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THE THEOLOGICAL TRAINING OF SAUL OF TARSUS

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 35
ACTS 9:19-30

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Then was Saul "Certain Days" with the disciples which were at Damascus. I give emphasis to "Certain Days" for these were the days of his theological and doctrinal training. Now in order for us to understand this man, Saul of Tarsus, we need to know something about his training. He had the best training of his day, save he missed the three years of personal training which Jesus gave to the disciples. But Saul was better prepared to understand the grace of God than any person alive.

We are going to notice that God is going to use many years in the preparation of this great man. On my door at the Louisville Seminary, there was a little bronze tablet which said, "The world will wait for your service until you are fully prepared". Let us look at the preparation of this man for his great work, which took a period of more than ten years.

1. He was trained in basic doctrine by Ananias at Damascus. Ananias was his first teacher in basic doctrine.
2. Saul went from Damascus to Arabia where he spent three years.
GALATIANS 1:11-17 "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."
3. After being in Arabia for three years, Saul returned to Damascus.
ACTS 9:23-25 "And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket."
4. When Saul escaped from Damascus, he went to Jerusalem.
ACTS 9:26-29 "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him."
5. He went from Jerusalem to Tarsus and spent from six to nine years there.
ACTS 9:30-31 "Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."
Tarsus had the greatest university of the world at that time, and Saul would have the advantage of this training. Many of the Roman Emperors were trained by the professors in Tarsus University.

ACTS 9:20 "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." Saul was still in Damascus and for the first time he preached Christ. It says he preached in a "Synagogue". This is not a Hebrew word as most people think, it comes from synagoges and is a Greek word. It simply means a place of assembly. When the Jews were scattered from Jerusalem, they would find themselves in foreign cities, and they would gather together to read the law of Moses. These gatherings were called "Synagogues". So Saul of Tarsus went to a synagogue and preached. He just kept on preaching Christ. The Greek says that he preached "The Jesus". Jesus refers to the humanity of Christ. So Saul's first message dealt with the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, that he was the God man.

ACTS 9:21 "But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?" Here we have the reaction to Saul's preaching. They were utterly astonished. You see, Saul of Tarsus had a worldwide reputation. He was famous for persecuting Christians. They just couldn't understand this complete change of pace Saul of Tarsus had made.

ACTS 9:22 "But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." Here is the record of his rapid development. "Increased the more in strength" means that he gained in preaching power. Ananias, Mr. Ordinary Christian, gave Saul basic doctrine and Paul's great mind took it and enlarged on it and preached with power. Later on, before he died, Simon Peter admitted that Paul was the greatest doctrinal writer of all. There is no substitute for doctrinal truth in the mind. But you have to have information before you can communicate it. The important thing is not the man but the message. Saul "Confused" those who rejected Christ. Saul preached and proved that the God man is Jesus Christ.

Now between verses 22 and 23 he went to Arabia and spent three years there. Ananias could take him just so far--then he had to get better training. Why? He had reached a high point in training and preaching--BUT HE STOPPED IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT LEARN A GREAT DEAL MORE IN BIBLE TRUTH. He realized that much more doctrine would be required for the battle he had ahead of him. He knew he had to study even though he was an eloquent speaker.

The primary duty and task of the preacher today is to study the Bible until his mind and soul is filled with Bible doctrine. He needs to apply the seat of his pants to his study chair, with eyes fastened on the Scripture so he can STUDY AND TEACH--STUDY AND TEACH--STUDY AND TEACH.

ACTS 9:23 "And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him:" Now Saul has returned to Damascus. The Jews were now organized so they could kill him. You see, they wanted to kill him for he was going to upset the applecart of Judaism. Why? What did Judaism teach at this time? Judaism had gone in for ritualism, and many didn't even believe in God at all. They had rejected doctrine and had rejected Jesus as the unique man of the universe. The Jews had gone on negative signals, had refused to let the Holy Spirit teach him, and religion had taken them over completely and they had ritual without reality. The Jews were organized into a synagogue and they will have nothing to do with doctrine that teaches Jesus is the Son of God. Religion is their curse and ritual holds them together and when Saul of Tarsus returned to Damascus and preached Jesus, they not only rejected it, but they wanted to kill Saul. Religion had taken over their minds and they were so determined not to accept Jesus that they went about to kill Saul who was preaching Jesus as God. (We have seen this in our time. A Jewish boy was converted to Christianity and when he returned home and told his Jewish parents about it, they threw him out. They stripped him of everything, took his name from him, and even got a

casket and had a funeral and pretended that the boy was dead. To them he was dead.) Now this is always the reaction of religion. Religion advocates violence. Take law and order away and religion will move in and persecute. If religion has no restraint on it from the state, then it will rise up and dominate. This is why there must never be a union of church and state, for it always destroys human freedom. (As an illustration of this, look south of the border into Central and South America. Where religion is the state, there is no freedom.)

So when Saul of Tarsus returned to Damascus, he immediately became the object of their assassination plot. They kept watching the gates day and night trying to catch him. Right at this time a man named Aretas, an Arab King, owned Damascus. Herod made a treaty with Aretas and as a result he got Damascus. Aretas, in order to get on the good side of the Jews, even gave them the right to kill. But he told them they must do it outside the city. So they were trying to catch Saul and kill him outside the walls of Damascus.

ACTS 9:25 "Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." It means they let him down through the wall in a rope hoist. In the navy these rope hoists are still used to transfer people and baggage from one ship to another. Here is a picture of team work in the early church. Little did they know as they let him down that night that they were giving freedom to the greatest theologian and man of God the world would ever know.

ACTS 9:26 "And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple." This is his first trip to Jerusalem since his conversion. He had been saved at least four, possibly five years. He had not put his foot in Jerusalem since the day he left there to go and kill Christians. Saul is now thinking about how he left five years before, and he is looking forward to a reunion with the believers he had opposed five years before.

ACTS 9:27 "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." This little word BUT is "de" in Greek and is a conjunction of contrast. Here is a legalistic church afraid of Saul of Tarsus, but Barnabas is a grace man. Barnabas is first in great Christian nobility.

READ ACTS 15:37 "And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark." Paul didn't agree with Barnabas and there was a sharp break between Barnabas and Saul. Later on in Colossians 4 and 2 Timothy 4, Paul admits he was wrong. So here is a picture of a believer who takes a stand for a believer on the basis of grace. Here in Acts 9:27 the majority in the Jerusalem Church was wrong and Barnabas was right.

(As an illustration we remember that when the twelve spies went out to spy out the land of Palestine that ten came back and gave the wrong report, and only Caleb and Joshua were right. Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua were the only four who thought they could go into the land and take it. Often the majority sets the policy but often the majority is wrong.)

The only man alive who could lift the legalistic Jerusalem Church into a powerful church was Saul of Tarsus, and they refused to listen to him. But here in verse 27 Barnabas broke the ice. He was the grace man. He took Saul and stood up for him.

ACTS 9:28 "And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."
 Barnabas evidently went with Paul in and out of the city and made it possible for him to preach.

ACTS 9:29 "And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him." The reason it mentions the Grecians here is that they were the most difficult to convince. Saul was not afraid to dispute with them and point them to the truth about Christ.

ACTS 9:30 "Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus." Since the same thing happened here that had happened at Damascus, a plot to kill Saul of Tarsus, his friends arranged to quietly and quickly get him out of the city.

The real reason he left is outlined more fully in Acts 22:17-21. "And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Once he was in Tarsus he had an amazing ministry there.

Here in Tarsus, the seat of the great university, were many famous professors. Athenidorous was the great teacher of Augustus Caesar. Nestor was the teacher of Tiberias.

ACTS 9:31 "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." This was the result of Saul's conversion. The churches had rest and the Christian cause expanded.