



A Course

In

**GENERAL
BIBLE**

PART FIVE

Prepared by the
Committee on Religious Education
of the
American Bible College

A COURSE

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Pineland, Florida 33945

INTRODUCTION

As you study the Scriptures, you will find that it is of the greatest importance to approach the Bible in a reverent attitude of mind, looking upon it as the inspired Word of God, and not just an ordinary piece of literature. If the Bible is studied in the same manner as one studies Shakespeare, Milton or some historical work, it may be found interesting and profitable. But by this approach, the Bible student, persistent though he may be, will never find its rich treasures. The Apostle Paul says: "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (I Cor. 2:14) For the profitable study of the Word of God, the right spiritual attitude is indispensable.

The Scriptures should be studied as eagerly as a hungry person seeks for food. The formal reading of a portion of the Bible may have some worth as a religious exercise, but in order that the complete benefit may be obtained from its truths, they must be appropriated to personal needs. A milkman may deliver thousands of quarts of milk each day and yet go home thirsty. The Bible student may read large portions of the Bible with little benefit unless he makes it his own by personal appropriation and feeds upon it.

In your studies of the Bible, will you appropriate the riches thereof to your own personal use, or will you read as you would read a book of fiction, a mystery, etc? In order to make full use of the pearls of wisdom

contained in the Bible readings, it is suggested you reread them. Go into its wonderful fields of truth; go down into its valleys; climb its mountain peaks of vision; follow its streams of inspiration; enter its halls of learning. Many Bible truths do not appear on the surface; they must be dug up and be brought into the light by toil and effort.

There are various methods of Bible study, such as the topical method, the study of books, the study by chapters, the study of important passages, and the biographical method. In our approach we are following the last method the biographical (storytelling) method or the study of various Biblical Characters. In this way the Bible heroes are made to walk across the stage of life again and to furnish us, as Christian believers, lessons of life and inspiration.

The General Bible Survey course is formatted in the historical story-telling method. This method is utilized in order that the student may see the Bible as a complete unit telling His-story history. Although the American Bible College believes the King James Version is the preserved Word of God, this method of study allows the writer to occasionally condense a passage in his own paraphrase. This should not be construed to imply that A. B. C. is correcting God's Word.

During this course the student is required to read through the entire Bible.

CHAPTER ONE

SAUL OF TARSUS

Scripture Reading: Act 21:39, 22:3,27,28; 26:4-7; Philippians 3:3-6

Many are the books of the life of Paul, but no scholar has been able to cast any great light on his childhood and youth. The early missionary activity and declining days are still surrounded by considerable dimness. While the period of youth and closing years are veiled in obscurity, we do know something of his ministry which comes from his own letters. Although Paul does not write about his personal life in these letters; we can draw from them a great deal of information about his character. In addition to Paul's own writings there are valuable insights in the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke.

1. Name. Saul belonged to the smallest tribe which made up Israel. The first king of Israel was Saul who also came from the small tribe of Benjamin. There are those who contend that Saul of Tarsus received his Hebrew name in honor of King Saul. Others reason that he could hardly be named in honor of a king who was not popular. Saul means "desired" and it may be that Saul's parents were childless for a number of years.

A number of Bible scholars are of the opinion that the Apostle took the name Paul from that of the proconsul, Sergius Paulus whom he was summoned before and whom Paul won for Christianity. Others hold forth that the Apostle had the name Paul along the side of Saul from the time of his circumcision. There have been other attempts to explain the reason for the two names. Luke describes the transition from Jewish life to that of the Christian way, Acts 13:9. Some scholars base their reasoning for the change of the name on the idea that Saul is the Jewish-Phaisaic name and Paul the Christian or apostolic name. It was quite common among the Jews that, besides their Hebrew name which was used in their own circle, a Greek name sounding much like the Hebrew name would be used in the larger world of events.

2. Parentage. The date of Paul's birth is not exactly known, but it is believed to be about 1 A.D., which would make him five years younger than the Lord. Other calculations place him at the same age of Jesus. The birth place was in the famous Grecian

commercial and literary city of Tarsus in a province called Cilicia. Tarsus was an important city of boasting pride. Coins from Tarsus were stamped, "Tarsus Metropolis, First, Fairest and Best." Cicero lived in Tarsus while governing Cilicia from 51-50 B.C. and it was from here that Mark Anthony summoned Cleopatra in 38 B.C.

Tarsus gave to Paul an early broad concept of the Gentile world. It had been a free-governing Hellenistic city since 170 B.C. The city was third among the centers of Greek learning, being surpassed only by Athens and Alexandria. Living in the city was the great Stoic Philosopher named Nestor. While Tarsus was a seat of learning, at the same time, we can reasonably expect that Paul's parents guarded him from the pagan influences of the Greek religion. On the other hand, Paul, along with his parents were given social standing and dignity as well as exemption from punishment of scourging and crucifixion. Socially Paul was far above the mere citizens in the city and from a legal position, he ranked with the great men of the empire.

In Phil. 3:5 by calling himself a "Hebrew of Hebrews", he meant that both his father and mother were Jewish by birth. Little is known about Paul's father except for a few inferences. He was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee and a Roman citizen. There is no way to indicate how long Paul's father was a native of Palestine or how long he had lived in Tarsus. Some historians contend that Paul's father moved from Palestine to Tarsus as a merchant. Others hold that Paul's ancestors settled in Cilicia about 175 B.C. We are not able to establish the length of time in which Paul's father had lived in Tarsus on the basis of his Roman and Tarsian citizenship.

Historians point out that it was quite common that liberated Jewish war prisoners were given Roman citizenship. It is presumed that Paul's father was a wealthy merchant because Roman citizenship was not granted unless the person was in the money class and also a significant person. Probably the father manufactured or traded in cilice or the tent cloth and this may account for Paul learning the tent-making trade. It is also believed that Paul's father was in the

upper class of citizens since he was able to send his son to Jerusalem and to support his advanced studies.

No records are available giving information about Paul's mother. There is only one account which offers data about other relatives. Paul had a sister living in Jerusalem and her son gave him assistance in a grave situation, Acts 23:16-22.

3. Paul's Early Education. Paul's education began at home where the history, precepts and the ordinances of the Law were taught. From his mother he learned to pray and his mind was indelibly impressed with the prayers and domestic rites of the household. He would hear the oft' repeated stories of the patriarchs and prophets, of poets and patriots, of kings and national heroes. By his mother's side, Paul trotted along to Synagogue and coming home had many eager questions. At the age of five, his father took over his education. Paul then began to read the Scriptures; and at the age of ten, learned the Mishna or the traditions of the elders. At the age of thirteen, he was under obligation to keep strictly all of the commandments. When he reached fifteen, the time had arrived that a study of the Talmud must begin.

There is no way of knowing if Paul attended any Greek schools in his childhood. Although the Jews were very reluctant to permit their sons to become influenced by pagan institutions of learning, Paul's style of Greek, vocabulary and logic point of an excellent educational background. His knowledge of Roman culture and the Old Testament scriptures indicate an educated background. His writing style is more eloquent than other New Testament writers. Probably Paul learned scholastic Greek and Hebrew customs and language from a Jewish school where composition was one of the courses of instruction.

4. Paul With Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Since Saul's father had financial means it was an honor to send his son to become a Scribe. We already pointed out that Paul had a married sister living in Jerusalem and it is probably here that he stayed. Paul studied under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel, who was a grandson of the famous Hillel, a student of Greek literature and a leader of the liberal school of Pharisees. Gamaliel is the only Jewish teacher of the Law who is named in the New Testament. As a teacher, he was held in the highest respect and Paul takes pride in stating that he sat at the feet of Gamaliel. Under his teaching, Paul's intellectual and moral endowment was developed to the highest order. The educational training rooted and grounded Paul in the Scriptures of the Old Covenant and those traditions of the elders which culminated in the Talmud. All of the training gave Paul the ability

to argue with the Pharisees as a son of Abraham, of the Tribe of Benjamin, and as a disciple of the renowned Gamaliel, surnamed, "The Glory of the Law." Luke calls Gamaliel "a doctor of the law, held in honor of all the people." Gamaliel was a man with far more tolerance than his fellows. It is said of him that he did not regard Greek culture and letters as sinful and forbidden. On the other hand, while he appeared to be liberal, he was yet a Pharisee in the fullest degree. Paul received training according to the strict manner of the Law.

5. Paul's Appearance as a Man. Tradition has described him as being short, stocky, piercing dark eyes under v-shape eye brows, a large hooked nose and bald headed. Some artists have attempted to give Paul long heavy beard which would be traditional for Pharisees. In order to be a Pharisee, he have had no physical scars, blemishes or spots.

A great deal of time and study has been devoted to Paul's physical "thorn in the flesh." No matter how taxing the affliction may have been, Paul must be given credit for his physical endurance in being able to go through the vast hardships as a missionary. In his letters, there are several intimations of attacks of an acute illness which seems to appear as most painful. One discovers that Paul had a sharp pain in his body which came as Satan's messenger to bruise him. Paul contributes this pain as a way to save him from being unduly elated. (Gal. 4:13; 2 Cor. 12:7)

Diagnoses as to what this incurable malady may have been run from dysentery to epileptic fits. Modern psychiatry would attempt to pin the infirmity to a mental illness since Paul seemed to be inclined to hallucinations. Such a theory does not hold since Paul was a man with a high sense of reality. The idea of epilepsy has been ruled out since it is inconceivable that a man suffering from such an ailment could endure the great physical strains and develop such a high spiritual insight as Paul was capable of doing. Galatians 4:13 does not offer any support to the idea that Paul suffered from epilepsy.

One thing is clear, however, Luke the physician does not reveal anything about Paul's ailment. What then was this "thorn in the flesh"? Was it malaria, neurasthenia, insomnia, migraine headaches, eye trouble or palsy? Who knows? The oldest tradition is that the "infirmity of the flesh" refers to violent and prostrating headaches. Both Tertullian and Jerome held to this theory, while Calvin believed that the pain in his body was spiritual temptations. Another a more recent and rational theory has been that Paul suffered from chronically recurrent attacks of a

certain malarial fever so common along the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The more plausible theory has been based on the Damascus road blindness and proposed that Paul never fully recovered his eye sight. "A thorn in the flesh" only implies an irritating soreness, not a total debilitation of the flesh. Three times he begged the Lord to rid him of the thorn, but his answer was, "My grace is sufficient, for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" II Cor. 12:9. Gal. 6:11 seem to confirm his poor vision. Also, the mention of eyes and his need for secretarial help in writing many of his letters mean eye trouble of which Dr. Luke would not be able to treat.

6. The Personality of Paul. Paul did not fully free himself from his Jewish manners, nor did all of his training to be a Pharisee rub off. It will be noted that after his conversion there remained a strong religiously ethical zeal for righteousness. Paul had no time for the ungodly and unholy things of life. His passion against evil and for truth is clearly revealed throughout all of his letters. While Paul remained a Jew, yet God's grace molded him as a potter's vessel. Paul could say, "All things are become new" in Christ II Cor. 5:17.

Paul's mind operated more as a Greek than as a Jew, being more systematic in his thinking than Jewish. As a Christian, Paul's zeal did not wane in the least and his drive was even stronger. As a leader, his followers and co-workers held him in highest regard. The pride of a Jew was exchanged for the spirit of humility. As Paul became humble, he also took on a mild, meek and merciful spirit. Above all, his greatest passion was his love to Christ and love to fellowmen.

7. Paul's Family Life. Was Paul married? Paul certainly claims the right to lead a married life like Peter and the other apostles. Yet his writings also seem to indicate the preference of a single life. Historians point out that Clement of Alexandria, Erasmus, and others held to the theory that Paul was married to Syntyche. Others regard him as a widower who had lost his wife before his conversion. Philip Schaff in his **History of the Church** does not contribute to the possibility of Paul being married. William Barclay, a more recent Bible scholar holds to the idea that Paul had at some time been married.

Students who place their contentions on the premise that Paul was married make their claims with respect to his relationship as a Rabbi. As a Rabbi,

Paul could not fail in fulfilling the strict duties of the Law and traditions; and as such, he was under obligation to be married. Evidence points to the fact that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin and it was a rule that members must be married men, Acts 26:10. One possible conclusion is that if Paul's wife had not died after or before his conversion then she more likely left him when he became a Christian.

END OF SAMPLE