

Bible Characters for Your Weekly Bible Study

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For week of January 25 - 31, 2010

Percival, Peggy, "**No persecutor or persecution in Love**," Christian Science Journal, Vol.99 (July 1981), p. 379.

--Have you ever felt persecuted?

- Maybe you have followed your highest sense of right, only to find that others have misinterpreted your intentions?

--Right now, if an unpleasant situation seems huge and unsolvable, you may be tempted to throw up your hands in despair and say, "Forget it. It's just too overwhelming."

--In his Sermon on the mount, Christ Jesus gave us two beatitudes that have specific importance:

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And

"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." [Matt 5: 10-12]

--As long as we are certain that what we are doing is righteous and motivated by love, and we endeavor to follow the leadings of Jesus, we can rejoice, knowing that the kingdom of heaven is ours.

- Our peace comes from the joy of knowing we have glorified God.

SECTION II: Saul the persecutor (Acts 8: 1 *And at*, 3)

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: In Judea and Samaria during the Period of Transition for the Early Church, 36-37 AD. Written by Luke probably before Paul's first Roman imprisonment @60-62 AD.

"Geographically, the new stage is focused around two poles. The apostles stay on in Jerusalem (vv,1,14); and Jerusalem remains a narrative focus through to ch. 12. But the rest of the church is 'scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria' (v.1)." (Oxford Bible Commentary)

"The persecution was launched by a leader of those Jews who were enraged by the apostles' inviting impure and non-Israelite people to enter the covenant community—by someone named Saul, later to be known as Paul (8:1-3)—but the movement continued." (Cambridge Companion to the Bible)

Saul
(Sawl)

(Abbreviated)

After Jesus himself, Paul is the most important figure in the history of Christianity. Although a Jew, in Tarsus [**south central Turkey**], an important city of Cilicia, Paul, whose original name was Saul, was born a Roman citizen. He was a tentmaker. All the influences about him from the beginning—Jewish, Greek, Roman—contributed, apart from any consciousness or intention on his part to fit him for the work of his life.

His Conversion. “Paul’s name was actually Saul, appropriate since his ancestry was of the tribe of Benjamin (Rom 11:1). (All the People of the Bible) As a young man, he sought out and persecuted Christians. The conversion of Saul is regarded as a miraculous event.

Near Damascus [Syria]

“At the height of Paul’s campaign of repression, he was confronted on the road to Damascus by the risen Christ.” (Who Was Who in the Bible)

Saw a Great Light

Saul Was Blinded

Christ’s Rebuke

Saul’s Reply

Was Led to Damascus

Fasted and Prayed

Ananias Sent to Him: A Christian disciple named Ananias was sent to Saul and baptized him, and from that point on he received his sight, his name was changed to Paul, and he preached Christ in the synagogues.

Was Baptized....

“men and women committed them to prison”

“Acts relates four times that, prior to Paul’s conversion, he persecuted and imprisoned the followers of Jesus. In Acts 8:3; 9:2; and 22:4, men and women...are explicitly targeted: in Acts 26:10, Paul proclaims in a speech before King Agrippa and Bernice that he had previously imprisoned ‘many of the saints.’” (Women in Scripture)

Leishman, Thomas L., “[Background of Saul of Tarsus](#) (Part I),” THE CONTINUITY OF THE BIBLE: Paul the Missionary Apostle, Christian Science Journal, Vol.92 (October 1974), p. 601.

--The life and work of Paul, often referred to by his Hebrew name of Saul, is a subject which, in importance, is second only to the consideration of the ministry of Christ Jesus himself.

--Jesus’ immediate disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, and the rest of the eleven who remained faithful to him, played an important part in spreading the gospel, the “good news” of Christianity, throughout Palestine and probably into Asia Minor, while tradition has it that Peter went as far afield as Rome.

• But it is Paul who has won for himself the proud titles of the “Missionary Apostle” and the “Apostle of the Gentiles.”

---It was he more than any other who carried the teachings of the Messiah into the Gentile world as a universal religion. Thus, when we examine what is told of the society, or church, of Jesus’ followers after their Master’s ascension—those followers for whom the men of Antioch in Syria invented what was then the contemporaneous term “Christian”—one name stands out more clearly than all the rest, the name of Paul.

Bennett, Stokes Anthony, “[Freedom](#),” Christian Science Journal, Vol.10 (January 1917), p. 565.

--THERE is no subject of such vital interest to humanity as that of freedom. The universal demand and endeavor is for a greater, truer freedom than is today experienced, and there is manifestly much need of some better, surer means for obtaining it than is in general use.

--In this connection Mrs. Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science, writes as follows in the textbook, "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" (p. 227): "*Discerning the rights of man,*

we cannot fail to foresee the doom of all oppression. Slavery is not the legitimate state of man. God made man free...Love and Truth make free, but evil and error lead into captivity."

--Paul had found from pointed experience what it means to be condemned through failure to be "*in Christ Jesus,*"—that is, through walking after the flesh, and not after the Spirit. As we remember, there was a time when the apostle (then Saul of Tarsus) was bitterly opposed to the Master and his mission, and when as a consequence he taunted, harassed, and persecuted the Master's followers. In the eighth chapter of Acts we read: "*As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.*" This was indeed the time when he was condemned.

“**The Lectures**” LECTURES, Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.14 (13 January 1912), p. 392.

--Bible students are familiar with the story of Saul of Tarsus, who went about persecuting the early Christians, and even found delight in having them condemned to death.

• Yet, when Saul was touched by Truth he was quickly converted, and under the name of Paul became one of the foremost disciples in the ministry of Jesus.

---The membership of the Christian Science church is made up, to a greater or less extent, of men and women who opposed, more or less bitterly, what they believed Christian Science to be; yet, when their understanding began to receive impressions of the real meaning of Christian Science, they might be heard to exclaim: "And this is Christian Science! How beautiful it is, and how different from anything I had imagined it to be."

SECTION III: Saul's visitation by Ananias, the servant of God, in Damascus (Acts 9: 10-13, 15, 17, 18)

RELATED SCRIPTURE: Acts 22: 3-21; 24:14; 26:2-23

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: The period of transition for the early church, 37 AD, in and near Damascus.

“The conversion of Saul of Tarsus from persecutor to missionary is so important to the author of Acts that he offers three separate accounts of it (cf. 22:3-21 and 26:2-23 with 9:1-19).” (Abingdon Commentary)

"The term 'conversion' is anachronistic and misleading if we think of it in terms of a change from one religion to another. Christianity was not at this stage a distinct religion in the modern sense but a sect within the Second Temple Judaism, promoting one among a number of contested Jewish identities (Acts 24:14)." (Oxford Bible Commentary)

“The only other mention of Damascus in Paul's letters is at II Cor 11:32, where he describes being let down over the walls in a basket as an example of the humiliating position an apostle might find himself in. This must refer to the same episode (it could hardly have happened twice), but the details are different: in Paul's account, it is not 'the Jews' but the ethnarch (local commissioner) of Aretas who watches the gates to prevent his escape.” (Oxford Commentary)

Ananias *putting his hands on him* (v.17) does this “for healing his blindness (9:12), not for the commissioning (see 13:1-3) or for receiving the Holy Spirit (see 8:18).” (People's NT Commentary)

Ananias

[Ān a nī'as] (Jehovah has been gracious)

Ananias was a common Jewish name; the same as Hananiah. Three men by the name of Ananias are mentioned in the Bible—all in the New Testament, and all in the Acts of the Apostles

This week's lesson refers to "a Christian disciple living in Damascus at the time of Paul's conversion (Acts 9:10-18; 22:12-16)." (Who Was Who in the Bible) "He is described as a 'disciple, but the particular term used...usually implies a new convert rather than an established follower.'" (All the People in the Bible) "Ananias receives a vision to go to Saul, now blind in Damascus, and lay hands on him that he might receive his sight." (Eerdmans Dictionary) He reluctantly restores Saul's vision. "He became Paul's instructor; but when or by what means he himself became a Christian we have no information. He was 'a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt' at Damascus." (Easton Bible Dictionary)

Battersby, James Rothwell, "[The Street Called Straight](#)," Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.46 (2 December 1944), p. 1927.

--Recently the writer had the privilege of walking along the famous street called Straight in Damascus.

- He could not help wondering what message lay behind the name which it has preserved since the days when Paul was divinely led there and from whence he started his illustrious career.

--Obviously it is a straight street in the generally accepted sense of the word.

- It is typical of an undeviating purpose, which turns neither to the right nor to the left and has one object in view—to preserve an unbroken line.

--Does this not symbolize Christian Science, whose teachings reveal the need of continually keeping to the straight and narrow path of Truth?

Kidder, Rushworth M, "[Ananias](#)," POEM, Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.78 (17 January 1976), p. 99.

"I heard you, Lord: '*Heal him*'
But...may I say a word?
This Saul—haven't I heard
about Jerusalem
and how he scorched us there—
the violence, terror, or despair?"

Ananias,
what matters to us
nineteen centuries since
is that you shattered such logic
and listened.
Routing your own resistance, you trusted,
freeing the verse of your heart
with the rhythm of intuition.
Love-led, you dared face hatred with compassion.

Not that you didn't question—
we all have. But out of that blaze
you came, wide-eyed and childlike,
to uncritical innocence....

SECTION V: Paul, in the custody of Julius, travels from Caesarea to Sidon en route to Rome, and is shipwrecked (Acts 27: 1, 2 [to ;], 41)

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: The voyage to Rome occurred @60 AD. Luke wrote the Acts of the Apostles @60-62 AD.

“Along with other prisoners Paul is sent to Rome. He is in the custody of Julius, a centurion of the Augustan [cohort], which was stationed in Caesarea about this time..” (Interpreter’s One-volume Commentary)

“This narrative is the most detailed account of an ancient voyage which we possess, and is our principal source of knowledge of the art of navigation as [practiced] by the ancients.” (Dummelow Commentary)

“The use of the pronoun ‘we’ [v.1] marks the return of Paul’s close friend Luke, who had been absent since 21:18.” (MacArthur Bible Commentary)

“The modern reader requires a map in order to locate the numerous geographical references [such as *Adrayttium* (inlet of Aegean Sea on west coast of Turkey), v.2] referred to in this section. The geography throughout is accurately described. The story also manifests a thorough awareness of travel routes and sailing strategies.” (People’s NT Commentary)

Paul
[Pawl]

(Abbreviated)

Voyage to Rome (@60 AD)

“After appearing before the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem, and before Felix and Festus at Caesarea, he was compelled to protest against injustice and delay (he had been a prisoner fully two years) by exercising his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to the Emperor. The voyage to Rome is told by an eye-witness.” (Funk & Wagnalls Bible Dictionary)

“Paul’s voyage to Rome was long and perilous, involving storms, shipwrecks, and encounters with enemies.” (People’s NT Commentary)

The Storm

“There is now a real danger that they will be blown all the way down to the Syrtis sandbars near the coast of Cyrene (on the north coast of Africa).” (In the Steps of Paul)

The Vision

The Shipwreck

On the island of Melita [Malta]

"Like the Lycaonians of [Acts]14:11, they [the Maltese] are portrayed as kindly but superstitious folk, taking Paul's imperviousness to snakebite as an indication of divine status (v.6)." (Oxford Bible Commentary)

It was here that he healed Publius’ father of a fever.

Julius

[Jew’lee us](Lat. name of a Roman clan)

“In the book of Acts, Luke pays a great deal of attention to the pagan Julius, a Roman centurion of an imperial regiment (Acts 27:1).” (All the People in the Bible) Julius was “the centurion of the Augustan cohort, or the emperor's body-guard, in whose charge Paul was sent as a prisoner from Caesarea to Rome. He entreated Paul "courteously," showing in many ways a friendly regard for him.” (Easton Bible Dictionary)

“At Crete he did not believe Paul’s prediction of the coming storm (v. 11), but after the tempest broke he heeded Paul’s advice and kept the sailors from forsaking the ship (v. 31).” (Westminster Dictionary)

“The historicity of Julius’ role is sometimes questioned since it is unlikely that a centurion of an auxiliary cohort would have been given charge over such an important prisoner or would have had such authority over the ship.” (Eerdmans Dictionary)

“**A Prayer for Two Tragedies**,” Christian Science Monitor (28 January 2005), p. 18.

--In an effort to get my bearings, I turned to a Bible story—a disaster in the making with a last-minute swerve for the better.

- It ended in a healing outcome.

---It’s the New Testament account where Paul, then a prisoner, is caught at sea in a fierce storm that proves to be too much for the vessel and for her crew.

--In a way, this single episode might have produced a double-tragedy day all by itself.

- The soldiers on board had orders to kill Paul and the other prisoners if events turned dire.

---Paul’s prayers had a double healing impact, saving the prisoners and their keepers.

• The Bible chapter concludes, “*The centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*” (Acts 27:43,44).

Twitchell, Pierrepont E., “**Paul and the Sailor**,” POEM, Christian Science Journal, Vol.70 (July 1952), p. 364.

He told us we should winter there in Crete.
Had we obeyed, we would have saved the ship.
Near Melita the cross tides roar and rip
Across the rocky shoals where two seas meet.
When we were wrecked, Paul nonetheless was sure
That we would all be saved. He seemed to know,
However wild the winter winds might blow,
In God’s dear love His children are secure;
And even while the ship swept to its doom,
The love of God still held him tenderly.
Surrounded by the raging of the sea,
He did not see the darkness and the gloom.

Paul’s strength and calm assurance make him seem
Like to a sturdy gallant ship with sails.
He trusts in God; his courage never fails.
He is a vessel strong in brace and beam.
He proves we have available at will
A haven safe from any raging storm,
Where we can rest and watch the scene transform
Until the sea of life is calm and still.

Pogson, Reuben, “**When the South Wind blows Softly**,” Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.8 (4 August 1906), p. 777.

--THE story of Paul's voyage and shipwreck has many lessons for the student of Christian Science.
--Most students of Christian Science take an occasional retrospective view of their journey Godward, and if sufficiently loosed from the bonds of egotism they can see the links in the chain of eternal truth which has been holding them to God and His universe.

- They then learn, often with dismay, that it was not when the storm of persecution seemingly hid the sun from their sight that they missed the succeeding links, but that often when their eyes were dimmed by undue contemplation of a personal victory, they were tricked into seeing angelic vestments where keen spiritual sight would have uncovered the nakedness of the fleshly lie. We need to be specially on guard when the soft south wind of human approval blows, for it may carry us away to meet a Euroclydon of passion and pain from which we are scarcely saved by the one pure thought that had been held as a prisoner, but which in the hour of storm and shipwreck must take command.

Paul heals the father of Publius and others on the island of Malta (Acts 28: 1, 7-10)

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: Written by Luke @60-62 AD. The event occurred during Paul's voyage to Rome on the island of Malta during the same time period.

Melita (**Malta**) [v.1] is “an island, seventeen miles long and nine miles wide, about sixty miles south of Sicily. None of the sailors had previously been to the bay (known today as St. Paul's Bay) where they were shipwrecked.” (MacArthur Bible Commentary)

“Paul heals the father of Publius by laying-on of hands with prayer (cf. 9:17; Lk 4:40). Healing is mediated with the same sign as ordination and the bestowal of the Pentecostal Spirit of prophecy and tongues.” (Peake's Commentary)

Publius

[Puhb'lee uhs]

Publius was “the chief man and a landowner on the island of Malta, when Paul was there. He entertained the apostle and his companions for 3 days. He was rewarded; for Paul by prayer and the laying on of hands cured the father of Publius of fever and dysentery (Acts 28:7-8). His name suggests that he was a Roman; and his title...seems to indicate that he was the highest Roman official on the island.” (New Westminster Dictionary)

“Jerome reports an early tradition that Publius became a Christian and was martyred.” (All the People in the Bible)

WAGERS, RALPH E. (CSB, Lecturer, Associate Editor, Normal Class Teacher, and President), “**They shall lay hands on the sick**,” EDITORIAL, Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.65 (19 January 1963), p. 109.

--Spiritual healing in Christian Science is wholly apart from physical contact and is not dependent upon any religious rite or ceremony.

- Leading up to a completely satisfying interpretation of Christ Jesus' statement, “*They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover*,” as recorded in the sixteenth chapter of Mark, Mrs. Eddy states (Miscellaneous Writings, p. 247): “*Everything that God created, He pronounced good. He never made sickness. Hence that is only an evil belief of mortal mind, which must be met, in every instance, with a denial by Truth.*”

--...metaphysical work is prayer in its highest sense.

--One may ask, “But how does prayer, this spiritual activity of thought in the interest of another, affect the mind and body of the one seeking help?”

--Laying on of hands is exercising the spiritual power which accompanies one’s love of God and of one’s neighbor.

- In one’s willing obedience to and consecrated communion with God, the illusions of material sense are made impotent to deceive and so are incapable of producing any effect.

Henniker-Heaton, Peter J. (Associate Editor), “[Prayer Heals Chills and Fever](#),” Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.78 (11 December 1976), p. 2191.

--The divine power expressed by Christ Jesus that enabled him to heal a case of fever [Peter’s wife’s mother] so instantly and completely was not unique to him.

- His immediate disciples had access to it, and there is evidence that some of his later followers did, too.

---We hear that Paul healed the father of Publius, the chief man of the island of Melita.

- This man was prostrate with fever and other alarming symptoms, and, according to the Bible account, “*Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.*” [Acts 28:8]

--The prayer that heals fever, chills, and all other discords is an attitude of thought shaped by Christly understanding.

- It involves the calm, clear awareness of what being really is—the Christianly scientific recognition of the presence of the perfect, spiritual universe and man created by God—and faith that the divine Father maintains health and harmony in His creation forever.

SECTION VI: Paul sends greetings and blessings to the Corinthians through Sosthenes (I Cor 1, 1, 3)

RELATED SCRIPTURE: Acts 18:12-17

TIME LINE AND AUTHOR: Written by Paul to the church at Corinth in the first half of 55 AD from Ephesus while on his 3rd missionary journey.

“Corinth was the capital of the Roman imperial province of Achaia [[Greece](#)] and a crossroads of culture, commerce, and politics.” (Theological Bible Commentary)

“Paul emphasizes his direct missionary vocation, couples with his own name that of a brother known at Corinth...reminds his readers of their call to lead a dedicated life, and includes in his appeal the members of all the churches in Achaia. They are to be united in reverent worship of Jesus as Lord, and in the brotherhood of the church. Greetings characteristic of the Greek and Hebrew worlds of thought (*grace, peace*) receive a new meaning when God is revealed in Christ.” (Abingdon Commentary)

Sosthenes

[Sos'thuh neez]

Sosthenes was “probably Paul’s secretary, a former leader of the Corinthian synagogue who had become a brother in Christ. On one occasion, he was beaten for bringing Paul before the civil court at Corinth (Acts 18: 12-17).” (MacArthur Bible Commentary)

Leishman, Thomas L., “[Paul’s Epistles to Corinth](#),” Christian Science Journal, Vol.59 (February 1942), p. 649.

--The Apostle Paul seems to have written no fewer than four letters to the Corinthian church, which was in dire need of his counsel and support.

- The earliest of these letters is mentioned in I Corinthians 5:9, where Paul refers to an epistle which he had previously sent them with reference to immoral practices within the church, and scholars feel that two brief fragments of it are now preserved in I Corinthians 6:12-20 and II Corinthians 6:14 to 7:1, passages in which the apostle pointedly reminds them that they are "*the temple of the living God*" and that their "*body is the temple of the Holy Ghost.*" Unfortunately, this plea for purity received little practical response, and a few months later, probably during 55 AD, Paul wrote his second letter, known to us as I Corinthians. Its opening chapters caution the men of Corinth against the continuance of unseemly party feeling in the church; while the apostle would have them beware lest mere intellectuality supplant true wisdom.

Charpiot, E.E., "A Perfect Man," Christian Science Sentinel, Vol.5 (15 August 1903), p. 1903.

--Materiality, error, sin, and evil are the mud which, for a season, may seem to hide the manifestation of man, but when, by "*the washing of regeneration,*" this mud has been removed, God's precious jewel (His likeness, or man) is brought forth in all its divine perfection, purity, and beauty.

- When by this washing the muddy or sinful mentality of the "*chief of sinners,*" called Saul of Tarsus, had been removed, the new man, the man of God, "*the second man*" "*the Lord from heaven,*" "*the hidden man,*" was revealed and was known as the immortal Paul, "*an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.*"

---By this baptism or washing, this new birth, this resurrection, this putting on of the new man, the chief of sinners was cast into the lake of fire, a type of eternal destruction, and the new man, Paul, could say: "*The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*"

- As a ray of light issuing forth from the Sun of Righteousness, man cannot be deprived of his celestial resplendency.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

The Bibliography is provided only in the notes of the first Sunday of the month.

*The weekly Bible Lessons are made up of selections from the King James Version of the Bible and the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science.