

God's Troublemaker

Mike Southern
June 2016

It's easy to believe that, since God has the power to do anything He wants, anything He does should be perfect from the start. But God chooses to treat us humans as more than just pieces on a chessboard, so sometimes things don't run as smoothly as they could. Take Saul of Tarsus, whom we know as the Apostle Paul. He really WANTED to serve God but, even after his conversion, things didn't run all that smooth at first.

This story comes from Acts 9:16-31, with a timeframe provided by Paul in Galatians 1:11-24.

Everybody who knew Saul of Tarsus
knew he was an unstoppable force for God.
He was a devoted Pharisee,
convinced that what he believed was right,
convinced that he was doing what God wanted
when he tried to destroy the heretics
who would come to be known as Christians.
Nobody dared get in *his* way!

But one day, as Saul traveled to Damascus,
where he intended to imprison more of the Christians,
God stepped in.
He blinded Saul,
told him that the Christians were right after all
and that he was to become a Christian missionary.
Then He sent a man named Ananias to heal Saul
and teach him about Jesus.

And after a few days in Damascus with the Christians there,
Saul was ready to start telling people about Jesus.

First, he left Damascus and went south into Arabia,
where he spent nearly three years.
The only reason we know he went there
is because Saul mentioned it in one of his letters.
We don't know exactly what he did there—
Did he preach to the Arabs?
Did he learn directly from Jesus about his mission?
Perhaps he did both; we just don't know.

But we do know what happened when he came back to Israel...
Trouble. BIG trouble!

First Saul went back to Damascus
and into the Jewish synagogues.
He argued from the Jewish Scriptures—
and believe me, Saul KNEW his Scriptures!—
that Jesus was the Son of God.
His arguments became more and more powerful
and none of the Jews could prove him wrong.

And that just made them mad.

REALLY mad.

So mad that they decided to kill him.
They even got the governor to set traps at the city gates to catch him.
But the Christians in Damascus found out about the plan
and they snuck Saul out of the city at night;
they lowered him through a hole in the city walls
in a basket so he could get away.

From there he went to Jerusalem.

He wanted to meet with the believers there
but everybody was afraid of him.
After all, as far as they knew,
this was just a trick to capture and imprison Christians!
But one of them, a man named Barnabas, found out the truth.
He brought Saul to two of the Apostles—
James, the brother of Jesus, and Peter.
They listened to his story and believed him,
so they welcomed Saul into the fellowship
and he preached with them.

But it wasn't long before Saul made the Greek Jews in Jerusalem so mad
that they decided they wanted to kill him too!
So when the Christians in Jerusalem found out about the plan
they snuck Saul out of the city,
took him to the seaport of Caesarea
and sent him back to his hometown of Tarsus.

And then, the Bible says,

the church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria finally had some peace!

Not only did the church finally have peace,
but it started growing and getting stronger.
The believers became more faithful to God
and felt God's presence even more strongly than before.

As we know now,
God had big plans for Saul.

When the Good News started to spread among the non-Jews in Antioch,
the Apostles sent Barnabas to see what was happening...
and when Barnabas saw what was happening,
he knew just what to do.

He immediately went to Tarsus
and brought Saul back with him.
The rest is history...

But the Bible says that Saul never quite stopped being a troublemaker,
although that didn't stop God from using him.

*So maybe, just maybe, God can use us too.
It sure makes ME feel better to know that!*