

People in Paul's Life

by

Russell Taylor

Contents

Study

- 1 Gamaliel
- 2 Stephen
- 3 Ananias of Damascus
- 4 Barnabas
- 5 John Mark
- 6 Silas
- 7 Timothy
- 8 Lydia
- 9 The Philippian Jailer
- 10 Aquila and Priscilla
- 11 Titus
- 12 Phoebe
- 13 Onesimus

Scripture quotations are from
The New International Version ©2011 Biblica

People in Paul's Life

1 - Gamaliel

We begin our series on some of the people who feature in the life of Paul with a man who had possibly the biggest influence on him before his conversion.

Gamaliel was a man who had a huge influence on many people, but is only mentioned once in connection with Paul's life. We read about this in Acts chapter 22 and verse 3. Paul had been arrested in the Temple at Jerusalem, but after being beaten, was allowed to speak to the crowd who witnessed the event. He tells them that he was brought up a devout Jew who was zealous for God, having been taught by Gamaliel. He had been taught the details of the Law and the Jewish customs and to follow them to the letter.

If we turn back in our Bibles to Acts chapter 5 we read in verse 34 that Gamaliel was a Pharisee, so he was a very religious person who followed the Law diligently. We also read that he was highly respected as "a teacher of the law" and all that the Pharisees believed. In fact we read that he was, "held in respect by all the people." So, as a result of this man's teaching, and the fact that his father was a Pharisee, Paul became well versed in the Law. We read this in Philippians chapter 3 and verse 5.

As well as being a teacher of the Law, Gamaliel was a member of the supreme Jewish Court of Justice in Jerusalem known as the Sanhedrin. He was present when Peter and John were on trial and became their ally by persuading the court to be lenient with the apostles. I suspect there was a reason for this. He probably didn't want to see the court divided on such an important issue, as this would have lost them a lot of credibility among the majority of the population and with the Roman authority.

However, before he spoke to the court he asked that the apostles be taken outside. I believe he did this because he didn't want them to think he supported them by speaking on their behalf. In fact what he was saying was, do not oppose them, but don't support them either. Although at first reading it might appear that Gamaliel was siding with the apostles, he wasn't. We don't read anywhere that he came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah, and that he had come to take the punishment for the sins of the people who included Gamaliel, and include us today.

To support his leniency he names two men who had previously tried to start new sects which they did not approve of. In both cases, when these men died their followers were dispersed.

Gamaliel knew that these men had been acting on their own ideas and that their actions were not of God. He tells the court that if these men had been called by God there would have been lasting results.

In verse 38 of Acts chapter 5 there is a small word that appears twice. It is the word, 'if'. Gamaliel knew the power of God and that if these men (speaking of the apostles) were preaching something they had thought up themselves, there would be no lasting results and their organisation would soon come to an end, and would no longer be a threat to their influence among the people. But if they were acting under the guidance of God, there was nothing the court could do to stop them, as they would be fighting God, and that God could not be beaten.

By sending the apostles out of the courtroom he was showing the other members of the council that he was not taking sides with the apostles. If they had been allowed to remain they (that is the apostles) would have been led to believe that he supported them. In other words he wanted to be on both sides without either side knowing. He wanted to support the council, but he also wanted to do what was right in God's eyes. This is something that was condemned by Christ who said that you are either with Him or against Him. We read this in Matthew chapter 12 and verse 30. We also read in Matthew 6 and verse 24 that you cannot faithfully support two masters; referring man and God.

Gamaliel can be likened to many people today who claim to be Christians, but are very broadminded and tolerant of what goes on around them. This shows a lack of conviction concerning what God has revealed through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Gamaliel, as we have already said, was a respected teacher of the Law, but he only taught the Law as given through Moses and the various traditions that had been added to the Law over the ages. These traditions, in the eyes of the Pharisees, were as important as, if not more important than the Law itself. This was wrong in God's eyes as the Israelites had been told by Moses not to add to or take anything from the Law, but to keep the Law as it had been given them. We read this in Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 2, and in chapter 12 and verse 32. Why shouldn't the people add to it? Because the writer of the book of Proverbs tells us in chapter 30, verses 6 and 7 that "Every word of God is pure" and "Do not add to His words." This means that if anything is added to it, or taken from it, it is no longer the pure word of God.

Gamaliel, like the majority of other Jews at the time, was still waiting for the Messiah to come, as the Jews did not accept that Jesus was the promised One. Jesus, when speaking to His disciples in what we call the Sermon on the Mount said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." That's in Matthew chapter 5, verse 17. In other words, He had not come to make the law and the writings of the prophets obsolete, but to make them complete. The Pharisees, including Gamaliel, could not accept this and therefore didn't teach it.

Paul's knowledge of the law that he had been taught by Gamaliel came in useful when he visited synagogues on his missionary journeys. He preached Christ as the fulfilment of what

the law stated and what the prophets prophesied. His preaching had to be accurate and not conflict with the law because he was preaching to religious Jews. Some of these, especially those living in Berea, “searched the Scriptures” at every opportunity to make sure Paul was quoting them accurately.

We also see evidence of Paul’s knowledge of the law coming out when he wrote to the church at Rome. He told them in Romans chapter 3 and verse 20, that the law gives knowledge of sin and in Romans chapter 7 and verse 7, that the realisation of sin in his own life came through his knowledge of the law.

I see Paul as being a model student during his time with Gamaliel because we read of him saying in his letter to the Galatians, chapter 1 and verse 15, “I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.”

We see therefore from our study of Gamaliel that, although he taught what we now know as the Old Testament correctly, he did not recognise that this was not sufficient for people living at that time, and indeed today. Paul tells us later that all Scripture is inspired by God and not just part of it. We also learn from him that you have to make a decision in life concerning your relationship with God because God sees no room for compromise.

What is your relationship with God? Is there a total commitment to the life He has called you to?

People in Paul's Life

2 - Stephen

As well as Gamaliel, there is another person who probably had a big influence on Paul before his conversion, yet we don't read of them actually speaking personally to each other. This man was Stephen.

He is first mentioned in Acts chapter 6 where we read that he was one of the seven men chosen by the apostles to serve in a practical way in the church at Jerusalem. One of the roles of the temple authorities was to distribute food to those in need, but it appears that those who followed Jesus were denied this help. As a result the church took on this task by relying on the gifts of the more wealthy among them to help meet the needs of the poorer members. As the church grew, this work became too much for the apostles to do themselves, so they appointed seven men to be responsible for this work. The Bible actually puts it that they were to be appointed to "serve tables". In New Testament times the work of administering and distributing goods and care to these needy people would have been carried out over tables. Therefore the duties these seven men were appointed to carry out were of a practical nature rather than a preaching and teaching ministry. This would leave the apostles more time to do what they felt they had been called to do and that was to teach and preach the word of God.

Several qualifications had to apply to all these men before they were chosen. First of all they had to be disciples. In verses 2 and 3 we read that the apostles called all the disciples together and told them to choose seven men from among their number. The first qualification for Christian service is that the person has committed his or her life to the Lord and for service in His church. God does not want to use people who are not born again in His service.

Secondly they had to be of good reputation. They had to be well respected by the people in the church and those outside the church who they were seeking to win for the Lord. In other words they had to have nothing that people could point their finger at in an accusing way. Although they were expected to be witnesses by telling others about the Lord as they carried out their official duties, they had to be witnesses in how they lived.

Thirdly they had to be "full of the Holy Spirit." Being full of the Holy Spirit, means that their lives were controlled by God through the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that the work of the Holy Spirit would be to guide them in all truth because he is the "Spirit of truth". We read this in John chapter 16 and verse 13. He uses the "word of truth", which is another term used in the Bible for the Scriptures, to guide us through life. This is because the Scripture are inspired by God. By reading Acts chapter 7 we can see that these seven men were full of the Spirit and guided by Him.

The emphasis is on the word, "full". There had to be no room in their lives for outside influences to have any significant part in how they lived.

Fourthly, they had to be full of wisdom. Wisdom must not be confused with knowledge. Having wisdom means knowing how to use the knowledge we have, regardless of how much

or how little knowledge we do have. These men had to have lived spiritual lives and they had to be practical in their approach to their duties, yet at the same time know the Scriptures and how to use them in their service for the Lord.

So, these were the qualities that these seven men had to have before they were chosen for active service. As far as our study is concerned, these are what applied to Stephen.

We read that Stephen is the first of the seven men named. We are told three specific things about him. We find these in verses five and eight of Acts chapter six. He was a man full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit, and full of power and as a result was used mightily by God.

What do we mean by these? The first thing we notice is that the words, “full of ...” come before each of the qualities Stephen had.

Firstly he was a man who was full of faith. His faith in God and the finished work of Christ on the cross was the most important thing in his life. We are not told how or when he was saved from the penalty of sin, but we are told later by Paul in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 8 that it is by grace we are saved and through faith. Some translations of the Bible replace the word ‘faith’ found in Acts 6, verse 8 with ‘grace’. This shows that the two are very closely linked.

Then we read he was full of the Holy Spirit. Stephen had come to know the Scriptures and was able to give an accurate account of the history of the Jewish nation to those who were accusing him of blasphemy. Peter tells us that those who are God’s children should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that we have. To do this we have to have a thorough knowledge of God’s word to be able to do this. But to do it effectively we have to be full of the Holy Spirit in order to know how to use the Scriptures to bring glory to God in such circumstances.

Thirdly we read he was full of power. Although Stephen was appointed to be involved in the more practical work of the church he was given power to do much more because we read that this power gave him the ability to do “great wonders and signs among the people.”

So, what is the connection with Paul?

We read towards the end of Acts chapter 7 that while Stephen was being stoned, his accusers gave their coats to a young man named Saul to look after.

You might recall from our last study that Paul testified to being thoroughly trained in the Law by Gamaliel who was a member of the Sanhedrin that Stephen was brought before.

So, although we only read of Paul being outside when Stephen was being stoned, he was probably in the courtroom observing the proceedings as part of his studies. If this is the case he would have heard Stephen preach accurately from the Scriptures. He would also have seen something in Stephen which would remain with him for the rest of his life. He witnessed Stephen facing death, but not just facing death, seeing beyond death. He witnessed Stephen saying, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God,” which we read in Acts chapter 7 and verse 56. In other words he could see beyond death and was not afraid to say so. Some other words of Stephen’s which

would also have an effect on Paul were the last words he said. He made no secret of his belief in Jesus by saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” and then asking God to show mercy on his killers which is exactly what Jesus had done when He was dying on the cross.

Although what Paul witnessed didn't have an immediate effect on his life, because we read that he was in full agreement with Stephen's death, I like to think that this event helped him to recognise the voice of the Lord when he was approached on the road to Damascus.

Paul saw something special in the life of Stephen. Is there some Christian you can look back to and recognise the effect they had on your life? Is your life such that other people can see the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through you?

People in Paul's Life

3 - Ananias of Damascus

The third person we are going to look at in this series of studies is Ananias. He was the first person to help Paul following his conversion.

We are told he lived in Damascus, but are not told he had any leadership office in the church there. How long he lived in Damascus we are not told. Some commentators believe he might have gone to live there following the persecution of believers in Jerusalem. However, he could have lived there before that, because it appears he hadn't witnessed Paul's persecution of the church at Jerusalem first hand, because we are told that he had heard from many people about Paul, and how he had persecuted the believers.

Acts chapter 9 and verse 10 tells us that Ananias was a disciple. What do we mean by the word, 'disciple'? The original Greek word means, 'A learner or pupil'; so a disciple can be said to be someone who is a follower of a particular person's teaching. The word is mainly used in the New Testament to refer to a follower of Christ; in other words, someone who has responded to the gospel by accepting Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, and is living in a way that pleases God.

He was obviously a loyal disciple who the Lord knew He could rely on for him to be singled out by name for such an important task as to be the one to speak to Paul following his conversion. Later on Paul speaks of him as a man who strictly kept the law and who was well respected by the Jews in that city for his beliefs. Paul, when writing his second letter to Timothy tells him that the Lord knows those who are His. You can read this in chapter 2 and verse 19. Jesus, when referring to Himself as 'the Good Shepherd' in John chapter 10 and verse 3 says, "He calls his own sheep by name and leads them ..." and in verse 14 of the same chapter He says, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me." In the case of Ananias, it is obvious that there was a two-way relationship with the Lord, because when the Lord called him, he knew the voice of the Lord and responded to it by saying, "Here I am Lord."

Occasionally I will answer the phone and the caller begins talking without announcing their name. When this happens I usually recognise the voice of the caller, but occasionally I don't; or at least not immediately, because I don't know the caller that well. Ananias recognised the voice of the Lord immediately and was therefore able to respond.

God speaks to us today through the Bible which we refer to as God's Word. In order to hear God speaking to us through it we have to spend time in prayer and meditation on His word. If we do, God will reveal His will to us. He will tell us where He wants us to be and what he wants us to do and say, but we have to be ready for when He does, because he may want to say something special to us.

Ananias was ready for what the Lord had to say, so once He knew he had Ananias' full attention He tells him what he wants him to do. He knew that if God was calling him, He must have a good reason for doing so, because God does not make mistakes. He doesn't call the wrong person because he doesn't call someone to do something they are not capable of doing, and he doesn't call someone who He expects to turn His request down.

God knew Ananias wouldn't turn Him down, although Ananias wasn't expecting such a request.

The request, or more of a command, was to go and visit Saul of Tarsus. This request must have come out of the blue and would not have been a welcome one to Ananias because he had heard that Saul was in Damascus for the sole purpose of arresting all the believers living there. However, Ananias did not respond with a definite 'no' because, although he was willing to do the Lord's will, he needed reassurance from the Lord, and he got it. The Lord told him the plans he had for Saul's future.

Once Ananias had this reassurance he lost no time in going to find Saul. God tells him exactly where he will find him. He would find Saul at the house of Judas in Straight Street. What is interesting is that we don't read that the Lord had to tell Ananias what to say, although I am sure he would have sought the Lord's will in this matter. He was sufficiently mature as a believer that he would be given the right words to say when they were needed and therefore know immediately what to say. He had obviously received good sound teaching from the scriptures and was able to apply it to whatever situation he found himself in. We can, however read some of what he said to Paul by turning to Acts chapter 22 and verses 12 to 16.

There is possibly another reason why Ananias hesitated when the Lord asked him to go and see Saul. Because of what he had heard, as well as being concerned for the safety of the believers in Damascus, he would also have the continuance of the Christian witness in the city at heart. He had heard all about the persecution of the believers in Jerusalem and how the authorities had tried to prevent the apostles from preaching and meeting as a church. He didn't want the same to happen in Damascus.

Once Ananias had the reassurance from the Lord that it was safe to go and visit Saul he obeyed the command to go.

Notice how he greeted Saul when he met him. He put his hands on him and called him, "Brother Saul." He was prepared to accept him as a fellow believer and brother in Christ. God had revealed to Ananias that Saul had been born again into the family of God and was therefore his brother. Such was the warmth that Ananias showed to Saul that Saul never forgot it. Years later as Paul, when addressing the crowd in Jerusalem following his arrest, mentions the part that Ananias played in nurturing him as a new believer.

Ananias was the right person, in the right place, at the right time for God to call on to do a specific work for Him.

He was prepared to do that work because God commanded him to do it, and he was prepared to obey God's command to serve Him. We don't read any more about Ananias in the Bible, but I am sure he continued serving the Lord in Damascus for as long as the Lord wanted him to. Each Christian today is called to serve the Lord in a particular way and in a particular place. God has given us, as individuals, special gifts which he can use in His service, if we let Him. As the old hymn by Elsie Yale puts it:

"There's a work for Jesus, ready at your hand,

'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.

Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;

There's a work for Jesus none but you can do."

If you have accepted Jesus into your life as your personal Saviour, can you look back and give thanks to God for someone who helped you as a new believer to strengthen your relationship with the Lord or have you been the person that has helped someone come to know the Lord and given them the pure milk of the Word of God? Are you the sort of person who is prepared to serve the Lord regardless of any danger or even inconvenience? Ananias was such a person.

People in Paul's Life

4 - Barnabas

Barnabas is a person we usually associate with Paul during his time in the church at Antioch and as a fellow-worker on Paul's first missionary journey. However, we are first introduced to him as a member of the growing church in Jerusalem.

We are told his name is Joseph, but this was changed by the apostles to Barnabas, a name which we are told in Acts chapter 4 and verse 36 means, "son of encouragement". He was a Levite and therefore, a member of the tribe of Levi. He was also a native of Cyprus.

What do we learn about this man?

Firstly we read, like many believers at the time, that he was generous. He owned land which he sold to further the work of the Lord. We read this in Acts chapter 4 and verse 37. This was unlike some people we read about in Acts chapter 5 who, although sold something, kept some of the proceeds for themselves.

Why, when so many believers sold land like this, is Barnabas the only one named? Possibly because he was a Levite and members of the tribe of Levi were not allocated any land when the country was divided up among the tribes. They were to rely on God for all they needed. It can probably be assumed that the land he sold was therefore in Cyprus. By doing this it shows that Barnabas was prepared to make a complete break with the past in order to be completely loyal to the Lord. We do, however, read later on that he did return to Cyprus, but as a missionary.

When God calls us to be part of His family He expects us to make a complete break with the past in the way that we live. In Isaiah chapter 43 and verse 18 we read these words: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past." Later in his ministry, Paul tells us when writing to the church at Corinth, that when we accept Christ into our lives, the old life is finished and we have new life. We read this in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 17. Why? Because the believer is a new creation; he or she has been born again and has a new life.

Paul, in Colossians 3:9, 10 writes, "You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

The second thing we learn is that from the name given him by the apostles, Barnabas was one who would be an encouragement to others and we read several instances of this as we look further into his life.

When Paul tried to meet with the church at Jerusalem he met opposition. Because of his reputation they didn't believe at first that he was converted, but of all the apostles and disciples in Jerusalem, it was Barnabas who opened the door to welcome Saul. He held his hand out to Saul when others wouldn't. It was Barnabas who believed Saul's account of how he had been wonderfully converted, and how he had preached fearlessly in Damascus. So he introduced him to the disciples. Can you imagine how much Saul would have been

encouraged by Barnabas standing up for him when everyone else was suspicious of him because all they knew about him was the reputation he had gained for himself before his conversion. He knew that Saul's conversion was genuine. Barnabas was so respected by the Apostles that they believed him.

For a while Barnabas worked in the church at Jerusalem, but Saul was sent home to Tarsus because of threats to his life. As the word of God spread following the death of Stephen, Barnabas was sent by the apostles to encourage the growing church in Antioch in Syria. In Acts chapter 11 and verses 22 to 24 we are told on arriving there that he was pleased to find evidence of the grace of God in the members' lives. We are then told he encouraged them to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. How was he able to do this? The answer is in verse 24 where we read, "He was a good man" because he was, "full of the Holy Spirit and faith."

During his time there, there were many conversions and the church in Antioch grew. It was then that Barnabas decided to bring Saul from Tarsus to work alongside him, and they worked together for a whole year. Paul would be encouraged that Barnabas felt he was spiritually mature and experienced enough to be involved in this important work.

While at Antioch, Barnabas and Saul were sent to Jerusalem to take relief to the believers there as they had heard there was going to be a famine. From this, it appears that Barnabas, in his ministry of encouragement, had encouraged the believers at Antioch to live out their Christian lives in a caring and practical way. He probably led by example, because we saw earlier that he was one who gave willingly.

When they had completed this mission, they returned to Antioch and took with them Barnabas' young cousin, Mark.

Through the teaching of Barnabas and Saul, the believers in Antioch became more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit. As a result of this they felt it was time that the church got involved in missionary work. We are told in Acts chapter 13 and verse 2 that the Holy Spirit gave them a definite instruction to set apart Barnabas and Saul to do a specific work that he had in mind. This is what we have come to know as Paul's first missionary journey, and it is on this mission that Saul becomes known as Paul.

They took Mark with them on this mission. I'm sure this was Barnabas wanting to encourage this young man. Their first port of call was Salamis in Cyprus where they proclaimed the word of God. Don't forget, Barnabas originally came from Cyprus, so he was returning to preach to people who had a similar background to him. It was in Cyprus that we read of Paul getting more involved in the preaching and Barnabas beginning to take more of a supporting role. This might not have been easy for Barnabas.

After all, he had been a Christian for much longer than Paul and was more experienced in being in leadership. It can often be very difficult for those in leadership in our churches to step back and allow younger men to take over.

Although Barnabas comes over as being a role model to follow, like all believers, there were times when he was tested and on one particular occasion that we read about, he failed the test. Paul tells us in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 13 that Barnabas was led astray by the

hypocrisy of some of the Jews. Peter who was probably one of the most influential people in the church at Jerusalem refused to eat with the Gentile believers in Antioch because he was afraid of upsetting the Jewish visitors who had been sent by James. This was hypocritical as Peter had been involved in preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. Barnabas joined Peter in this hypocrisy.

Some time later Paul suggested to Barnabas that they revisit some of the towns where they had evangelised on their first mission. Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them again, but Paul wasn't happy with this as Mark had not completed the first mission with them. This caused Paul and Barnabas to go their separate ways. Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus, possibly to take up where they left off when they visited earlier and as a result the gospel spread further.

Barnabas had the desire to preach God's Word and, although one opening became difficult for him, he didn't give up doing what the Lord had called him to do. As a result more people would have come to know the Lord and be encouraged by Barnabas. Are you a person who is encouraged by knowing the Lord and encouraging others to know Him too?

People in Paul's Life

5 – John Mark

Although we think of Mark as the writer of the second gospel, his full name was John Mark. His mother was Mary who, as a believer, allowed her home in Jerusalem to be used as a meeting place for prayer.

We read in Acts chapter 12 of one special prayer meeting being held there. I think we can assume from this passage that this meeting had been called to pray for Peter who was in prison at the time for his faith. Mark might have been at this meeting, or at least in the house while the meeting was taking place, although we are not told this. We are not told that he was a believer at this time, but he would have come to know something of the Scriptures through his mother. Being brought up in a Christian home does not make someone a Christian, although it can have a profound influence on a person's life and any decisions that may have to be made in the future.

His mother was probably converted through the preaching of the Apostles. She may have been one of the three thousand who were added to the church that we read about in an earlier chapter of Acts. He would have seen the effect on her life and how being a believer affected people. He would have seen how James had been put to death because of his beliefs. He would have seen how Peter had been put in prison for the same reason with the hope of having him killed also. He would also have seen how the prayers of the believers had been answered in releasing Peter from prison.

After hearing the testimony of Peter on the day of his release, when he told the disciples in Mary's house that day how the Lord brought him out of the prison, Mark would have come to realise that the power of God was (and still is) far greater than the power of the most influential man in the country.

Of course, he might have already been a believer and taken an active part in the prayer meeting at his mother's house. When he actually became a believer is not really important. What is important is that he did.

It appears that while all this was going on, Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem. We read this in Acts chapter 11 and verse 30, although we are not told that they were at the prayer meeting. When we come to verse 25 in Acts chapter 12, we read that Saul and Barnabas took him with them when they returned to Antioch after completing their duties in Jerusalem. Why did they take him?

It means that Mark had become a believer by then and Paul and Barnabas had seen something in him that could be used in the spread of the gospel, and he was also a close relative of Barnabas. We read in Colossians chapter 4 and verse 10 that they were cousins. Taking Mark with them would also give him some first-hand knowledge of how another fellowship of believers operated.

The church at Antioch would be considerably different than what he had experienced in Jerusalem, as the meeting in Jerusalem would have consisted mostly of Jewish believers. On the other hand, there were Gentile believers in the church at Antioch who had never

converted to Judaism. By going with Barnabas to Antioch, Mark would possibly see spiritual gifts being used which he had not seen in Jerusalem. So it was a time of preparation for future service.

When we come to Acts chapter 13 we read of Paul and Barnabas being commissioned by the church at Antioch to go out as missionaries, and they took Mark with them as their assistant. This was to be the start of his service for the Lord. He was there to help the evangelists in whatever way was needed and also to gain even more experience.

When Paul and Barnabas left Cyprus we find that Mark leaves them and returns to Jerusalem. We are not told why he left them. In Acts 15 and verse 38 we are given the impression that Mark just decided he couldn't go on. One or two reasons come to mind as to why he decided to leave: He was related to Barnabas who was from Cyprus, so Barnabas might have introduced him to people there that he knew, and who would make Mark feel welcome. When the time came for them to move on from Cyprus, Mark might have become reluctant to leave what you might call his comfort zone.

He was a Jew, and like many others at the time might not have been happy with the gospel being spread to the Gentiles. As a close relative of Barnabas, he might not have liked Paul taking over the leadership of the work. After all, Barnabas had been a believer longer than Paul and had been in the church at Antioch longer than Paul. It was he who went to Tarsus to bring Paul to help him in the work at Antioch. When we read of the two men in connection with the church at Antioch, it is always Barnabas' name which appears first when reference is made to them. This seems to indicate that Barnabas took the lead in all aspects of the mission. When you come to verse 13 in Acts 13, it is Paul who appears to have taken over the leadership role, because from reading, "Barnabas and Saul ..." we now read, "Paul and his party..."

However, when we read of Paul preparing to go on a second missionary journey to Asia, we find Barnabas wanting to take Mark with them again (Acts 15:37). Paul did not think this was a good idea because he hadn't remained with them long enough to see the first mission to its end. He possibly saw in Mark someone who, because he had once deserted them, was not yet reliable enough, nor mature enough for the gruelling schedule that lay ahead. The Lord's work is important and can be very demanding. It requires people who are not just prepared to begin a work and carry it out so far. It requires people who are prepared to see it to the end.

This caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas and they went their separate ways. Barnabas took Mark with him and returned to Cyprus. Obviously through the encouragement of Barnabas, Mark did become a worker for the Lord who could be trusted and went on to write the second Gospel which bears his name.

Whatever way we look at Mark's departure, it appears that Paul felt let down by it. When you read Acts chapter 13 and verses 38 and 39 it is easy to be critical of Mark's behaviour or failings. What we should be doing is looking at ourselves and our own failings, and try to overcome them and learn from them. Mark obviously did learn from his. When we turn to Paul's letter to the Colossians we see one of the reasons why Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them. The relationship between Barnabas and Mark could be the reason Mark was

chosen to go with them on their visit to Cyprus. It could also be the reason for Mark's mother's house being chosen as a place where Christians could meet.

As Mark grew spiritually he became more a more reliable worker for the Lord. The church at Colosse was told to welcome him into their midst if he ever came to visit them, because he had become "useful" to Paul in his ministry.

In Peter's first epistle, chapter 5, verse 13 Peter looked upon Mark as a son. As we don't read of him being Peter's son by birth, we can assume that he came to know the Lord through the preaching of Peter that we read about in the early chapters of the book of Acts.

Can you see a natural progression (or growth) in your spiritual life? In Mark's case his spiritual journey began through the influence of a godly mother and others who visited her house for fellowship and through the influence of Peter's preaching. Can you look back on your life and give thanks for godly people who introduced you to the Christian message?

Has there come a time when you came to know the Lord personally as your Saviour by being 'born again'? Can you say that you have been faithful to God's calling at all times? I can think of many times when I have let the Lord down, but praise God, He is willing to forgive us and bring us back into fellowship with Him when we admit our failings.

People in Paul's Life

6 - Silas

Silas was one of those people who are not as well-known as some because he always seems to be overshadowed by others, but he plays an important role in the spread of the gospel.

We are introduced to him in Acts chapter 15 as a leading man in the church at Jerusalem who, along with Judas, was chosen by the apostles, with the blessing of the church, to visit the church at Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. The purpose of the visit was to take a letter to the Gentile believers there to teach them that conversion was a work of God and not based on a set of rules and regulations, and also to show them the need to distance themselves from their former way of life. Who better to send with Paul and Barnabas than those who had proved themselves sound leaders and teachers? The apostles knew that Silas was a man who would teach and preach the gospel faithfully. We read that Silas along with Judas, encouraged and strengthened the brethren with many words. The truth of God's word was preached in such a way as it could be understood and did not leave the listeners with any degree of uncertainty.

Where the Bible calls these men prophets in Acts 15 verse 32, it is referring to them as men who had been inspired by God to enable them to speak the words of the Lord as given to them through the Scriptures. It is not referring to someone who can foretell the future.

Silas was a man with special gifts that the Lord could use in the church. It is important today that our church leaders are people who know the Scriptures and are able to preach and teach them faithfully and also to encourage those they have been called to lead.

When the church at Antioch felt it was time for Paul and those with him to return to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas felt they should stay there longer and Silas felt he should stay there with them. However, just a few days later Paul felt called to go on another mission; this time to follow up those who had responded to the gospel on his first mission. Silas was chosen by Paul to accompany him. You can read this in Acts chapter 15 and verse 40. This shows the hand of God working, because if Silas had returned to Jerusalem he wouldn't have been in a position to go with Paul. It had been God's will that Silas remain in Antioch for a little while longer, so He had put it in the mind of Silas to stay.

Eventually they arrive at Philippi after picking up Timothy on the way. We read about their time there in Acts chapter 16, beginning at verse 12. We don't read anything of Silas' involvement in evangelising, but he was with Paul throughout his stay there. The mission appeared to be going well at first with the conversion of Lydia and her household, but then things changed.

We also read in Acts 15 verse 26 that Silas was a man who had risked his life for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This also shows how God chooses people who are prepared to suffer for the sake of the gospel as there were going to be times when his life would be in danger. Along with Paul, we read that he was forcibly arrested and brought before the magistrates. Unfortunately the crowds were not prepared to wait for the magistrates to reach a verdict and eventually

the magistrates gave in to them and had their clothes torn off them and had them beaten and ordered the jailer to have them locked up in what we today would call the maximum security wing of the prison. They were put in a cell from which there was no possible way they could escape.

Despite being in prison, Silas and Paul continued praising God. Most people would find this hard to do considering their circumstances. They had been stripped and “severely beaten”, so they would be in considerable pain. They also had the discomfort of being fastened in stocks. He realised he was there because it was God’s will. He probably didn’t realise immediately that his and Paul’s actions would result in the jailer and his family coming to a saving knowledge of the Lord. It is here that we learn, like Paul he was a Roman citizen. This meant that they had to be treated within the law. Paul complained to the Philippian authorities that they had not been treated as such as they had been beaten and put in prison without a trial.

It appears that Silas worked alongside Paul working quietly in the shadows. He was prepared to let Paul take the lead when it came to speaking to the people. This is an important part of any ministry. It is always encouraging to have someone with you for support. While Paul was preaching to the people, Silas was probably praying and at the end of the meeting would engage in conversation with those present.

After leaving Philippi the party visited Thessalonica where we read of Paul speaking to the Jews in the synagogue. Although some of the Jews “were persuaded” there were many who were opposed to this ‘new’ doctrine they were hearing. Although we don’t read of Silas’ involvement in the preaching, he must have been actively involved for his name to be included with Paul’s when the riot broke out and the mob searched for them. It appears that along with Paul, he had a reputation for causing trouble with their preaching about Jesus being “another king”. As their life was in danger, the believers helped them escape during the night.

The party then travelled to Berea where they received a warmer welcome to begin with. When Paul left there, Silas and Timothy stayed behind because they felt there was still work to do there despite opposition from the people. As we have already seen, Silas was a gifted preacher and teacher. The people of Berea had received the word eagerly, but they needed further teaching. Paul would have been quite happy to leave Silas in Berea because he knew he was capable of giving sound teaching to the new converts there. You might notice that Silas’ name is placed before Timothy’s. This is probably because he was more experienced in the Christian life than Timothy; also he had received a good grounding in the Scriptures at Jerusalem before being given the responsibility of leadership in the church. Timothy was still quite young and still learning how to serve the Lord.

In his first and second letters to the church at Thessalonica Paul includes Silas in his greeting, showing that he played a big part in the preaching at that church and of his involvement as part of the fellowship during the few weeks they were there.

There is also a reference to the preaching of Silas in Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth. He writes in the 19th verse of the first chapter, “For the Son of God, Jesus Christ ... was preached among you by me (Paul) and Silas ...”

Silas was a man who was prepared to travel to wherever God wanted the gospel preached and where believers needed encouragement.

Silas is also associated with the apostle Peter. We read in Peter's first letter, chapter 5 and verse 12 that it was with the help of Silas that he was able to write the letter. It is thought he was more educated than Peter who had just been a fisherman and therefore not needing much education. Even today, many well-known people have their autobiographies published, but the information about their lives that they want people to read are often put down in literary form by what have become known as ghost writers. They are prepared to remain almost anonymous and either allow their name to be omitted or placed in much smaller print than that of the subject of the book.

Silas was a man who was prepared to take second place to others, but was ready to come to the front and be accountable when called upon to do so.

People in Paul's Life

7 - Timothy

We are introduced to Timothy in the first verse of Acts chapter 16. Paul had felt the need to revisit some of the places he and Barnabas had preached at on his first missionary journey. One of the places they visited was Lystra where we read that there was a disciple living there called Timothy.

We read that his mother was Jewish, and a believer, but his father was a Greek and we assume was not a believer. Timothy had been brought up to know the Scriptures by his mother, Eunice and his grandmother, Lois who were faithful in their love for the Lord. We read this in 2 Timothy 1, verse 5. However, the fact that he had been brought up in a Christian environment did not mean that he was automatically a believer himself, although the seed of the Word of God would have been sown in him. Doesn't this show the importance of Christian parents bringing up their children in the knowledge of the Scriptures? This is something that the Bible encourages, because in Proverbs 22, verse 6 we read, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old enough he will not depart from it." And Paul in 2 Timothy 3:15 writes that the Scriptures "are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." I believe that what Timothy had learned in the Scriptures while he was growing up, came back to him when he heard Paul preaching.

Paul had visited Lystra on his first missionary journey; in fact he visited it twice, and it would be during one of these visits that Timothy would have come under the sound of the gospel and been convicted of his need for forgiveness. When writing to Timothy Paul calls him, "my true son in the faith" and "my dear son." These lead us to assume that Timothy had, at some time, been converted under Paul's ministry.

By the time Paul revisited Lystra Timothy had become an active member of the fellowship there, and he was well thought of by the believers there and in Iconium, so Paul decided to take him along with him and his companions as they continued their mission. Paul could see the potential in this man and also the need for young people to be trained for the Lord's service. The young people in our churches today need to be encouraged and trained for service within the church. Before Paul and Timothy left Lystra, Paul circumcised Timothy. This wasn't something he did because it was essential from the point of being a Christian, but Paul felt it would be an advantage when it came to witnessing and preaching to the Jews because of his mixed background. If he hadn't been the Jews wouldn't have listened to him.

Another thing we read about Timothy before he set off with Paul was that the elders in the fellowship laid hands on him (1 Timothy 4, verse 14). It was at this time that God made him aware of the gifts he had been given to serve Him with. He was reminded of the need to use these in (2 Timothy 1, verse 6).

Because he was quite young and inexperienced in the Lord's work, he willingly served in Paul's shadow. In fact he looked upon Paul as a father figure and role model when serving the Lord in the spread of the gospel.

The first important place they arrived at after leaving Lystra was Philippi. We don't read of Timothy being involved in the work there, probably because he was new to the work and needed to stay in the background watching, and learning from the experience of Paul and Silas. Presumably, while Paul and Silas were in prison at Philippi, Timothy stayed at the home of Lydia possibly sharing his testimony of how he had come to know the Lord and how he had been guided into accompanying Paul on his mission.

When Paul and Silas left Philippi to go to Thessalonica, we don't read that Timothy accompanied them, but he does appear to have been with them in Berea because we read in Acts 17:14 that Silas and Timothy remained in Berea in Macedonia when Paul left for Athens, but joined him there some time later. From there he was sent back to Thessalonica to help strengthen and encourage the believers there. By this time Timothy was experienced enough to be trusted by Paul to preach without having someone more experienced with him. You can see how well Paul regards Timothy by what he says in this letter. He calls Timothy his "brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ" (1 Thessalonians 3, verse 2). It appears that Timothy was well used during his time in Thessalonica because before he went, the young church there was going through tribulations, but when he eventually meets up with Paul again he brought him "good news about (their) faith and love." This encouraged Paul greatly.

Timothy also accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey along with several others who are named in Acts 20 an verse 4. We are not given much detail of his involvement in this mission.

We learn in the letter to the Hebrews that Timothy had spent time in prison, but had been released. We have no other information on this, but it does show that he was prepared to suffer for the sake of Christ like many people are prepared to do today. Despite this, he remained keen to preach the gospel whenever he had the opportunity.

What sort of a man was Timothy? When we read Paul's letters to him we find out several things about him which might put some church leaders off appointing someone to do such demanding work as he was involved in.

We are led to believe that he was a young man who was also young in the faith when the Lord called him to work with Paul. In 1Timothy 4, verse 12 Paul wrote, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young." Paul could obviously see the potential in him. Despite his youth, Paul knew that he was mature enough to set a good example for others to follow, because in the same verse he told him to "set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and purity."

But there were other things that might go against him and hinder his work if they were allowed to. It appears he was naturally quite a shy young man who was possibly not used to speaking in public. Paul speaks about his "spirit of timidity" in 2 Timothy 1, verse 7. Whether Timothy had shown signs of being scared of getting involved in public ministry we don't know, but when a person is asked to stand up and give a word of testimony or preach a sermon for the first time, the first reaction is to think you are not capable or worthy of doing it. Paul is saying that if God is calling you to do something for Him he will give the

strength and will to do it. He says, "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Another thing that could have been a hindrance to Timothy's service for the Lord was his health. In 1 Timothy 5, verse 23 Paul makes reference to his stomach and his frequent illnesses. However, it appears he was able to cope with his problem because we don't read of it hindering him in his service.

In closing, I want us to look at what Paul says about Timothy to the people of Philippi. He writes of his genuineness and unselfishness in carrying out his duties. He more or less says that even a person's own son could not serve someone better that he had served the Lord with Paul as his spiritual father. He says in Philippians 2:21, 22, "I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."

Don't forget, the Lord knows each one of us better than we know ourselves because, as the Psalmist writes in Psalm 9, verse 11, "The Lord knows the thoughts of man" and, as Paul tells us in Acts chapter 15 and verse 8, "He knows the heart."

And He knows you heart and mine.

People in Paul's Life

8 - Lydia

Today we are going to look at Lydia. She is the first of only three women we are going to look at in this series of studies. The only place we read about her is in Acts chapter 16 when Paul was on his second missionary journey. Paul had no intention of going to Philippi, but his plans had to be changed because he and his companions were prevented from going where they had originally planned to go by the intervention of the Holy Spirit. This change of plan brought them to Troas, a port on the coast of the Aegean Sea.

Once there, Paul had a vision in which he was called to go to Macedonia. They sailed from there to Neapolis and from there travelled inland to Philippi which was the principle city in Macedonia.

There was a small Jewish community living there, but mainly consisting of women. As there was no synagogue these women met for prayers by the side of the river. There was no synagogue because, according to Jewish law there had to be ten men to establish a synagogue. Paul had heard that the Jews in the city met for prayer at the riverside, so he and his companions went there to join with the worshippers.

Among the women Paul met there was Lydia. She was a business woman who seems to have been prosperous and possibly the head of her household. We are told she had originally come from Thyatira a city situated in Asia Minor; the country known today as Turkey. Thyatira was a city known for its textiles and dying of textiles. Lydia had moved from there to Philippi to carry out her trade there because we are told she was a dealer in purple cloth. Purple cloth was very expensive because it was difficult to make. The dye from the cloth came from a shellfish. The juice itself was white while it was in the veins of the fish, but when it was exposed to the sun it changed to a bright purple.

As the cloth was expensive to produce, Lydia's customers would only be the rich people of the city. The beautiful cloth was mainly used by members of the royal families and other high ranking officials who were required to have a purple band around the edge of their togas, or robes. We don't know if she was married or single or a widow, but she probably had people working for her in her business. She was, in fact like many people today. She worked for a living and was probably successful in her line of work due to the fact that she owned her own house.

Being from Thyatira, Lydia would be a Gentile, but had obviously converted to Judaism because we read that she worshipped God. Although she was born a Gentile, she had come to believe in God. But that wasn't enough for God. James writes, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." (James 2 and verse 19) Many people worship God without having a true relationship with Him. Satan still has a certain hold on them although they might not realise it. Nicodemus worshipped God as a Pharisee, but he did not have a personal knowledge of Christ. Jesus told him he had to be "born again" or "born of the Spirit" in order to have eternal life which is what Christ had come to give people. Jesus told him that, although he was sincere in his worship, that wasn't enough.

Lydia was very similar in the fact that she was successful like Nicodemus and, like him, was sincere. But she needed more. So what happened so that her life was changed?

The process began when Paul and his companions sat down with the ladies by the river and engaged them in conversation. We don't read that Paul preached a sermon to them, although he might have done; they probably just introduced themselves to the women and chatted to them bringing in the gospel as they did so. Although many people come to know the Lord as their Saviour through the preaching of the word of God, many also come to know Him through one-to-one conversations and observing the lives of true believers. Through these conversations, Lydia's heart was opened to receive the good news of Christ, but not by Paul. We read in Acts chapter 16 and verse 14, "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul." She believed Paul's words and the Lord opened her heart to understand the word that Paul preached, and then to respond in the way the Lord wanted. This resulted in a wonderful change in her life. The Lord was able to take His rightful place in her heart. She had come to believe that Jesus had died for her sins, had risen from the grave and is now seated at the right hand of the Father interceding for us. She had come to Him realising that, although she was a respectable person, there was sin in her life that she needed to confess and have forgiven. She became the first Christian in Europe that we read about

As a result of this change we read that she and the members of her household were baptised. I don't know if her family or servants were at the riverside with her when Paul was talking to her, or if she went home and brought them to him. Whatever happened, it appears that what had happened to Lydia had an impact on the lives of these other people who were associated with her and they were baptised with her. She and the others wanted to make a public declaration of the change in their lives by going through the water of baptism.

We are not told where or how this baptism took place, but the fact is she was baptised as an outward sign of the change that had taken place in her life. As Paul later puts it in Romans 6 and verse 4, she was, "buried with Him through baptism." She was showing that she was a new person and that her old life had passed away.

Following this she told Paul and the others that if they considered her a believer in the Lord, she would like them to come and stay at her house. Evidently she had plenty of room to accommodate them all. There were four of them because with Paul there was Timothy, Silas and Luke. In fact she didn't just invite them to stay with her, she begged them to. She had to persuade them to because I believe she wanted to know more about the Lord. She was, after all like a newborn baby who was hungry for the "pure spiritual milk" that we read about in Peter's first epistle because she wanted her relationship with the Lord to grow.

What we can also learn from the life of Lydia is that it is possible to have a successful career without it hindering her relationship with the Lord and her service for Him. How many people today, while trying to further their career, have had a tendency to push the Lord into a small corner of their life? This wasn't the case with Lydia. From what we read it appears that once she had come to know the Lord, He came first in her life, but she was still able to follow her occupation.

Following this we read of Paul continuing his ministry in Philippi and continuing to join the people by the river for prayer as part of his ministry.

However, he didn't just speak to the religious people he came into contact with; he used every opportunity available to tell people about the Lord. This caused him and Silas to end up in prison for the night. This could have caused a problem in this new fellowship with their leader in prison, but the people still had Timothy and Luke with them.

I am sure that these new believers weren't just sitting waiting and worrying; I can imagine them asking the two workers many questions about what their work involved. They would also be spending time praying for their friends in prison like the people who prayed at the home of John Mark that we looked at in Acts chapter 12 when we were studying John Mark.

Has your life changed through hearing the gospel and having your heart opened to receive it?

People in Paul's Life

9 - The Philippian Jailer

The interesting thing about the man we are going to look at in this study is that he is not named. He was an ordinary family man who did a rather mundane job. He looked after the city's prison.

Before we look at this man, we are going to look at the events that brought about the meeting between him and Paul.

Paul and Silas had been accused of breaking the law by teaching customs that were not approved by the Roman authority. In fact, what they had done was be instrumental in God driving out an evil spirit from a slave girl. The people she worked for realised that their main source of income had been taken from them, so they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place and brought them before the magistrates who had them beaten and put in jail. They weren't just put in jail, the magistrates ordered the jailer to put them in the most secure cell in the prison to make sure they couldn't escape. They were also further punished by being secured in the stocks.

To the jailer, this was just part of his normal day's work of making sure those who had been found guilty of doing wrong, served their sentence. What he didn't know when he carried out the magistrates' order was that an ordinary working day was going to change into an extraordinary one; one that would change his life completely.

He had done his duties for the day and returned to his house to relax for the evening, content that there should be no problems. At midnight, after he had gone to bed, Paul and Silas were in their cell praising God by praying and singing hymns. We also read that the other prisoners could hear this. Paul and Silas knew they were in that situation because it was part of God's plan for them, although at this stage it hadn't been revealed to them what this plan was.

Suddenly there was an earthquake. This wasn't a slight tremor, but one that was powerful enough to shake the whole building from the foundations up. It caused all the doors to the cells to burst open and the chains holding the prisoners secure to break. This was the beginning of the change in the jailer's life.

It began with him being woken from his sleep. He changed from being relaxed to being worried. He was responsible to the authorities for keeping the prisoners secure. What would happen to him if they had escaped? He would probably have to pay with his life. Looking back to Acts chapter twelve we read of Peter being freed from prison. Herod blamed the guards for allowing him to escape, and as a result had them put to death. Like Jerusalem, Philippi was part of the Roman Empire, so that same fate could face this jailer.

What did he decide to do? He decided to take the easy way out and end his life there and then. He didn't want to go through the trauma and humiliation of having to go before the magistrates and be publicly executed. He could see no hope. He could see no future for himself. He decides to end it all by killing himself with his sword.

But God had other plans for the jailer. He caused Paul to step in just in time to save him. He could see what the jailer was about to do, so he shouted to him to stop what he was doing immediately as there was nothing for him to worry about. In fact Paul had to shout because he could see the jailer meant business. He had to stop him in his tracks. Paul then reassured him that no-one had escaped.

The jailer would have known why Paul and Silas were in prison and would have also heard how people's lives had been changed as a result of their preaching. He also knew that people who were normally locked up in his prison would have escaped given an opportunity like this. But not only were Paul and Silas still there, but so were all the other prisoners because they too had been affected by what they had heard from Paul and Silas. These men had something that he didn't have and he wanted the same, so what did he do about it?

The first thing he did was to call for lights. As it was midnight, it would be dark and there would be no lights provided in the prison, but the jailer wanted to be sure that what Paul had said was true. He wanted to see for himself that none of the prisoners had escaped, as past experience would have told him that they would have, given the opportunity. Once he had a light, he rushed in. He was panicking because he was scared of what might happen to him. Once he was satisfied that all the prisoners were there, he "fell trembling before Paul and Silas." He was relieved and thankful, and given a certain amount of hope, at least for the immediate future. He wouldn't have to be punished and his job was safe, so he would be able to continue providing for his family.

But that wasn't enough for him. He realised there was more to life and more to hope for than he thought. He had heard that these men preached something that could give him more satisfaction in life in the short term, but there was an eternal future to consider, something that he had not given any thought to in the past.

Paul and Silas preached that there was something following physical death. Jesus preached that "everyone who believes in him (Jesus) may have eternal life" and "shall not perish." You can read this in John chapter 3 and verses 15 and 16. In verse 36 of this same chapter you also read that John the Baptist preached, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains in him."

The jailer would have either heard this preaching of the gospel or had been told about it because of the uproar it had caused in the town. He had now seen that Paul and Silas practiced what they preached. They showed a contentment that he never knew could be possible in someone in the situation they had found themselves in, and he wanted to know more. He wanted to know how he could be saved from experiencing God's wrath. He wanted what Peter calls, "a living hope" in chapter 1 and verse 3 of his first epistle.

He wanted what these two men had, but he didn't know how to obtain it. He realised there was only one thing to do and that was to ask. He then brings the prisoners out of the jail because he probably believed the building wasn't safe nor secure, and then asks one of the most important questions anyone could ask, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And the answer he was given was the same one Jesus had given: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." He probably didn't know what this meant, so Paul and Silas explained the truth of the gospel as found in God's Word. The jailer was like many people who never give

a thought to the scriptures until something happens to draw their attention to it. He wanted all the members of his household to hear what this new religion was all about. During this preaching, God opened the hearts of the jailer and his family and they believed. They entered into a new life with Christ.

There was a complete change in his attitude to the prisoners. He washed their wounds; these would be the wounds caused by the public beating they had received and by the chains that were fastened tightly around their arms and legs. He wouldn't have done this before his conversion, but he had come to realise that this new life he had entered into through faith, needed to show in his life by his actions. As James reminds us, "faith without deeds is dead." Paul and Silas had become his friends. In fact they were more than that, they were brothers in Christ. You can read this in James chapter 2 and verse 26. Despite it being in the middle of the night, the jailer and his family, who had also responded to the message of salvation, were then baptised.

The jailer's life would never be the same, "he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God." The wonderful thing is, that his family came to believe also, so there was a new household with Christ as its head.

There is an old hymn which goes like this:

What a wonderful change in my life has been wrought
Since Jesus came into my heart!

Has your life changed as a result of Jesus coming in and taking full control?

People in Paul's Life

10 - Aquila and Priscilla

Today we are going to look at a married couple. When Paul visited Corinth on his second missionary journey, which is recorded in Acts chapter 18, he met Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. Aquila was a Jew, but had lived in Italy for some time before moving to Corinth. He was born in Pontus which was a province situated on the southern coast of the Black Sea in the north of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). On the Day of Pentecost that we have recorded in Acts chapter 2, we read "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." Among the people listed there were people from Pontus.

They moved to Corinth because they had been deported by the Emperor, Claudius who had decreed that all Jews had to leave the city. They were believers, although we are not told when or how they were converted. We are also told that they earned their living by making tents and working with leather. In those days all young men who studied under the rabbis had to learn a trade.

Aquila and Priscilla are mentioned several times in the New Testament, but never separately. From this you can see that Priscilla played an important part in their service for the Lord. They worked as a couple both in their service for the Lord and in their day to day employment. Today, the term 'tentmaker' is used for people engaged in the Lord's service, but support themselves financially by doing secular work.

Paul came to meet them because when Paul visited a city, it was his custom to visit the synagogue first in order to speak to the Jews living there. As Aquila was a Jew, he would be worshipping there on the Sabbath.

We read that Aquila and Priscilla willingly opened their home to Paul. Although they had probably never met him before, they would have heard of him by reputation. Although Paul was in Corinth for eighteen months, he only stayed part of that time with them. When Paul encountered opposition which could have endangered their lives, he moved to the home of Justice. They did, however give him work so that he could support himself financially. This brings out the practical side of their Christian service. Even today, many people in the Lord's service are grateful to those who offer hospitality when they are away from home.

A good example of hospitality of this kind can be found in the second book of Kings and chapter 4 where we read of the Shunammite woman and her husband feeding Elisha and making a special room for Elisha to stay in whenever he visited the region.

When Paul left Corinth after remaining there a good while, Aquila and Priscilla went with him as they obviously wanted to continue serving the Lord. They were prepared to give up their work as tentmakers in Corinth and go wherever the Lord called them. Paul was returning to Antioch in Syria, and after a brief stay in Ephesus, he continued on his journey, leaving Aquila and Priscilla there.

They knew the scriptures, like most Jews, but their knowledge of them would have increased through Paul's teaching. They had also come to know that Jesus was the

promised Messiah and had come to know Him as their Lord and Saviour. This means they were prepared for what would lie ahead.

While they were at Ephesus, we read of the arrival of a preacher named Apollos. We are told that Apollos was an eloquent man who had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He also knew who Jesus was and what He had done, but unlike Aquila and Priscilla, he didn't have the same personal relationship with the Lord. When he preached there was something missing.

Aquila and Priscilla had a good knowledge of the Scriptures and a strong personal relationship with the Lord. Paul was very keen that believers should have a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures coupled with the gift of discerning between truth and error. When writing to the church at Philippi, in chapter 1 and verse 9, said, "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight." Because they had this knowledge and discernment, they soon identified what was missing in Apollo's teaching and spoke to him about it.

They explained to him the full reason for Christ coming to earth and how he could have the same relationship with Him that they had. How did they do this? Probably by relating their own personal experiences with what the Old Testament preached concerning the coming of the Messiah, and what they had been taught, resulting in them repenting fully of their sins and how they had come to love the Lord.

They were not learned theologians like Apollos, but knew the truth of the gospel.

Their preaching obviously had an effect on Apollo, because he went on to preach Christ in Achaia, which was a province in southern Greece, of which Corinth was the capital. He encouraged and helped the believers there.

When Paul wrote to the believers in Rome he says that Priscilla and Aquila risked their lives for Paul. We are not told when or where this happened, but Paul was grateful enough to mention it in his letter. He also speaks of other churches in the Gentile regions being thankful for this. There are believers today who are prepared to put their lives in danger for the furtherance of the gospel. Over the years many people have been imprisoned because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many of them could have had their freedom if they had been prepared to renounce their faith. There may have been some that did, but those who didn't found their faith increased and as a result were an influence to many people.

While they were at Ephesus, they also opened up their home for the church to meet. You read of them doing this in Romans chapter 16, verses 3 to 5 and 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 19. It is thought that Paul wrote his letter to Corinth while he was at Ephesus, and he mentions Aquila and Priscilla because, having lived in Corinth, they would be known to the believers there.

Hospitality is something Peter teaches in his first letter, chapter 4 and verses 9 and 10, where he writes: "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."

In the case of Aquila and Priscilla, they had been given the gift of a home, a trade and the gift of being able to communicate with others in order to spread the gospel. And they had been given these gifts for God's glory. Paul told the church at Corinth that there are different kinds of spiritual gifts which can be used in different ways for serving the Lord. There are also many practical gifts that can also be used. He gives people the ability to serve Him in the specific way He has called them to serve Him. You can read this in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 and verses 4 to 6. Paul told the believers in Rome that if they are given gifts, then they should use them. This can be found in Romans chapter 12 and verse 6.

Paul and many others would have had good reason to thank Aquila and Priscilla for their support and encouragement. Many would be able to thank them for leading them into their knowledge of the Lord. Married couples like this are an asset to any fellowship. They come over as a couple who pray together and spend time as a couple reading and discussing God's Word.

There is an old hymn which says: "There's a work for Jesus only you can do." It may be preaching or offering hospitality. Both tasks are equally important by complementing each other for the furtherance of the gospel. There are many other ways in which a believer can be used in the service of the Lord, so why not ask the Lord how He can use you?

People in Paul's Life

11 - Titus

In this study we are going to look at Titus. We don't find him mentioned by name in the book of Acts, but he was involved in many of the events recorded in that book. In Galatians chapter 2 and verse 1 we read that he was present with Paul and Barnabas at the Jerusalem Council that we read about in Acts chapter 15.

Paul and Barnabas visited Jerusalem following some false teaching on the question of circumcision that was being taught by some in the church at Antioch. We read in Acts 15 and verse 2 that "Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question." It appears from Galatians chapter 2 that Titus was one of the "other believers" who accompanied Paul and Barnabas. From this it also appears that Titus was not a man who could be taken in by false teaching.

Titus was a Greek and therefore had not been circumcised as an infant. Paul saw circumcision as a command given by God through Moses when the Law was given, but his teaching in Romans 6 verses 14 and 15 was, "you are not under law but under grace." Although Paul did not condemn circumcision, he made it clear that it was not necessary for salvation. It is for this reason he did not compel Titus to be subjected to this painful ritual.

When Paul went to Troas to preach the gospel he found the door was open to preach. However, he expected to find Titus already there waiting for him. When he wasn't he was concerned. We are told, "He had no peace of mind." For this reason Paul decided not to remain in Troas but sail to Macedonia and it was there that Titus joined him. You can read this in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 12 and 13 and chapter 7 and verse 6.

We read in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 1, that Paul had previously visited Corinth and had what he calls a "painful visit". It is thought that this came about following a report Timothy had brought him after delivering Paul's first letter to them. He didn't want another painful experience, so he sent Titus and another unnamed person to Corinth. We read this in 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

Eventually Titus caught up with Paul when he arrived in Macedonia. We read that Paul was attacked from every direction which made him fear the worst might happen. But Titus arrived and gave Paul comfort and encouragement (2 Corinthians 7, verses 6 and 7).

Titus had obviously been working for the Lord in Corinth, because when he met up with Paul he gave him news concerning the people of Corinth. Titus had been comforted by the people there and was therefore, from experience, able to be a comfort to Paul. He told Paul of the Corinthians' sorrow for the way they had treated him while he was there and now wanted to please him. Can you imagine how much Paul was encouraged by this news? The reason Titus was able to encourage Paul was because his spirit had been refreshed by the people of Corinth.

From this we see that Titus was not only prepared to allow others to encourage him when he was feeling low, but was willing to be there when needed to give encouragement.

We are not told how Titus came to meet up with Paul in Macedonia and not in Troas as Paul had originally thought, but God was in control of events. Titus had travelled to Macedonia from Corinth and we are told he had been comforted by the people there. He left Corinth having been blessed through the people there. He was happy and contented “because his spirit had been refreshed” by them. As a result he had come to love the people of Corinth. We read of Paul saying, “His (that is Titus’) affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you (the believers in Corinth) were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.” This is in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 15. When Titus reported back to Paul, Paul had peace of mind knowing that things had improved there and they had accepted the Word of God that Titus preached.

God had begun a work of Grace in Corinth by introducing them, through the Word of God to Christ, but they had a long way to go to reach spiritual maturity. They needed nurturing and further teaching and Paul felt that Titus was the right man to do this and we read, “We urged Titus, since he had earlier made a beginning, to bring also to completion this act of grace on your part.” See 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 6.

We are now going to look at Paul’s letter to Titus and see what we can learn about him from what he wrote.

The first thing we read is that Paul calls him, “my true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4), which tells us that he was probably converted under Paul’s ministry. Over the years Paul had come to trust him in his use of the Scriptures because we read that Paul left Titus in Crete to do a particular work. We don’t know when Paul actually visited Crete and we probably don’t need to know or we would have been told. However, there was some unfinished business there. For some reason Paul must have had to leave the island but he knew he could trust Titus to continue the work which he had begun.

One of the things he was required to do was appoint people to lead the work there. He was given a list of qualities to look for in the men to be appointed. We are given a list of these qualities in Titus 1 and verses 6 to 9. I assume from this that Titus had all, or most of these qualities and was of strong enough personality to show authority when the church was subjected to false teaching and other disputes.

When we come to Titus chapter 2 we see that he knew the Scriptures and was of sound doctrine, because we read that one of his tasks was to teach this to the people living on the island. But then he was told to teach the people how to live in the way God wanted them to, and he goes into detail, the people who were to be taught, and what they were to be taught, so that they would be able to live God-centred lives which would be an encouragement and witness to others.

From the list of people given, Titus was to show no favouritism when preaching and teaching, because he includes everyone from the older people, some of whom would be appointed as leaders, to older women, younger men and even slaves. This is in keeping with the words of Peter in Acts chapter 10 and verse 34, and Paul in Romans chapter 2 and verse 11, where they tell us that “God does not show favouritism.” James tells us that “favouritism is forbidden” and therefore, “don’t show favouritism”, because if you do, “you sin.” These quotes can be found in James 2 and verses 1 to 9. This is why Paul reminds him

in Titus 2 and verse 11 that God's grace is for everyone and then in chapter 3 and verses 4 to 7 he reminds him how God saved His people. This is the gospel which Titus was told to stress in his preaching.

So, it appears that Titus must have been influenced by Paul as he travelled with him and learned much from him in order for Paul to feel he was sufficiently experienced to be entrusted with such an important task.

Can the Lord trust you in the same way? Are you living according to the Word of God in such a way that He can use you in any way he may call you?

People in Paul's Life

12 - Phoebe

Phoebe was a woman who Paul thought very highly of, but all we read of her is found in just the first two verses of the sixteenth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans.

We are not told that she was married. I suspect she wasn't, or her husband would probably have been mentioned in the same way as Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned as a couple. She was probably either single or widowed, because if she was married she wouldn't have had the freedom to go to Rome.

I suspect she was from a heathen background because her name is derived from the Greek name for the god, Apollo.

In commending Phoebe to the church at Rome, Paul first of all calls her, "our sister." All Christians have a relationship with God. In the first chapter of John's Gospel, verses 12 and 13 we read that those who have received Christ have the right to become or be called children of God. He is referring to those who have been born of God. So, when Paul calls Phoebe, "our sister" he is saying that, like him and those with him when writing this letter, she has been 'born again' or 'born of the Spirit.' He is saying that there had come a time in her life when God had spoken to her and she had accepted Christ as her personal Saviour. Earlier in our studies we read of Ananias of Damascus addressing Saul, as Paul was then called, as "Brother Saul" because he recognised him as a true spiritual brother. This is in Acts chapter 9 and verse 17. Paul recognises Phoebe as a true sister in the Lord in the same way and therefore has the same standing as he does in the eyes of God.

We are not given any details of her conversion. It is possible she was converted under the ministry of Paul, but she might have become a believer through the on-going work of the church after Paul had left Corinth when he visited the city on his second missionary journey. When Paul wrote to Timothy he called him "a true son in the faith" and "a beloved son", and he uses a similar term when addressing Titus. He does not call Phoebe his daughter, but his sister. As a result she probably wasn't converted directly as a result of Paul's ministry, but his teaching would have helped strengthen her relationship with the Lord.

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans while visiting Corinth on his third missionary journey. By this time the church at Corinth had grown and there was now a daughter church at Cenchrea which was the eastern port of Corinth. We are told she was "a servant of the church in Cenchrea." The Greek word for servant is where we get the name 'deacon' from. Although today this word is used for an official title or office in the church it is not certain if she had this office. If she did have an official office in the church, then in order to be appointed she would have had to have had a good character. When deacons were first appointed in the church at Jerusalem they were men who had to have a good reputation. They had to be people who could be trusted. They had to be people who were full of the Holy Spirit. In other words their lives had to be controlled by God through the leading of the Spirit.

Finally they had to be full of wisdom and discernment. Even if she didn't have the official office of deacon, I am sure she fulfilled these qualifications. But they are not meant to apply just to people in official roles; all Christians should show evidence of these in their lives.

How important should serving the Lord be for the Christian? James tells us that "faith without works is dead." This means that if we are not serving the Lord in some way, our faith in the Lord is questionable. So, what should our attitude be to serving God? The Bible gives us some thoughts on this:

In the first book of Samuel, chapter 20 and verse 12 we read, "Serve the Lord with all your heart." In other words, don't give Him second best

In Psalm 100 and verse 2 we read, "Serve the Lord with gladness." In other words, serve the Lord willingly. Service for the Lord should never be a chore.

In Psalm 2 and verse 11 we read, "Serve the Lord with fear." This doesn't mean we should serve the Lord because we are afraid not to, but because we recognise that service for the Lord is service for the King of kings and Lord of lords and we should therefore treat him with the honour that is due to Him.

What is certain about Phoebe is that she served the Lord in whatever capacity she could because of her love for the Lord. She was probably like some of the women Paul speaks about in his letter to the Philippians, chapter 4 and verse 3, who worked hard with him to spread the gospel, but in her case worked through the church she attended. Paul actually refers to the fact that she had helped him and many others, although we are not told how. Paul must have thought highly of her to entrust her with the delivery of his letter to the believers at Rome. After all, this was an important letter as it contained essential teaching for the believers at Rome, and it is teaching which is relevant for the church as a whole.

In the early church women servants had a variety of jobs. These included caring for the sick and poor in the church. They also had the duty of looking after strangers and even visiting people in prison. They would also be involved in teaching younger women and children

Today, in most churches, women usually outnumber the men. This is often because the husband is not a believer, but can be sympathetic to his wife being one. It could also be because the woman is a widow or has never married.

One lady we read about in the New Testament who was not able to serve the Lord in a practical way was Anna the prophetess. We are told she had been a widow for about eighty four years, which means she was probably about a hundred years old, or even older. But she served the Lord by fasting and praying day and night. James tells us to pray for one another, especially for those who are sick because prayer can have a powerful effect. He says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man (and I think we can include women here) avails much." We read this in the Epistle of James, chapter 5 and verse 16. We are also asked to pray for those who are able to serve the Lord. Paul especially asked the people of Thessalonica to pray for him and those working alongside him in his ministry. He valued prayer so much that he asked them in both of his letters to the church there. Maybe age or some other disability is preventing you from serving the Lord as you would like, but you can serve the Lord by praying.

When commending Phoebe to the people of Rome he asks them to “receive her in the Lord.” In other words he is asking them to receive her as a believer into their fellowship. She was from a different country and therefore from a different culture and therefore be used to different customs. A person’s background should not make any difference to them being accepted into a fellowship because, as Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, we “are all one in Christ Jesus.” This can be found in Galatians 3 and verse 28. He is telling the recipients of the letter that they don’t have to be wary of her because he can vouch for her sincerity. But, how do we receive strangers into our fellowship? I have visited churches which have made me feel at home and at one with them. I have also visited churches where I have not felt welcome. Remember, the Lord welcomed all who came to Him in true repentance.

We are not sure if Paul actually sent her to Rome, if she was the one to deliver the letter to Rome, or if she was someone who held a responsible position in the commercial world and was therefore asked by Paul to deliver the letter because she was going there. Whichever is true, if any, it teaches us that we should always be ready and willing to go and do whatever the Lord asks of us and to use our circumstances as a means of serving the Lord.

People in Paul's Life

13 - Onesimus

In this final study of some of the people Paul encountered in his life we are going to look at Onesimus. He was a man who had a wonderful testimony to tell, but unfortunately the Bible only gives us an outline.

Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon. It appears that he had had enough of being in such a lowly position and had ideas of greater things for himself. So he runs away. I suspect the fact that he had stolen from his master was the reason he had run away. He knew that if he had stayed and been found out he would be punished quite severely and would have to forfeit some of his privileges.

By running away he had severed his relationship between master and slave. He had put himself into a situation where he was no longer cared for by Philemon. In fact he had probably made himself into an enemy of Philemon, so he travelled as far away from him as he possibly could. He could have travelled to Ephesus and tried to get lost in the crowd, but he didn't, possibly because he might have been seen by people who would recognize him as a slave of Philemon. Instead he travels approximately 1200 miles to Rome where he would not expect to be found - a place where he would be able to start a new life. After all he probably had plenty of money which he had stolen from his master.

We are not sure how it happened, but it appears he ended up in prison. If you were to go to a group of people in prison and ask them why they were there, they could probably give you a variety of reasons, that is, if they were prepared to tell you. However, regardless of what they have done wrong, the main reason they are there is because they were found out. The seriousness of the crime determines the length of the sentence. They can go for many years without being found out and perhaps they never will, but they will live in fear of being found out.

We read that Onesimus' wrong doing came out into the open when Onesimus came into contact with Paul, and through the preaching of Paul, he came into a relationship with the Lord. I wonder how honest he was with Paul when they first met. Did he tell him that he was a slave who had run away from his master? I suspect he didn't to begin with. He probably came into contact with Paul because he had ended up in prison after committing further crimes.

I believe that the hearing of the good news of salvation made him feel guilty for what he had done and he came to know the Lord as his Saviour, and as a result his life changed. He became a new person and as a result he became useful to Paul in his ministry, or "profitable", as we read in verse 11. In fact he had become so useful to Paul that he would like to have kept him with him to help him while being in prison.

But he was the property of someone else. He was the property of Philemon. So in order to put things right in his life he had to be reconciled to him. He could then become profitable to the one who he should be.

But he had wronged his master and therefore couldn't progress in his Christian life until he had put right the wrong he had done. He needed to be forgiven and as a result could become a brother in Christ to Philemon, and not just a brother, but a "beloved brother" as we read in verse 16.

This is where his contact with Paul came in useful. Onesimus had an obligation to return to his master, and Paul was going to give him the opportunity of going back to Philemon as a different person and should be treated as such.

He would still be a slave (or servant) but hopefully Philemon would see him with different eyes and Onesimus would carry out his duties in a different way as there would be a new dimension in their relationship. He must also remember that although he will still be in the service of Philemon, he must make amends for his wrongdoing. Then the change that had happened in his life would make him useful in his master's service.

Paul had seen the change which had happened in Onesimus' life and knew that Philemon would see it also, so Paul wrote a short letter to his friend Philemon. The main purpose was to persuade him to accept Onesimus back into his home after he had run away.

Slavery had been around for many years. In Psalm 105 and verse 17 we read that Joseph "was sold as a slave". Slavery was also very much a part of life in Judea, Galilee, and in the rest of the Roman Empire during New Testament times. Neither Jesus nor Paul, nor any other Biblical figure is recorded as saying anything in opposition to the institution of slavery.

Slaves were either bought or taken in payment of a debt. This meant they became the property of their master so they were legally bound to do everything their master asked them to do. Hebrew slaves were to be given their freedom after a set number of years but this rule didn't apply to Gentiles. If the servant (or slave) was happy in the service of their master then they could remain a servant for life.

So, from this short book of just 25 verses let us see what we can learn about this man who Paul had come to love.

Onesimus was a victim of a system which, as we have seen, had been around for many years and which had become an unavoidable fact of life, rather than a victim of Philemon.

It wouldn't matter if Philemon was the kindest person around, Onesimus was at a disadvantage and resented being in the situation he was in (most people would).

We are told in verse 18 that Onesimus had probably done wrong by stealing from his master. At least we are told that he probably owed Philemon something. Paul said, "If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me." (v.18)

From this I would say that Onesimus showed very little respect for his master. In fact I would say that he is trying to serve two masters - Philemon and himself. He was presumably getting paid for the work he did. He would also be getting his food and accommodation, but it wasn't enough for Onesimus. He wanted more than he was entitled to so he took what belonged to someone else.

In the same way slavery has been around for many years, so has stealing, and God also gave rules concerning it.

The eighth commandment as found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 15 reads, "You shall not steal." Onesimus had broken this commandment and deserved to be punished by both God and Philemon. The only way to avoid this punishment from Philemon was to repay what had been stolen and beg for forgiveness. Until he did this the threat of punishment would be hanging over his head. He may have asked the Lord for forgiveness when he was born again, but that didn't absolve him from any punishment from Philemon.

Although Paul promised in his letter to Philemon that he would repay anything that Onesimus owed him, he could never be accepted by Philemon as the "dear brother" and as "a brother in the Lord" that we read about in verse 16, without admitting the wrong he had done and then saying he was sorry to Philemon.

The apostle John in chapter 1 of his first letter and verse 9 writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." In the same way Paul's letter would help him seek forgiveness from Philemon and enable him to be useful in his service for Philemon and in his new relationship.

From a spiritual point of view we are all slaves. Jesus said, "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." (John 8:34) and the writer of Proverbs in chapter 5 and verses 22 and 23 says, "The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his skin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly."

After the change in his life Onesimus became a new creature (or a new creation). Have you come face to face with the Lord and sought His forgiveness and entered into a new and living relationship with Him?