

Saul's Background:

What we know of Saul's life before ministry is a patchwork from various passages in the Bible. We can learn of it from Acts 18, 22, 23 and Philippians 3. Saul was his Hebrew name, Paul his Roman name. Saul was born into the tribe of Benjamin. His hometown was Tarsus. Tarsus is located within modern day Turkey. It is 20 KM inland from the Mediterranean Sea to the north.

From the above passages we learn that Saul was a Pharisee as was his father. This meant he strictly observed the Law and the traditions of Israel. The identity of his mother is not known but he was a Roman Citizen and had at least one sister who had a son. They lived in Jerusalem. Saul's nephew was instrumental in saving his life. (Acts 23:16-17)

Saul learned tentmaking as a trade and also studied under Gamaliel a well-respected Jewish Rabbi who belonged to the part of the Pharisees and the Jewish Supreme Court, the Sanhedrin.

Saul's Persecution of the Church. Acts 7:58-8:3.

Being the student of the Scriptures that he was and a Pharisee with connections, He no doubt would have been aware of Jesus in the years of his public ministry. He certainly became aware enough to become a vehement persecutor of the church.

We can be certain that rumbles of persecution had been occurring for weeks after Pentecost. The followers of Jesus like were strengthened by the Holy Spirit to bear witness of Jesus and His identity. Just as the rulers of Israel felt threatened by Jesus, they were threatened by his disciples. After all 3000 were added to the number following Jesus as the result of one sermon by Peter.

The Bible states that Saul was "ravaging the church." Acts 8:3. He was Like a wild animal. Ps 80:13

Why do you think Jesus would allow the church to be scattered from Jerusalem? Acts 8:1

Saul's conversion to Jesus. (Acts 9,22,26)

On the Road to Damascus Acts 9:1-2

Why do you think Christians were known as "Followers of the Way?"

Jesus Gets Saul's attention. Acts 9:3-9

The zealous Pharisee with all the credentials is confronted with the power of God and the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. He becomes a blind man lying on the ground.

What are some situations that God might use to have people look to Him?

God sends ministry to Paul. Acts 9:10-19

How important it is for others to be obedient to Christ. To speak the Word of the Lord and conduct His plan courageously.

What courageous thing has God had you do in the past or requiring of you now?

God's Plan for Saul Acts 9:15-16

God's plan for Saul's life was to suffer for the name of Jesus. The persecutor of the church will now suffer for the sake of the church. God had a plan for Paul- He could have, like Jonah ran away from God, but he remained. None of us knows what God has called us to go through for the sake of the church. Our role is to be faithful each day- and trust Him as we go forward through life.

Saul's ongoing reminder from God. 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Remember Jacob and How he wrestled with God? (Genesis 32:24-32) When it was all done, God touched him on the hip causing Jacob to walk with a limp the rest of his life. A beautiful picture of this is seen in Hebrews 11:21.

God struck Saul with blindness to get his attention. It is believed that Paul struggled with his vision for the rest of his life. This was his "thorn in the flesh". It is believed the vision of 1 Cor. 12 occurred in the three days of physical blindness after his encounter with Jesus.

References to ponder considering this and his ongoing weakness.

Galatians 4:13-16, 6:11

Acts 26:13-20

God, on some occasions, will leave his people with infirmity to remind them of how he has delivered them from their old life. The intensity of our wrestling with God may be the measure of the infirmity. It could be physical, mental, or relational. God knows what it takes to keep us faithful and humble. Sometimes our struggles are just the result of living in a broken world. But I do believe god works in such ways. Concerning Saul and his prayer for relief, once God gave him the answer "My grace is sufficient for you..." it seems that he left the matter in God's hands and remained silent about it.

Epilogue: Acts 9:19-30

Following His conversion Paul immediately began preaching! He stepped into ministry as all followers of Jesus should do.