

**Paul**

Passages: Acts 7:54–8:3; 9:1–31; 11:25–30; 13–28; Gal 1:1–2:14; Phil 3:4–11

*Memory Verse*

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

<b>Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]</b>	<b>Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]</b>	<b>Good Work [Behavior]</b>
God seeks to make use of His people as vessels that are ready for every good work.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. God called us to serve according to His will and His way.</li><li>2. God knows our hearts and directs our paths.</li><li>3. God seeks faithful workers to be His witnesses.</li></ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Serve God according to His time and His will.</li><li>2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit in conduct and speech.</li><li>3. Faithfully and diligently study the word of God.</li></ol>

*Overview*

**Events and Spiritual Teachings**

- A. Saul Before His Conversion: “Concerning the law, a Pharisee”
- B. Paul’s Conversion and Preparation: A Chosen Vessel, a Minister, a Witness
- C. Paul’s Ministry: “Poured out as a drink offering”
- D. Paul’s Character

**Life Application**

1. Serve God according to His time and His will
2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit in conduct and speech
3. Faithfully and diligently study the word of God

**Memory Verse**

**Conclusion:** God has His will and ministry for each of us. We must work hard and know His words to be an approved worker of God.

## Spiritual Teachings

### A. Saul Before His Conversion: “Concerning the law, a Pharisee”

(Teachers: Figures 1 or 2 can be referenced as a visual timeline of events throughout lesson.)

Let’s begin by studying Paul’s background. Before his conversion, Paul went by his Jewish name, Saul.

**Hometown:** Tarsus, in Cilicia (Acts 21:39)

Tarsus was located on the northeastern tip of the Mediterranean Sea. Since he grew up here, he had a Greek name, could write in Greek, and held Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37–38).

**Education:** He was raised according to the laws of Moses and trained to be a Pharisee. Paul strictly observed the written and oral laws (Acts 22:3–5; Phil 3:5–6; Gal 1:14).

#### **Did You Know?**

During Paul’s time, there were two main schools of Judaism: the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai. Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel; his teachings were not considered as strict as Shammai’s. This is reflected in Gamaliel’s advice to the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:34–38.

Why is Paul’s background important?

1. First, Paul did not persecute the church out of a wicked heart. From his background, we can see that Paul persecuted the church out of zeal for the God of Israel, as he thought the Jewish people were committing blasphemy. One of the teachings of the gospel that many Jewish leaders could not accept was the divinity of their Messiah. Let us read Acts 7:56–57 and Matthew 26:63–65.
2. Second, Paul’s background guides us on how we should read his writings. The name “Paul” is Greek, and he was a Roman citizen, but Paul was a Pharisee. He was raised on the law of Moses and taught to memorize the Scriptures. Therefore, to best understand Paul’s letters, we must read it from his perspective, without applying western thinking to explain his teachings.

### B. Paul’s Conversion and Preparation: A Chosen Vessel, a Minister, a Witness

Let’s first read Acts 9:1–31 (cf. Acts 22:6–11; Gal 1:16–21).

When a great light shone around Paul, he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:4). At that moment, Paul began to reconsider his actions, and asked two important questions:

#### 1. “Who are You, Lord?”

When Paul asked this question, the Lord responded, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:5). Paul realized that his previous beliefs were wrong; the Jews were not committing blasphemy. Jesus of Nazareth had died, resurrected, and was in fact God.

#### 2. “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Paul knew that he must stop persecuting the Jewish people, so he asked God for guidance. God instructed him to go into the city, where He had prepared a disciple to help Paul. Once in Damascus, God used Ananias to lay hands on Paul that he may regain his sight, receive the Holy Spirit, and receive baptism (Acts 9:12, 17–18). More importantly, God revealed to Ananias exactly how He wanted to use Paul. Paul was going to be:

- “A chosen vessel of [God] to bear [His] name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15)
- A minister (Acts 26:16)
- A witness (Acts 26:16)
- Sent to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21; 26:17)

How was Paul prepared for his calling? As a trained Pharisee, he had extensive knowledge of the Scriptures. As a Roman citizen, his status allowed him to travel across the Roman Empire with ease. His education and citizenship meant that he had the best of both worlds; he could speak and write eloquently on the law of God, as well as articulate the same in the dominant language of the nations at that time—Greek.

God had great plans for Paul, but despite his training and education as a Pharisee and Roman citizen, he wasn’t ready to begin his ministry immediately. Paul wrote that he did not travel to Jerusalem with the apostles but went to Arabia before returning to Damascus. In fact, it was three years before Paul traveled to Jerusalem to see Peter (Gal 1:17–18). During these three years, Paul prepared for the ministry by meditating on God’s word and praying for understanding of the mysteries (Eph 3:1–3). In the end, it took Paul years before he embarked on his first missionary journey or wrote his first letter.

### **C. Paul’s Ministry: “Poured out as a drink offering”**

*(Teachers: Display Figure 3 for students to examine.)*

When God first appeared to Paul, he had a special mission for him. From the moment of his birth, Paul had been set apart by God to go to the Gentiles and proclaim the gospel to all nations (Rom 15:15–16; Gal 1:15–16; Eph 3:1; Acts 13:2–3). Paul went on three, possibly four, missionary journeys, none of which had an appointed return date. Each time, Paul departed with his coworkers and taught the gospel of God wherever the Holy Spirit led them.

On these missionary journeys, Paul preached to those willing to listen, first to the Jewish in the synagogues, then to the wider population in the cities. He also performed miracles and wrote letters of encouragement to the brethren he met. So, his ministry was evangelical, pastoral, and literary.

Paul used Antioch as his “base of operations” (*mark on the map for students to see*); at the end of each journey, he would return here and report to the apostles.

1. First missionary journey  
In Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the Holy Spirit. They began by traveling to familiar locations, such as Barnabas’ home region Cyprus. Many believe that Paul wrote his first epistle, to the Galatians, on this journey.
2. Second missionary journey  
For this journey, Paul journeyed with a new coworker named Silas. Led by the Holy Spirit, they were sent even further out, preaching to the region of Macedonia and beyond. During this time, he spent eighteen months in Corinth, where he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
3. Third missionary journey  
Paul spent three years in Ephesus. Over the course of this journey, he wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians,

and Romans as he continued to pastor and evangelize in the regions of Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia.

On these three missionary journeys, Paul labored next to many coworkers, among whom were Barnabas, Silas, Mark, Timothy, Titus, Priscilla, Aquila, and Epaphroditus.

After his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem one more time, even though God revealed to him that the Jews sought to kill him. Once in Jerusalem, he was arrested and spent years imprisoned in northern Israel before making a journey to Rome, where he was placed under house arrest, continuing his imprisonment. While imprisoned, Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon, collectively known as the prison epistles.

Near the end of his life, Paul wrote three pastoral letters to workers he considered to be sons in the faith, Timothy and Titus. His final letter was 2 Timothy, where he used a phrase commonly quoted to describe his life of service. Let us turn to 2 Timothy 4:6–7 and Philippians 2:16–17. This “drink offering” symbolized Paul giving his all to God. The same zeal that had driven Paul to persecute the early church had been transformed into devotion towards Jesus’ calling to preach to the Gentiles.

***Did You Know?***

During Paul’s time, “Scripture” referred strictly to what we know as the Old Testament (2 Tim 3:16). However, the revelations of God that the Lord gave to Paul, and the mysteries that he articulated were so profound that even Peter commented on them (2 Pet 3:15–16).

**D. Paul’s Character**

How can we describe Paul after all this study?

1. He was incredibly zealous and devoted to the faith, as both a Pharisee (Acts 8:1–3) and an apostle (2 Cor 12:15; Phil 1:23–25; Gal 4:19; 1 Thess 2:11–12).
2. Paul was eloquent, sharp-minded, and bold in speaking the truth of the word of God (Acts 9:28–29; 14:12; 2 Cor 10:10; Gal 2:14). We can especially see this in the precision with which he explained the gospel in his writings.
3. Paul was faithful to the end of his ministry; he served until his life had finished its course (1 Cor 4:1–2; 2 Tim 2:1–2, 10, 14).

We can see through his life that God prepared Paul for this work—even before Paul knew what was in store! But once God called Paul, he faithfully followed and completed it with all his time, strength, and ability.

***Check for Understanding***

1. **Before Paul converted to Christianity, who was he and what was he doing?** He was a Pharisee, someone who studied and taught the law of God. He persecuted the church because he believed they were teaching heresies.
2. **What were the two questions that Paul asked God on the road to Damascus?** “Who are You, Lord?” “Lord, what do You want me to do?”
3. **What was God’s calling for Paul?** God called Paul to serve as a chosen vessel, to minister, and to witness to the Gentiles.

- 4. How did God prepare Paul for this work?** As a Pharisee, Paul studied the law of God meticulously. As a Roman citizen and native of Tarsus, Paul was able to move about the Roman Empire easily and preach to other nations in fluent Greek. After his calling, Paul prepared by withdrawing to Arabia and Damascus to receive wisdom and revelation from God.
- 5. Describe Paul's character in his service.** Devoted, zealous, sharp-minded, able to speak the word of God boldly, and faithful.

### *Life Application*

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#### **1. Serve God according to His time and His will**

As J1 students, what can we do for God? The church and our classes may give us simple tasks to help the church run smoothly. While these tasks may not seem to make a difference to us, we can learn the value of an obedient servant by following through with them (Phil 2:7–8; Lk 17:7–10).

#### **2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit in conduct and speech**

When Jesus ordered His disciples to wait in Jerusalem, He said that the disciples would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they would become His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Today, since we are the servants of God, the Holy Spirit will empower us in the same way. So, we must ensure that we walk in the Spirit, listen keenly to the word of God, and pray unceasingly so that God may work His great power in us and make us witnesses in our schools and in society.

#### **3. Faithfully and diligently study the word of God**

Though Paul already had extensive knowledge regarding the Scriptures, he still spent time after being called to study them more deeply. Today, God also seeks for us to be faithful workers. To do this, we cannot rely on our passion to be our sole motivation; after all, Paul was exceedingly zealous for God as a Pharisee. Rather, we must read the word of God carefully and often, to understand the sound doctrines passed down to us (Tit 1:9). Only in this way can we become qualified servants of God.

### **Testimony**

*In the name of Jesus, I bear testimony. When I entered junior high school, a few friends that I looked up to introduced me to rap music. By the time I was in year seven, I was listening to rap music almost exclusively. The music I listened to and the culture it embodied influenced me to be a young man that spoke very crudely, often swearing and generally acting in a way opposite to what I had learned. Throughout these years, I still prayed for the Holy Spirit each Sabbath, but it wasn't with a genuine desire for God to fill my life and lead me. When I was in year nine, I was moved by the Holy Spirit, and feeling God's presence inspired me to diligently pray and change my behavior. Praise God, He gave me His promised Holy Spirit, and I resolved to change the way I spoke and acted, and even the music I listened to. But I still found it challenging to read the Bible, finding other novels or computer games more interesting.*

*That year, I attended one of my first overnight spiritual convocations. I had a lot of problems weighing on my heart, so I remember saying to myself that I would wake up early and pray to God. That morning, I woke up at 6 am as the sun was rising at the crack of dawn. But to my surprise, when I woke up someone was already up, outside in the classroom. It was the pastor, sitting there reading the Bible by the window. And it was then that I learned the value of waking up early, setting aside a quiet time—before my brain was flooded with TV shows and other stimulation—to use this time to search God and read His words.*

*That spiritual convocation was one of the pivotal moments of finding my faith in my teenage years. I was able to feel the nearness of God in prayer, in Bible reading and in the lessons, and these foundational principles would guide my growth through high school. Hallelujah! All glory to God!*

- Anonymous

### **Memory Verse**

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“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

### **Context**

Paul is passing on to Timothy the requirements for an approved worker of God.

### **Meaning**

1. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God”  
Service is a privilege. Just because we are baptized into Christ does not automatically mean we can serve Him regardless of our own behavior and conduct. Rather, we must make every effort to put aside our sin, our weaknesses, and worldly distractions so that we can be a vessel ready for every good work (2 Tim 2:21).
2. “a worker who does not need to be ashamed”  
We are stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1). As God’s stewards, one day we will stand before Him, held accountable for everything we have done in this world. Have we accomplished what God has called us to do? Are we responsible in every work entrusted to us?
3. “rightly dividing the word of truth”  
We must carefully hold on to sound doctrine when we interpret the Bible and speak to others of its teachings. This starts by first having correct knowledge and a deep understanding and wisdom regarding the word of God. Unless we spend time studying the Bible, we cannot possibly hope to interpret the word of truth correctly.

### **Conclusion**

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Paul’s life serves as a reminder to us on three fronts.

- First – God is in control of all our lives. Whenever He places events in our lives, He does so to prepare us so that we can carry out the good work that He wills for us.
- Second – God will send us to do the work that He wills. We cannot pick and choose how we wish to serve God, for we are only unworthy servants. Instead, in everything entrusted to us, we should put in our best effort to glorify God.
- Third – We must keep God’s words in our hearts. Only when we hold fast to sound doctrine and have a firm grasp of the word of God can we faithfully follow Him until the very end.

## Lesson 9 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. In your own words, explain the requirements for an approved worker of God.  
*We cannot ignore our behavior and conduct. Rather, we must put aside our sin, weaknesses, and worldly distractions to be a vessel ready for every good work. As stewards, we will be held accountable for everything we have done. Thus, we should act so that we will not be ashamed when we stand before God in judgment.*
2. What did God tell Ananias He had in store for Paul? Provide biblical references.
  - a. *A chosen instrument of God's, before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15)*
  - b. *A servant (Acts 26:16)*
  - c. *A witness (Acts 26:16)*
  - d. *Sent to the Gentiles (Acts 26:17), repeated again 3 years later in Jerusalem (Acts 22:21)*
3. How did Paul prepare himself for the ministry? How can we prepare ourselves to serve God?  
*He waited three years before meeting other brethren, first receiving the revelation of God in Arabia. Study the Bible diligently and learn what we can from workers around us.*
4. What were Paul's characteristics during his service to God?  
*Zealous, passionate, devoted to faith.  
Sharp-minded, eloquent, unafraid to speak the word of God to correct someone.  
Faithful until the end, completing what God had willed for him.*
5. Choose one of the above aspects and explain: (a) Why you think this aspect is important, and (b) How can you improve in it.  
*Personal answers.*
6. Why is serving God important to you? What can you do to ensure you remain as faithful as Paul?  
*Personal answers.*

Figure 1

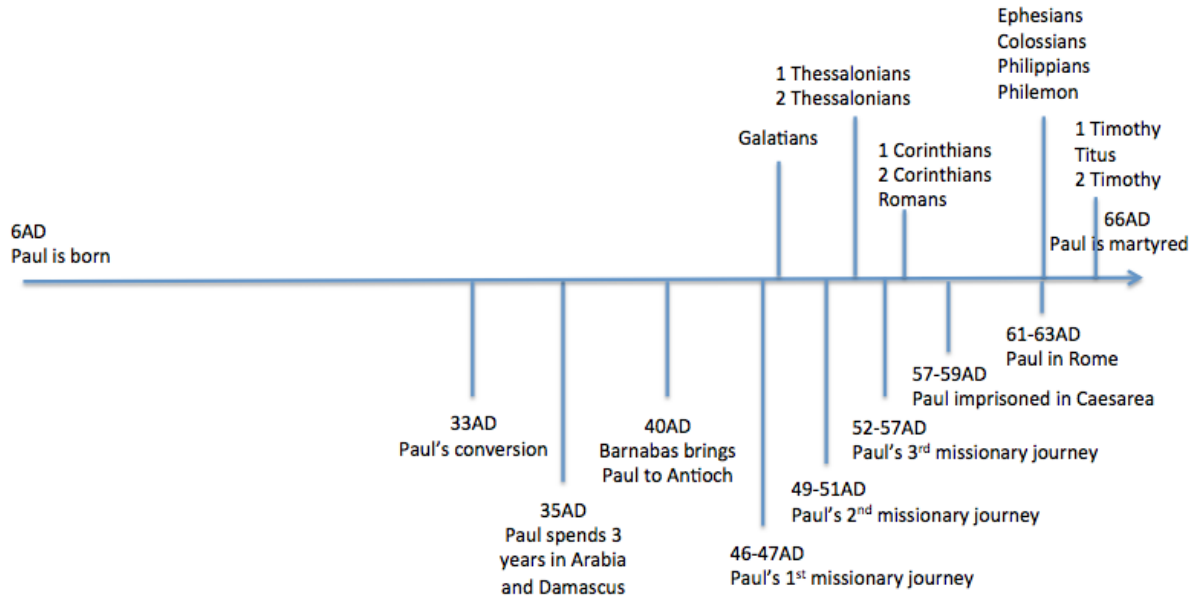


Figure 2: Timeline for Secondary Reference <sup>1</sup>

AD	34	37	46-47	48-49	50	51-53	53-54	54-57	57	57-59	59-60	60-62	62-66	66-67	
Conversion Damascus Arabia	Jerusalem Visit Tarsus, Syria, Cilicia	Antioch, Relief Visit Jerusalem	First Missionary Journey & Antioch	Jerusalem Council & Antioch	Second Missionary Journey	Antioch	Third Missionary Journey	Jerusalem Arrest	Caesarea Prisoner	Journey to Rome	Rome House Arrest	Fourth Missionary Journey	Arrest Rome	Martyred	
ACTS	9	11	13-14	15	16-18	19-21	22-23	24-26	27-28	28					
	3 Years Arabia		1 year Antioch		18 months Corinth			3 Years Ephesus		2 Years		2 Years			
LETTERS			Galatians		1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians			1 Corinthians 2 Corinthians Romans		Ephesians Colossians Philemon Philippians		1 Timothy Titus 2 Timothy			
ROMAN EMPERORS	Tiberius---Caligula---Claudius				Nero										
ROMAN PROCURATORS	Tiberius Alexander		Venditidius Cumanus			Antonius Felix (wife, Drusilla)			Porcius Festus						
ROMAN PROCONSULS			Sergius Paulus Proconsul of Cyprus		Gallio Proconsul of Achaia										
MAJOR EVENTS	Herod Agrippa persecutes the church		Famine in Judea		Jews banished from Rome by Claudius			Claudius poisoned by his wife		Roman General Corbulo invades Armenia, captures Artaxata and Tigranocerta.			Nero burns Rome, persecutes Christians, and Jewish Revolt of 66 starts Jewish Wars		
	Caligula orders his image set up and worshiped at Jerusalem Temple, but dies preventing it.														

<sup>1</sup> Bob Conway, "Paul's Ministry Timeline," *Life of the Apostle Paul*, September 25, 2013 <http://lifeofapostlepaul.com/chronology-pauls-life/pauls-ministry-timeline/>



Figure 3: Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Conforming to Jesus Ministry, "Paul's Missionary Journeys Map," *Biblical Maps*, 2018, [https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/paul%27s\\_journeys\\_map.htm](https://www.conformingtojesus.com/charts-maps/en/paul%27s_journeys_map.htm)