-20
36	Paul to Tarsus	Tarsus	Acts 9:29-30 Acts 22:17-21



Funeral Inscription discovered in 1889, referring to King Aretas of the Nabatean Kingdom, who ruled from 9BC to 40 AD, and who help jurisdiction over Damascus. Aretas was the father-in-law of Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great.

The Nabataeans, former desert Bedouins, built Petra around 300 BC. Petra, meaning “rock,” was the name given by the Greeks. Per Josephus, “Rekem” was the name used by Arabs during the first century AD, meaning “decoration” or “facade.”



RE-IMAGINE: PAUL MUST RETHINK ALL HIS PREVIOUS UNDERSTANDINGS

It might be helpful to think of Paul going through natural “Stages of Faith:”

1) Convert; 2) Commit; 3) Command; 4) Crisis/Collapse 5) Coalesce (to begin again). Think of the general process, and the “coalescing” or re-integration stage in particular, as a rejoining of the pieces.

