

Bible Studies for Life: July 2

Barnabas and Paul • Acts. 9:26-28; 11:22-26; 15:36-40

By Don Hicks



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This points out to us a key objective in Christian discipleship. God expects us to invest in another person or persons after He has given us the gift of someone investing in us by disciplining us.

Let's identify the characters in these final studies. First, we will look at the better known, the Apostle Paul. Saul was his Hebrew name. Saul was a common Hebrew name. He was probably named after King Saul since both of them were in the tribe of Benjamin.

After his conversion to "The Way," Saul became known as Paul (Paulus), his official name as a Roman citizen. Paul was born in Tarsus in the eastern part of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). He was a Roman citizen since Tarsus was an official Roman city. Paul's Roman citizenship was an important factor in allowing him the freedom to travel and preach widely in the Roman Empire.

However, of greater importance to our understanding of the background of Paul the Apostle is that we must remember he was a Jew by upbringing, education, and training.

Paul described himself this way before his conversion: *"If anyone else thinks he has grounds for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised the eighth day; of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; regarding the law, a Pharisee; regarding zeal, persecuting the church; regarding the righteousness that is in the law,*

blameless" (Philippians 3:4b-6 CSB).

Paul pointed out that his zeal was demonstrated by his persecution of the church. That persecution was mean spirited.

Let's try to understand the fears of the early Christians. The Pharaoh who tried to kill all the Israelite boys when Moses' mother floated him down the Nile River is an example of that kind zealous tyrant.

Can you imagine the pain of the Israelite Mamas when midwives who obeyed the Pharaoh killed their newborn sons? Remember too that King Herod killed all the boys under two years of age in a failed attempt to kill Jesus.

I mention these persecutions to help us understand the fear that Saul's persecution was causing. Maybe we could understand this fear if we look to modern examples of war crimes, genocide, and persecution. Consider for a minute these purveyors of fear and terror: Adolf Hitler, the Japanese Emperor who attacked Pearl Harbor, Saddam Hussein, the 911 hijackers, Vladimir Putin.

Saul had to work himself up to get as bad as he was before his conversion. The first time he participated in the martyring of a Christian, Stephen (Acts 6–7), Saul only took care of the garments of those throwing stones but Acts 8:1 records, *Saul was there, giving approval to his death.*

Acts 8:3 tells us, *Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.* Notice a couple of details Dr. Luke shows us in his wording of this account. Saul "dragged" persecuted Christians to jail – there is no indication of any legitimate trial.

Luke also thought we needed to know it was not only men but women, too, who were dragged to jail.

Now we come to the good news that involves the discipling of Paul by our other main character in this successful discipling story, Joseph of Cyprus. Unless you came across the name, Joseph of Cyprus, while preparing for this lesson, you may not ever remember hearing it but the Bible often includes nicknames that tell a person's character. That is the case here.

The name you probably do know is Barnabas, which means encourager. As background and to fully understand what a courageous act it was for this encourager to mentor Saul/Paul, remember all we have said about Saul dragging men and women of The Way off to prison. Then study Acts 9:1-10 & ff.

Barnabas, in an act of great bravery, took him (Saul) and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly (Acts 9:27 NIV).

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