

WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

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Saul and the Church at Antioch

After the martyrdom of Stephen and the persecutions which followed, the Christian evangelists were scattered abroad, traveling as far as Phenice and Cypress and Antioch. In this latter most flourishing center of the new faith, Saul performed his first outstanding work. The names of Peter, Barnabas, Mark and Silas are still associated with the activities of this church. "There is to be found there to this day that gracious spring of water which was brought forth by the prayers of St. Paul for the baptism of the Antiochians."

Peter appointed a head of the church in Antioch in A.D. 53, who was succeeded by Ignatius, one of the foremost disciples of John.

The Christian centers of Greater and Lesser Asia, and of all the countries of the East, were under the jurisdiction of Antioch. These numbered at one time considerably more than a hundred and fifty-three. Antioch Christians followed the custom established in Jerusalem. Centers were founded in the homes of the faithful known as "church houses." History records that as late as the second century divine services were performed in private homes. This continued until the time of the saintly Theophilus, seventh Bishop of Antioch, who, when the number of followers had grown too large to be accommodated in members' houses, set aside his own residence exclusively as a church.

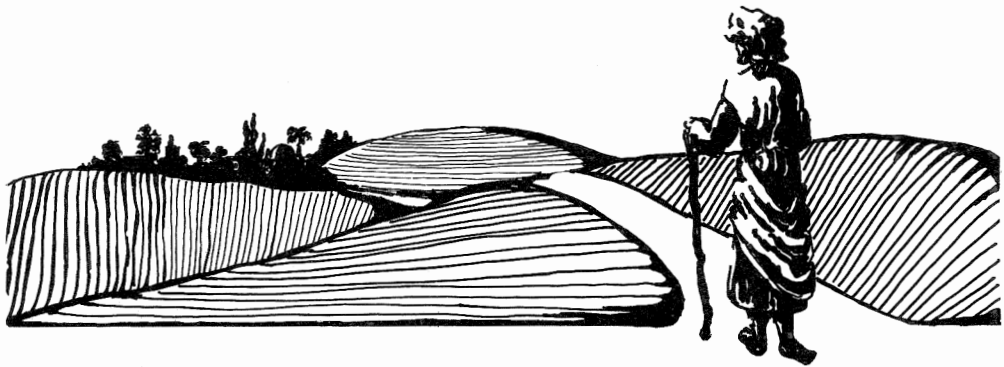
In the magnificence of her public buildings, the city of Antioch rivaled even the Eternal City. The principal street, broad and

decorative, stretched for a distance of about two and a half miles. Herod, known as the great builder, had this thoroughfare paved with polished marble and had imposing colonnades erected both sides of its entire length. The city's population at this time was about half a million.

According to Cicero, Antioch had an enviable reputation for learning and culture. The Antiochians were also known for their extreme licentiousness. Historian Gibbons describes the great temple, five miles from the city proper, as situated in "that sweet grove of Daphne." Admired gardens and terraces, bowered in laurel and cypress, adorned with bright pools and sparkling fountains, was this shrine dedicated to Daphne and Apollo wherein ceremonials had degenerated into bestial exploitation of feminine beauty and charm — so much so that "the morals of Daphne" became a familiar byword and Roman soldiers were forbidden to visit the temple or its environs. The temple itself, however, ranked with those of Alexandria and Jerusalem in beauty and grandeur.

In Seleucia, seaport of Antioch located fifteen miles distant upon the coast, are the remains of a massive Roman pier, with huge boulders extending into the Mediterranean, which is known as "the pier of St. Paul."

This was the Antioch which offered refuge to followers of the new way when they fled the wrath of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen. Their work flourished and grew so rapidly that the



Mother Church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to direct their activities. He, soon needing assistance, went to Tarsus to ask for Saul's aid.

Thus Antioch became the center of this exalted Apostle's work. It was always considered his home church. For two years he labored there with Barnabas, then from that point began the three journeys destined to spread the light of the Christ teachings around the world. At the conclusion of each of these memorable pilgrimages he returned to his home church for rest and refreshment.

It was in Antioch that the followers of Christ first came to be called "Christians." The Greek word *chrestoe*, meaning good or useful, was pronounced much like *Christos*. Many ancient inscriptions have been discovered in which *Christian* is spelled *Chrestian*. It has been suggested that the good and useful work of the Christians gave rise to their distinctive appellation.

Saul was, perhaps, forty-five when he came to help Barnabas. He is described as small and bald, with contracted brow and large nose. Lucian states that he wore a long flowing beard, dark brown in color. St. Chrysostom gives the added information that "his eyes were bright and sparkling."

At this time Jerusalem knew the golden age of Pharisaism under the reign of Agrippa I. In order to please this orthodox sect, the Emperor continued to persecute the Christians. James, brother of John, was executed. Peter was imprisoned. This renewed attack upon the Mother Church caused an increas-

ing number of its members to seek refuge in Antioch. Hence, the work of the Christians and Paul's fame increased rapidly.

Judea was ravaged by a severe famine in 45-46 A.D. Saul's heart was with "the poor saints in Jerusalem" during this trying ordeal, doubtless because many of them had been widowed and orphaned by his own persecutions. Accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, he visited the Mother Church in the summer of 46. He was received with open hearts and arms by the converts, who soon fell under the "gracious spell" of his spiritual power and eloquence.

Weeks and months passed. Saul would have liked nothing better than to remain in Jerusalem; but one day, while he was in solitary prayer in the temple, the glorified One appeared to him and bade him leave. "They will not receive thy testimony concerning me," were the words of the Blessed Lord. "Depart: for I will send thee hence unto the Gentiles." (Acts 22:18, 21)

Companied by the noble and gracious Barnabas, Saul obeyed the heavenly vision and returned at once to his home church in Antioch to make ready for his journey further afield. They were eagerly welcomed by friends of the church, who experienced the high exaltation of reunion with their leaders. During a season of fasting and prayer, many received illumination of the Holy Ghost. They could read in the cosmic scrolls something of the great work awaiting their beloved Master Paul who, now embarking upon his spiritual adventure, his divine

Apostolate, no longer bore the name of Saul. Henceforth he was to be known as Paul, the greatest of all evangelists.

SAUL BECOMES PAUL

Each picture in the life of Paul evidences a specific phase of occult development. Such a progression marks the life of every aspirant who attains to Paul's exalted status. Saul, the persecutor of Stephen, bears little resemblance to Paul, author of a divinely inspired Song of Love. It was because of the transformation in character and consciousness that the name of this eager, ardent spirit was changed from *Saul* to *Paul*. Esoterically, names are but numerical expressions of spiritual ideas. Saul of Tarsus is far removed in consciousness from the Paul who penned in his final Epistle to Timothy, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

Saulos, a famous Jewish name, and Paulos, a Latin name of Greek origin and form, symbolize the two natures of the man: the lower (degeneration) and the higher (regeneration). Saul of Tarsus, the intolerant and revengeful persecutor, came out of his experiences as Paul, the New Man. The Adam in him died and the Christ was born within. His ambition became humility. His bigoted sectarianism was transformed into an all-embracing fellowship and compassion. His intense zeal of race expanded into love for all humanity. His brilliant future was sacrificed for a career of persecution and renunciation; honors and adulation were gladly exchanged for scourgings and imprisonment. He willingly renounced all this world offered that he might become even as the least among the Apostles of Christ, "If by any means I may . . . save some of them."

After this transcendental experience which came to Saul on the journey towards Damascus his name was changed from Saul to Paul. It will be noted that in this change

of names it is only the first letter of each name that is changed. In other words, "P" is substituted for "S." It is always the beginning letter of a name that carries the principle intonation which makes harmony or inharmony. It is for this reason that many persons sensing this inharmony change their names. "S" in the Hebrew alphabet is the letter "Samech," and this letter means to be tried and purified by fire. The Tarot describes this letter in the following words: "When thou hast been purified by fire, then the beauty of thy gold will shine forth that all men may observe the Divine Light which is within you." The letter "P" in the Hebrew alphabet is "Phe." This is symbolized by the eight pointed star. Eight is the numeral representing tremendous spiritual power and the Tarot description for the letter "Phe" is found in the words: "Man liveth not by bread alone but by all that proceedeth from the letter 'Phe'." Thus it may be observed how accurately the spiritual development is described as the name of Saul has been changed into Paul. Saul had literally been tried and purified by fire, and as Paul, the heights of his spiritual consciousness had become so increased that words of living power poured forth from him and his letters and Epistles bear the inspiration of this living bread of life that will endure as long as civilization shall endure upon the Earth; for Paul belongs not to any one age or time, but he belongs to all ages and to all times.

Paul placed mystic keys in each of his Epistles as an aid to all disciples who enter upon the way. Fourteen of the twenty-seven Books comprising the New Testament testify to the work of this great evangelizer. "Every letter of Paul is a picture of Paul," says Adolf Deissman.

As before stated, Paul's experiences in super-physical realms for three days and nights left their impress in various ways on each page of his Epistles, every letter of which spells immortality and every page glows with the splendor of Life Eternal. Each one contains both an inner and an outer message. Each has "milk for the babes and meat for the strong men."