

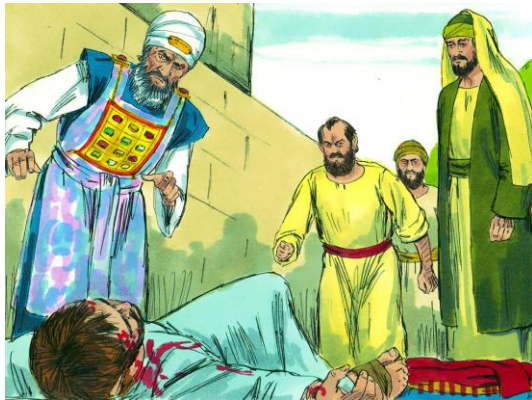


THE APOSTLE PAUL, WHO WAS HE?

We have often spoken of the apostles, Matthew, Peter, John, James, but there is one we've never talked about. It is the apostle Paul. Do you know his story? Do you know how he became an apostle of Jesus? This is what we are going to tell you. Paul is his name in Latin, but his Jewish name is Saul. He was born in a town called Tarsus that is why we call him Saul of Tarsus. Listen carefully to this story that you will find in the Book of Acts of the Apostles in chapter 9.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

After Pentecost, the apostles perform so many miracles that people come running to to be healed and the number of disciples continues to increase. But they are persecuted by the



religious leaders who are furious. So, many are leaving Jerusalem. They disperse in the country. Some will even settle in Damascus, the capital of Syria.

Saul of Tarsus is a very religious young Jewish man who does not believe that Jesus is the promised savior. He is filled with hatred towards the disciples. By chasing them to send them to prison,

he thinks he is defending his God.

- I'm going to Damascus, he says to the High Priest. If I find supporters of this Jesus there, I will bring them here in chains and they will be thrown in jail. We must put an end to these people's doings!

When the disciples in Damascus hear the news of his coming, they are very worried.

- This man is terrible, they say. He's chasing us even here! No one can stop him. The trip goes smoothly and Saul is now very close to the goal. His plan action is well established. He moves forward with pride and determination.

He now sees the walls which surround Damascus. The sun is high in the sky. It is shining brightly, the heat is stifling. Suddenly around noon, a supernatural light, like a flash



surrounds him, It is even brighter than that of the sun. He is dazzled and falls to the ground, as if struck down. A voice from heaven is heard:

- Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Saul is scared. It's not a man's voice. He is in the presence of a Divine Person.

- Who are you, Lord? He cries out.

- I am Jesus whom you are persecuting!

All of Saul's pride and arrogance vanishes. There he is, prostrate, in the dust, utterly miserable. He is at the feet of Jesus. This Jesus whom he believed to be dead, He sees Him in His glory. It's as if everything around him is falling apart. What is Jesus going to do? Will he condemn? Punish him? Seized with fear, he asks:

- Lord, what do you want me to do?

- Get up, enter the town, and there, you will be told what to do.

Saul gets up. He opens his eyes. Then he closes them. He opens them wide again. He rubs them but everything is dark!

- Oh! I cannot see anymore! I am blind! He said, groping.



His companions take him by the hand and lead him like a little child. During three days he stays with a man called Judas. He does not eat. He doesn't drink. He prays. He remembers in his head all his life, his hate, his violence. He sees the face and the tears of those men and women he persecuted. He begs for forgiveness from God and accepts Jesus as his Savior and his Lord. In a vision he sees a

man called Ananias who lays his hands on him to restore his sight. But who is this Ananias? How could he find him? Here, no one knows where he is. Saul doesn't worry, he knows that now the Lord is leading his life. He waits while praying.

On the third day, the Lord appears in a vision to an inhabitant of Damascus, a disciple. He tells him:

- Ananias!

- Here I am, Lord, replies the man, I am listening to you.

- Get up and go to the house of Judas. Ask to see a man called Saul of Tarsus. Lay your hands on him so that he can get his sight back.

- But, Lord, replies Ananias, I have heard a lot about this man. We have been told about all the evil he did to your disciples in Jerusalem. And I know he came here to persecute us.

- Don't be afraid of him! He is no longer a persecutor but one of my disciples. I chose him to be a witness to the Jews, but also to other peoples and to many kings. I called him to be an apostle.

Ananias is reassured. Once at Judas 'house, he finds a young man with a peaceful beaming face. He lays his hands on him. At this moment something that looks like scales falls from Saul's eyes and the miracle occurs.

- I can see! I can see you all perfectly well! He says quite upset. The Lord gave me my sight back! I was a cruel and wicked man but He showed me His mercy. He made a new man of me.

Saul is baptized. He meets the disciples of Damascus. All together they praise God for this great miracle.

Without delay, he begins to talk about Jesus throughout the town. He preaches courageously in synagogues.



- Jesus is risen. He is truly the Son of God, the Savior that God has promised us.

People are amazed.

- Come, they say to each other, for sure he is the one who persecuted the disciples of Jesus! He came here on purpose to arrest them and take them in chains! And now he says Jesus is God.

How is it possible?

Saul continues to preach the gospel, but after a while the religious leaders want to make him disappear.

- He's a traitor! They say. He troubles the people. We're going to watch the city gates day and night to get hold of him and kill him.



Saul and the disciples are warned of the plot.

- We're going to sneak you out of town, they tell him.

One night, they lead him to the wall that surrounds the city. They put him in a big basket and with the help of ropes, they bring him down along the rampart. Saul is saved. He is going to pursue the mission that the Lord has entrusted to him.

1, 2 3, 4 AND YOU AND ME!



You saw how this encounter with Jesus transformed Saul of Tarsus. His life was completely changed, his thoughts, his feelings, everything is different for him now. It's a change of direction. The fanatic and hateful young man has become the apostle Paul. He is now filled with love for God and for others.

With a lot of courage, he proclaims the gospel in different countries. You can find the story of his three great missionary journeys in the Book of Acts of the Apostles. I encourage you to read them.

4, 3, 2, 1 AND WE PARENTS!



The account of Saul's conversion contains points in common with all conversion (the repentance, faith, consecration to God ...), but it also has very specific ones that cannot be transposed to any other conversion, which is particularly true for our children. I suggest you accompany them in the discovery of Paul's missionary journeys. You can follow his movements on the maps that are in appendices of your Bible. And remember that if God changed someone like Saul from Tarsus, he can do the same for your family. Keep this hope!