

## The Apostle Paul

### **Who was Paul and why do we study him?**

Paul was a great pioneer of the early Church. His travels, his preaching, and his writings helped to shape the whole history of the Christian faith. His letters are the oldest part of the New Testament, written before the Gospels were written. These letters, or epistles, are often used as one of the lessons or bible readings at weekly Sunday church services. These writings and the example of Paul's life helps us understand who Jesus was, what his life, death and resurrection meant and what it was like to be an early Christian. Paul was alive during Jesus' life, but he was not one of Jesus' disciples.

### **How did Paul become a Christian?**

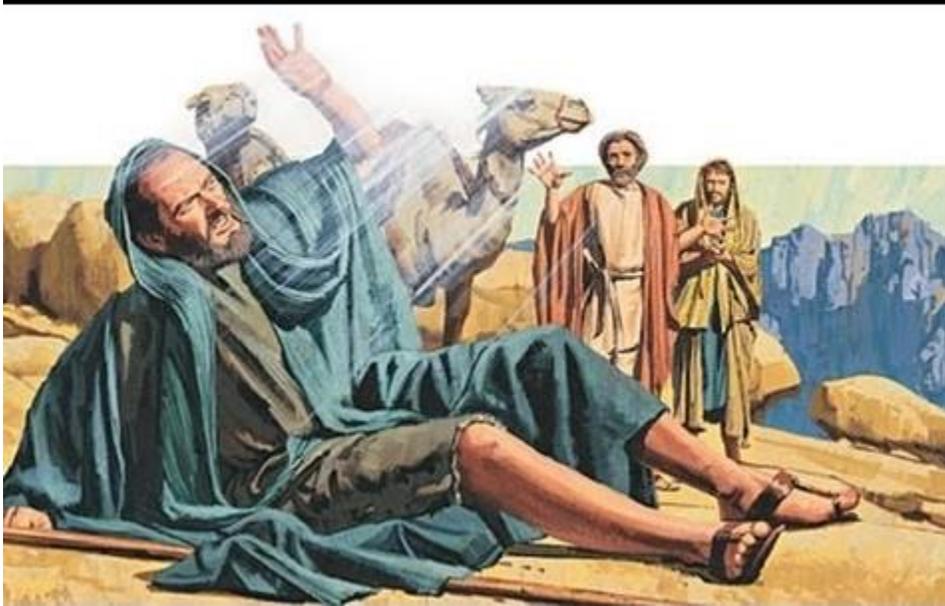
Paul was not always called Paul. His name at birth was Saul. He took the name Paul after he became a follower of Jesus. He was born into an educated Greek-speaking Jewish family and was skilled at leatherworking and tent making. He was a member of the Pharisees, the less strict of the two religious parties of the time. Saul, however, felt that the followers of Jesus who believed He was the Messiah were wrong spreading false teachings and should be severely punished, including being put to death. Saul helped in persecuting those who believed in Jesus.

One day, while traveling to Damascus to persecute Jesus' followers, Paul was overcome by a great light, and he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" It was Jesus! Saul fell to the ground. The people with him heard the voice, but they saw nothing. When Saul stood, he was blind. For three days he could not see, and he had nothing to eat or drink. A Christian leader named Ananias went to the house where Saul was and told him that his sight would be restored and that he would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Immediately, something like scales fell from Paul's eyes. He could see again! At once, he was baptized.

### **What happened after Paul became a Christian?**

Paul began to preach that Jesus was the Messiah. He traveled widely during his life around the Mediterranean, visiting what is now Israel, Syria, Turkey, Greece and Rome. He started many Christian communities and nurtured existing ones. His letters written to these Christian communities he had visited on his travels. Paul was often attacked as being an unfaithful Jew and as an enemy of the Jewish faith, just as he had done to others earlier in his life. Paul spent years of his life in prison for his belief in Jesus as the Messiah. Although the circumstances are not known with certainty, most scholars believe that Paul was beheaded as a criminal.

Over the next several weeks, we will examine these aspects of Paul's conversion as a Christian and how he shaped our understanding of what it means to be Christian and a follower of Jesus.



“St. Paul the Persecutor was a cruel and sinful man. Then Jesus hit him with a blinding light, and then his life began.” - *Saint of Me by the Rolling Stones*.