

Paul, the Apostle

A play in three acts to celebrate the Year of Saint Paul, 2008–2009

by Jeanette L. Graham, M.A.

Act I: Paul's Youth

Setting People gathered in the marketplace, purchasing food stuffs and wares, as well as meeting and greeting

Cast Narrator

Saul, around 12 years of age

Saul's mother and father

Women at the market Esther Sarah Judith
 Leah Others

Merchants and market customers milling in background



Narrator: When Paul was a child, he lived in the Mediterranean city of Tarsus. No one knows the date of his birth, but it was probably several years after the birth of Jesus. An Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, Paul was actually named Saul, a somewhat common name given to Jewish children in memory of the first king of the Jews. It was only later in his life that he was more often referred to as Paul, the Greek form of his name.

We meet up with Saul now in the market place in Tarsus. He is a young boy about to enter his teen years.

Esther: *(enters with her basket, ready to purchase goods but obviously more interested in socializing)* Hello there, Sarah. How are you . . . and how's the family? *(continues talking even though Sarah is ready to answer)* It's been ages since I've bumped into you here at the market.

Sarah: So it has. The weather's kept me away. It's been so hot and steamy lately. I don't go out unless I have to. Instead, I send the girls for the few things we need. They're getting pretty good at bargaining with the merchants.



Esther: Ah yes, your girls. They're growing quickly. You're lucky to have their help. (*looks away and starts waving at someone else she spots*) Oh, look; there's Leah . . . over there at the grape seller's stand. She's another one I haven't seen for a while. (*She stops and watches Leah for a moment. Leah is speaking to Saul's mother, while Saul stands beside his father who is conversing with some men. Meanwhile Judith wanders over and joins the group in time to hear Esther's question.*) Do you know who it is that Leah's talking with?

Judith: I've seen those people before, but I've never met them. They look like they're rather well off . . . and the young man, quite handsome, don't you think?

Sarah: (*nods at Judith*) I don't really know them either but, if I'm not mistaken, the boy's name is Saul. My girls know of him. You know how girls are—they keep their eyes on the boys. They say that Saul is quite smart as well as good looking.

Esther: Here comes Leah. She probably knows something more about the family.

Leah: (*looking at each one as she greets them*) Hello, Sarah, Esther, Judith. Have you seen what they're asking for grapes this week? You'd think they were made of gold. The good Lord provides all right, but the merchants hike up the prices to their liking.

Judith: Too true, and the figs aren't worth what they're asking either.

Esther: I agree but, Leah, we're curious about other things. Who are the people you were just chatting with over there? We three have lived in Tarsus all our lives, but we can't seem to place them.

Leah: I'm surprised. They're a rather prominent family. The father is of the tribe of Benjamin, a very nice man and very religious. The whole family is religious . . . and strict. They keep and honor our laws better than any I know.



Sarah: Are they Pharisees then?

Leah: I believe so.

(Saul and his parents walk toward the women, the father acknowledging other men in the crowd. Before reaching the group, Saul's father nods to his wife and moves to join and talk with some other men.)

Esther: Look, Saul and his mother are walking this way. Call them over, Leah, and introduce us. We'd really like to meet them.

Leah: I'm not comfortable doing that. I don't know them that well.

Esther: Oh, come on.

Leah: What am I going to say, "These three women are curious and need to know everything about everybody, so come and meet them"?

Sarah: They seem like very nice people. Why shouldn't we meet them?

Leah: *(as Saul and his mother approach)* Hello again. If you aren't in a hurry, I'd like you to meet some of my friends—Judith, Esther, Sarah. *(Leah points to each as she says the name.)*

Mother: It's a pleasure. This is my son Saul.

(Saul acknowledges with a nod of the head.)

Sarah: So, Saul, I take it you're busy these days learning your father's trade. It's always wonderful to hear about a son who follows in his father's footsteps.

Saul: Actually, I'm studying in Jerusalem. I'm just home for a short visit.

Mother: Saul's receiving his education at the school of Gamaliel.



Saul: Gamaliel is a highly respected rabbi. I'm learning a lot.

Mother: We want to make sure that Saul is well grounded in the laws and traditions of our ancestors. As you know, there's nothing more important in our changing world than a good education.

Saul: But my father makes sure I know something of his trade. He's a master craftsman when it comes to leather and canvas.

Mother: He makes tents and coverings for stalls, like the stalls here at the market. It's a good business.

Saul: He does a lot of repair work also. He's always busy.

Esther: It sounds like you're very proud of your father.

Saul: I am.

Judith: And what do you do to help him?

Saul: I try my hand at leather work, but school takes up most of my time. Maybe one day I'll work with my father. But not right now.

Mother: Yes, maybe someday, but now we must head for home. I have much to do before evening sets in.

(Father leaves the men with whom he's been visiting. Saul and his family exit.)

Leah: I have lots to do too, and I haven't even starting shopping yet. What do you say, ladies? I heard that one of the large fishing boats came in this morning with a great catch. Shall we check it out?

(With a nod of agreement, all go toward the merchants' stalls to purchase.)

End of Act I

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Act II: Saul's Conversion

Setting 1) trees and plants, to create sense of the outdoors;
"stones" made of crumpled paper bags;
2) large floor pillow on which Saul can recline

Cast

Narrator	Stephen, a young man
Angry mob members	Saul, around the age of 30
Saul's companions	Jesus (voice offstage)
Ananias, a middle-aged man	



Narrator: Saul learned well at the school of Rabbi Gamaliel. Now a young man of about 30 years, he lived according to the most rigid norms of the Pharisees and the Mosaic Law. As a result, Saul was suspicious of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, that man who was crucified and who, according to his followers, had risen from the dead. Saul saw Jesus' disciples as a menace and a threat to the Temple and the law—to the Jewish faith itself.

At this time, a follower of Jesus named Stephen was brought before the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He was falsely accused of speaking against God and the Temple. Angered, the Jewish leaders had their guards drive Stephen out of the city. An angry mob chased after them, shouting and throwing stones.

Companion 1: (*pointing to the mob chasing Stephen*) Saul, look. We'd better get out of the way or we'll be trampled.

Companion 2: They must be chasing that Stephen fellow.

Saul: He's angered everyone with his Jesus preaching.



Companion 2: A troublemaker . . .

Companion 1: Those followers of Jesus talk about a new law.

Saul: Well, we don't need their talk or their new law here in Jerusalem.

Companion 1: Come on, let's grab some stones and join in.

Companion 2: What do you say, Saul?

Saul: Let's get rid of Stephen.

Companion 2: Hey, Saul, hold our coats.

(The companions throw their coats at Saul's feet.)

Companion 1: Let's go!

(The companions pick up stones and join the yelling crowd in pursuit of Stephen, who moves to the end of the stage area, stops, and drops to his knees as he is pelted with stones.)

Stephen: *(looking heavenward)* I see the heavens opened and the Son of God standing at the right hand of God. *(Stephen falls to his knees as the mob continues to stone him.)* Jesus, do not hold this sin against them. Lord God, receive my spirit. *(Stephen falls to the ground.)*

(In the midst of the mob, Saul picks up a stone and begins to hurl it at Stephen but stops midair, drops the stone, and turns away. The mob drags Stephen offstage.)

Companion 1: That takes care of Stephen.

(Saul and his companions "freeze" in place as the narrator speaks.)



Narrator: After Stephen's death, Saul became a leader of those who persecuted the believers in Jesus. He dragged them from their homes and shops and took them off to prison. Some of Jesus' followers left Jerusalem, fearing for their families and their lives.

(Saul and his two companions talk as they journey together.)

Saul: *(to his companions)* Hurry up, we're near Damascus. It won't be long now.

Companion 1: Those Jesus-followers who ran from Jerusalem to Damascus think they're safe.

Companion 2: They don't even know that we're right behind them.

Saul: I can hardly wait to put them in chains and drag them back to Jerusalem.

Companion 1: There they'll get what they deserve.

Saul: I promised the high priest that soon he'd hear no more about Jesus. We'll wipe out his followers. The name of Jesus will be forgotten forever.

(A bright light appears from offstage. The three travelers stop. Saul, shielding his eyes, falls to his knees. The two companions cover their eyes in fright.)

Saul: What's going on? What's happening?

(The voice of Jesus comes from offstage.)

Jesus: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul: "Who are you?"

Jesus: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." [Acts of the Apostles 9: 4-6]



(The light disappears. The two companions help Saul get up.)

Companion 2: What was that? So strange—the light was blinding, and I heard a noise, but I'm not sure what it was.

Companion 1: Are you all right, Saul?

Saul: I can't see! I can't see a thing. Help me. Get me to Damascus.

(The companions lead the blinded Saul offstage.)

Narrator: Saul's companions led him to a house in Damascus, where he stayed for three days. He neither ate nor drank. Instead, he prayed and thought about what had happened to him. Then the Lord sent a man named Ananias to meet Saul.

(A companion helps blind Saul onto the stage and seats him on a pillow on the floor. The companion leaves. Ananias enters from the other side of the stage.)

Ananias: Are you Saul of Tarsus?

Saul: I am Saul.

Ananias: Are you the one who hunts down followers of Jesus and throws them into prison?

Saul: Yes, I have done those things. But I was struck with a great light and the Lord himself spoke to me. Now I am blind and confused. Who are you?

Ananias: I'm Ananias, a disciple of Jesus. And I have to say that, knowing who you are, I didn't want to come here.

Saul: But you did come.

Ananias: I had to. The Lord told me that he has chosen you to bring his message to many lands.



(Ananias moves toward Saul and gingerly lays his hands on Saul's head.)

Ananias: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Saul: *(looking around in disbelief and becoming joyful)* I can see! It's all true, then. I can see again.

(Ananias helps the weak Saul get up and supports him as they walk offstage.)

Narrator: Saul could see again, but not only with his eyes. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he saw the truth in Jesus' teaching. He recognized Jesus as the promised Savior. Saul was then baptized by Ananias and, after regaining his strength, went throughout Damascus, proclaiming to everyone that Jesus truly is the Son of God, the promised Messiah.

End of Act II

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Act III: Paul's Missionary Journeys

Setting 1) greenery suggesting the outdoors;
2) scrolls suggesting the synagogue;
3) darkness with a light on Paul

Cast

Narrator	3 citizens
Saul/Paul	Barnabas
Companions of Saul	Men in the synagogue
Synagogue official	3 listeners
Group A—3 speakers	Group B—3 speakers
Prison guard	



Narrator: It wasn't easy for the followers of Jesus to accept Saul's change of heart. Just a short time ago, he was hunting them down and dragging them off to prison. Now he too claimed to be a believer. The early Christians were confused.

The Jewish religious leaders were confused too . . . and angry. Saul had turned against them. Saul, their friend, had become Saul, their enemy.

Saul didn't care what others thought. He went all over Damascus, teaching about Jesus to anyone who would listen.

(Three people walk along chatting inaudibly and then stop to share the latest news in Damascus.)

Citizen 1: Have you heard the latest about Saul? The leaders of the temple are out to get him.

Citizen 2: Have I heard? Everyone's heard. He's made a lot of important people very angry.



- Citizen 3:** That's because Saul has turned against them.
- Citizen 2:** I think they're worried that too many Jews are coming to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.
- Citizen 3:** *(in a quieter voice)* I've heard that they want to kill Saul before he causes any more trouble.
- Citizen 1:** You're probably right.
- Citizen 3:** Word's out that his friends want to get him out of Damascus before he's arrested.
- Citizen 2:** That won't be easy. There are guards everywhere, even at the city gates.

(The three continue talking inaudibly as they walk offstage.)

- Narrator:** But in the dark of the night, Jesus' followers in Damascus lowered Paul over the city wall in a huge basket supported by a heavy rope. The temple leaders couldn't believe that Saul had escaped, but they were glad to be rid of him.

Saul went on to Jerusalem. Then he and his companion Barnabas set out on foot and by boat from town to town. Everywhere they spread the good news of Jesus. Their travels were difficult and long. Blisters, illness, heat, wild animals, and robbers were constant threats. Sometimes Saul and Barnabas had to stop and work to pay for their food and lodging. That's when Saul's skill at tent making came in handy.

Arriving in Antioch, Saul, Barnabas, and some of their companions gathered in the synagogue. It was the Sabbath, and they had come to worship with the others.

(Saul and Barnabas and companions enter and seat themselves in the synagogue among the other men.)



Synagogue official: My brothers, here in our synagogue we have heard the reading of the law and the prophets. Now, if one of you has a word to share with us, please speak.

Saul: *(rising to address those gathered)* Brothers of the family of Abraham and all you who fear God, listen. The word of salvation has been sent from God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

(A gasp goes through the crowd.)

Listener 1: What? Did you say Jesus?

Saul: Jesus went about doing good works. He healed the sick, reached out to the sinner, and taught any who would listen.

Listener 2: *(loudly)* Where did you learn these things you talk about?

Listener 1: This is nonsense!

Saul: But the religious leaders and the people did not believe Jesus. They did not accept him as the one promised by God. Instead, even though no guilt could be found in him, Jesus was put to death. But God raised him up after three days. God kept his promise. He sent Jesus to save us.

Listener 3: *(with disdain)* What you say is foolish! No one believes you.

Saul: Hear me! Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Listener 1: Let's go; I don't listen to lies.

(Those gathered [except Saul's companions] shake their heads and raise their fists against Saul. One by one they get up and leave.)

Barnabas: *(rising)* Don't go. What Saul says is true. Forgiveness and salvation are yours through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Saul: *(imploring)* Don't turn away. Stay and listen. Be saved.



Barnabas: All these things Saul tells you for your own good.

(Paul, Barnabas, and the companions leave, speaking quietly and looking discouraged.)

Narrator: Rejected by the Jewish people, Saul brought his message to the Gentiles. With them, he used the Greek form of his name—Paul. News about Paul and his passion for sharing the message of Jesus traveled far.

(People come onstage in threes from various areas, share their news in conversation with one another, and then exit at the opposite end of the stage. One comes alone and speaks directly to the audience.)

Group A *(coming onstage in threes, deep in conversation)*

Speaker 1: Paul and Barnabas were just in the town of Lystra.

Speaker 2: They were preaching, urging people to believe in Jesus.

Speaker 3: One believer had never been able to walk. Paul prayed to God, and the man stood straight up on his feet.

Speaker 2: That's when everyone called Paul and Barnabas gods.

Speaker 3: Oh, was Paul ever angry!

Speaker 1: He kept insisting that he cured the man in Jesus' name, not by his own power.

(All exit at opposite end of stage.)

Group B *(entering stage from different area, talking and walking)*

Speaker 1: Have I got news! Paul is dead.

Speaker 2: No, he isn't. That's just a rumor that's been going around.

Speaker 1: Really? Are you sure?



Speaker 3: I'm sure. What really happened is that some people were upset with Paul's message. They began screaming and yelling at him.

Speaker 2: Then they hurled stones at him, more and more stones. They dragged him outside of the city, threw him in a heap, and left him for dead.

Speaker 3: When Barnabas and his friends came to bury him, they noticed some movement. Paul was hurt but he wasn't dead.

Speaker 1: Remember when Stephen was stoned? I wonder if Paul thought about Stephen when the same thing was happening to him.

Speaker 3: Who knows . . . who knows?

(All exit at opposite end of stage.)

Prison guard: *(walking to center stage and speaking to audience, reading from a paper)* Pardon me. I hate to interrupt, but I need to tell you what happened to me. I wrote it all down so I wouldn't forget anything. Listen.

I was a jailer at the prison in Philippi when Paul was brought in. He'd been stripped and beaten for disturbing the peace. I was told to guard him carefully. So that he couldn't escape, I put Paul in an innermost cell and chained his feet to a stake. There was no way he could get out of there. Then in the middle of the night, there was an earthquake. Honest—all of a sudden—an earthquake. Paul's chains fell from his feet. The prison doors flew open. Paul was freed. Thinking that all my prisoners had escaped, I was ready to kill myself rather than be punished by the authorities. But then I heard Paul say, "Don't harm yourself; we're all here." Paul and his friends could have run, but they didn't. I knew then, without a doubt, that Paul was a man of God. Because of all that happened, I became a believer and was baptized.



Narrator: After his conversion, nothing stopped Paul from preaching about Jesus. Year after year, day after day, he moved from city to town and taught. Over 6,000 miles he traveled—on foot, by boat, on donkey. He endured hunger, cold, shipwrecks, robbery, beatings, and stoning. Still he continued teaching about salvation through Jesus. He helped set up churches in the towns he visited. Near the end of his travels, Paul headed back to Jerusalem, a most dangerous place for him. There he was beaten again, imprisoned, and sent to Rome to be tried.

For several years in Rome, Paul was under house arrest. Still he moved about preaching, always with a Roman guard at his side. Then, one last time, Paul's enemies had him thrown into prison. While there, he wrote letters to the churches he had established. He explained to them about the love of God and belief in Jesus. Just before he was killed, Paul wrote to Timothy, his young disciple.

(Paul is sitting on the floor with paper and quill pen, writing. A recording of Paul's voice comes from offstage, verbalizing his thoughts as he writes. A light shines on Paul. The rest of the stage is dark.)

Paul (recording): My dear Timothy,
Come and visit me here in prison if you can. Try to get here before winter, because I'm afraid my time is up. I'm so tired, and I feel that death is near. But don't worry about me. I'm ready. I fought the good fight. I finished the race. The crown of glory which the Lord has promised will be awarded to me. It will be given to you too and to all who believe in Jesus, our Lord.

Give my greetings to everyone. And even though I want to see you, if you can't get here, don't worry. The Lord will care for me. He'll rescue me from all evil and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To God be glory forever and ever.

End of Act III