

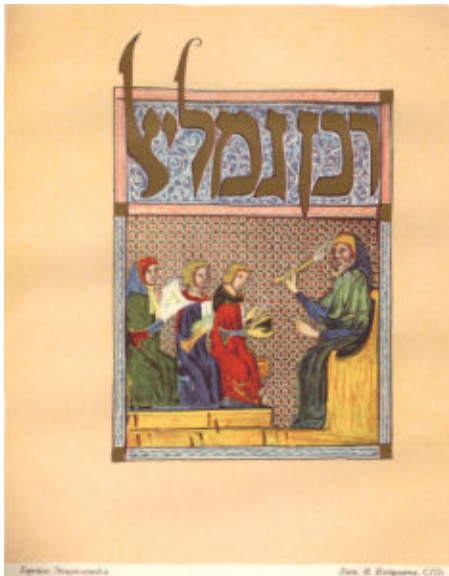
A Conversation With Paul

Introduction

We sat down recently with Stachys to interview Paul about his life, ministry, impact of his teaching, and concerns for today's world.¹

Interview

Stachys: So Paul, you had quite a life. Tell us a bit about your story.



Rabbi Gamaliel, Paul's teacher

Paul: Thank you. I grew up in Tarsus, in Cilicia, located in south central [Turkey](#). I was born a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3.5) and named Saul, after Israel's first king, who was of my tribe. I also was born with Roman citizenship, a benefit which would save my life (Acts 22.25-30). I demonstrated academic promise and was sent to Jerusalem to study to be a Pharisee under the famous Rabbi Gamaliel, grandson of the great Hillel (Acts 22.3).

Stachys: How did that go? Were you a good student?

Paul: Yes. I excelled. I became a member of the Council as soon as it was possible and advanced in Judaism above my peers (Galatians 1.14). I was (*smiling*) a “rising star.”

Stachys: You were present when Stephen came to trial before the Sanhedrin?

Paul: Yes. Quite a day. Stephen gave a brilliant summary of Israel’s history. He knew his Tanakh and one could not but be impressed with him. We killed him. I stood by the robes of those who stoned him (Acts 7.58).

Stachys: How did you feel about that?

Paul: I applauded it (Acts 8.1). I was zealous to uphold the Law.

Stachys: Was this action legal?

Paul: No. As Dr. Luke recounted, we were enraged. But blasphemy was punishable by death. The Council would have convicted Stephen. It was easy to rationalize our actions.

Stachys: So you were ok with this?

Paul: Definitely. I was committed to destroying those following Jesus of Nazareth, all of “the Way.” I broke into their houses, imprisoned, tortured, and killed them.

Stachys: Did you confine your actions to Jerusalem?

Paul: Initially, yes. But I had a burning zeal for our traditions. I went to the high priest and requested documents to authorize me to pursue followers of the Way beyond the borders of Israel. Once I obtained these letters I left for Damascus.

Stachys: How did that go?

Paul: Not as I expected. *(laughter)*



Paul: Apostle of Gentiles

Paul: As I neared Damascus—it was about noon—an intense light shown around me—so bright it dimmed the sun. I fell to the ground and heard a voice speaking to me in Hebrew which said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” I replied, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ The voice replied, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me’” (Acts 9.3-9, 22.6-11, 26.13-18).

Stachys: Wow. What next?

Paul: I was in shock. I could not see. I was blind.

Stachys: What about those with you? How were they affected?

Paul: They saw the light but were not blinded. They heard the sound of a voice but did not understand it. Since I was blind, they led me to Damascus to a house on Straight Street owned by

a man named Judas. I was blind for three days. I did not eat or drink. All I could do was pray. While in prayer, I had a vision: a man named Ananias came and laid his hand on me to give me my sight (Acts 9.11-12, 22.6-11).

Stachys: So did this happen?

Paul: Yes. While I was recovering, the Lord appeared to Ananias. He told him about me, where I was, and to come to me.

Stachys: Did he come?

Paul: Yes—but not without protest. He knew my reputation for ruthlessness. Ananias objected, saying, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name” (Acts 9.13-14). But the Lord calmed Ananias’ fears and said, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (Acts 9.15-16). Ananias obeyed and came to the house.

Stachys: Then what happened?

Paul: He placed his hands upon me and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ When I looked upon him he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard. Now, why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name’” (Acts 9.17-18, 22.13-16).

Stachys: Then what happened?

Paul: It was amazing. As soon as he spoke, I regained my sight. I was baptized. After this, I ate and began to regain my strength. While recovering, I visited with other believers and told them what had happened. When strong enough, I went to the synagogue and proclaimed Christ was the Son of God (Acts 9.20).

Stachys: That must have been a shock!

Paul: Quite. Those who heard me could not believe they were hearing Saul of Tarsus. They said, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" The Jews confronted me. They were what I had been just a few days before. When I showed them from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ they were confounded (Acts 9.20-22).

Stachys: The Lord has quite a sense of irony. After this happened, did you go to Jerusalem and consult with the Twelve?

Paul: Well, it is logical to think this would have been the first thing I did. But God had other plans for me. He sent me to Arabia—to the desert—to Sinai, where Moses received the Law (Galatians 1.16-17, 4.25). The risen Lord isolated me from the Twelve. He had a totally different purpose for me. He began to reveal what being "apostle of Gentiles" (Romans 11.13) meant. After I received His instruction, I left Arabia and returned to Damascus.

Stachys: What did you do there?

Paul: I continued to teach in the synagogues. The Jews could not refute my arguments so they plotted to kill me. I had become Stephen. Fortunately, I learned of this plot and escaped at night with the help of the disciples. They lowered me down the city wall in a large basket.

Stachys: More excitement!

Paul: Well, even more was to come.

Stachys: What next?

Paul: I went to Jerusalem. I wished to fellowship with the believers there. But they were afraid of me and doubted I was a believer. Barnabas, however, believed me and took me to the those who had believed in Christ and described how I had seen the Lord on the road, that He had talked to me, and how in Damascus I had spoken boldly in His name (Acts 9.26-27).

Stachys: Did you meet with the Twelve?

Paul: Only Peter. I also met James—the Lord's half-brother, known as "James the Just." I stayed with Peter fifteen days (Galatians 1.18).

Stachys: What did you do while in Jerusalem?

Paul: I proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. The Hellenistic Jews opposed me and tried to kill me (Acts 9.29). One day, while praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' I protested saying, 'Lord, they know that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. When the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.' But the Lord said, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (Acts 22.17-21). It took me a long time to learn the truth of His words. I loved my people. I thought, if I, Saul of Tarsus, could be changed, they could. Surely they will listen to me! It was not to be.

Stachys: So how long did it take to learn this truth?



Paul defends himself before
King Agrippa and Bernice

Paul: It took a long time. I did not appreciate it fully until the Lord imprisoned me in Rome (Ephesians 3.1, 4.1). Luke recorded our missionary journeys in Acts and my priority of going to Jews first with the gospel. When they rejected it, I would turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13.13-47, 18.5-6, 28.17-29). I resisted God's warnings about going to Jerusalem (Acts 20.22-23, 21.4, 7-14) and got into trouble, just as the Holy Spirit had warned. To save myself from being killed by the Jews, I had to use my Roman citizenship and appeal my case directly to Caesar (Acts 22.22-29, 25.11). The Roman commander moved me from Jerusalem to Caesarea to foil another plot of the Jews to kill me. I was imprisoned there for two years and during that time I met Governors Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa. Finally, they sent me to Rome for my appeal to the Emperor. During the voyage, a terrible storm arose. It wrecked our ship but the Lord was with us and we lost no lives. When I arrived in Rome, I immediately met with the Jews—my final meeting with them. It became clear, just as the Lord said, that they would not listen (Acts 28.17-29). This was in about 61 A.D. For the next two years I was under house arrest (a rented house) as Rome's prisoner. During this time, I spoke with many of Caesar's guards. Several came to know the Lord (Philippians 4.22). Sometimes they wondered who was the prisoner.

(laughter)

Stachys: Can we talk about your teachings?

Paul: By all means. The Lord revealed to me doctrines, which I termed “secrets” ([μυστήριον](#)). I designated them so because that is what they were. The Lord had not revealed them to Israel’s prophets, nor to the Twelve. He also had kept them hidden during His earthly ministry. They were revelations the ascended Lord revealed exclusively to me.

Stachys: What were these secrets?

Paul: One was the gospel of the grace of God—that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (Acts 20.24; Galatians 1.11-12). Another was salvation by faith alone—believing the good news that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead for our justification (1 Corinthians 15.1-4).

Stachys: Peter and the Eleven did not know this gospel and salvation by faith alone?

Paul: No. Peter and the rest preached the gospel of the kingdom which had begun with John the Baptist. That gospel focused upon the *identity* of Christ—who He was—the Messiah, the Son of God. They looked for the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth with Christ ruling as King (Matthew 6.10). I received my gospel directly from the risen Lord (Galatians 1.11-12). It focused upon His *work*—that He died for our sins and rose from the dead. The faith part of the gospel of the kingdom was believing Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 16.16; John 11.27; Acts 8.37). But in addition, that gospel also required repentance, keeping the Law, and water baptism for salvation (Mark 1.4, 16.16; Luke 10.25-28; Acts 2.38; Acts 15.1, 5). My gospel (Romans 2.16, 16.25; Galatians 2.2, 7; 2 Corinthians 4.3; 2 Thessalonians 2.14; 2 Timothy 2.8) requires but one thing: trust in the death and resurrection of Christ. When Peter preached the Lord’s death, he did not preach it as good news but as a Jewish crime (Acts 2.22-24, 3.13-15). He demanded the nation repent of it (Acts 2.36-38). For Peter, the significance of the Lord’s resurrection was He could return and establish His kingdom on

earth—if the Jewish people would repent (Acts 3.19-20, 25-26). The gospel the Lord gave me proclaims His death and resurrection as *good* news (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). My gospel is a gospel of grace and faith alone (Romans 1.16-17, 3.22, 26, 28, 4.5; Ephesians 2.8-9; 1 Corinthians 15.1-4). The Twelve had no idea Christ's death and resurrection had paid for the sins of the world and that God had reconciled the world to Himself (2 Corinthians 5.14-21). This truth remained hidden until the glorified Lord revealed it to me. The Twelve learned this truth from me (2 Peter 3.15-16).

Stachys: Wow. That's not what most people have been taught.

Paul: Well, that's not my fault (*smiling*). I wrote these things in my letters. They are there for anyone to read. In my first letter to Timothy, I wrote I was the first ([πρῶτος](#)), God's prototype or pattern ([ὑποτύπῳσις](#)), for those who would follow in this new salvation (1 Timothy 1.15-16). To the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 3.10-11, I expressed this truth with an illustration of architecture. I wrote them, "as a wise master-builder, I laid the foundation" (ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα). The foundation is Christ Himself, specifically His work on the cross and resurrection. The Church, the body of Christ, is the creation which came into being based on His death and resurrection. The Lord also revealed to me many other truths He had kept hidden.

Stachys: What were these?

Paul: Well, to continue, one was the Church, the body of Christ, in which those who believe my gospel become members of His body. No difference exists between Jew and Gentile in this relationship (Galatians 3.27-28). This was unknown to the Twelve.

Stachys: Peter did not know about the Church? Some teach that the Church came out of Peter.

Paul: Well, no one thought so in my day, especially Peter.

Peter knew nothing of the Church. Peter and the rest of the Twelve never had a ministry to Gentiles. Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote to Jews and never mentioned the Church, the body of Christ, in their letters. Peter left Jerusalem to visit Cornelius only through direct communication and prodding from the Lord. And after he returned, the believing Jews in Jerusalem upbraided him for having gone (Acts 10-11). God designated *me* as the apostle of the Gentiles (Romans 11.13) and designated the Twelve as apostles of Israel (Matthew 19.28; Galatians 2.7-9). The ascended Christ revealed to me, not Peter or the other apostles, the secret of the Church, the body of Christ (Ephesians 3.2-7; 1.22-23; Colossians 1.19; 1 Corinthians 12.12-27; Galatians 3.28).

Stachys: The Church did not begin at Pentecost?

Paul: Read Luke's account. What is the definition of the Church, the body of Christ? It is that body in which Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ. Whom did Peter address at Pentecost? Jews or Gentiles? He addressed Jews. Pentecost, or the Festival of Weeks, was a Jewish feast day, held 50 days after Passover. Peter called on the Jewish nation to repent from the murder of the Messiah (Acts 2.5, 14, 22, 36-39). If this was the birth of the Church, why did Peter not address Gentiles? We find the same thing in Peter's second sermon, in Acts 3. He addressed Jews only (Acts 3.12, 25). Throughout his messages, he quoted the prophets. The Jewish prophets meant nothing to Gentiles. If the Church came into existence at Pentecost, why did no evangelism of Gentiles occur? Read the Scriptures. Peter and the Twelve *never* had a ministry to Gentiles.

Stachys: Few seem to know this. What else?

Paul: The Lord revealed to me that when one believes my gospel he is identified in Christ's death and in His resurrection (Romans 6.3-5, 8). This identification is the basis of our hope of resurrection and the key to victory in the Christian

life (Romans 6.6-7). Peter and the other apostles knew nothing of this identification truth—of believers being baptized and identified in His death and resurrection.

Stachys: Other truths?

Paul: Several more. The Lord revealed that the one who believes my gospel is under new administration: Grace, not Law (Romans 6.14). God gave the Mosaic Law to Israel, not to Gentiles. The Law's primary purpose was to condemn and to reveal sin. It had no power to make one better. Peter and the Eleven continued to practice Judaism under the Law of Moses. They knew nothing of a new administration of Grace which replaced the Mosaic Law. Peter finally understood at the Council of Jerusalem that through *my* gospel one is saved by trusting in Christ's death and resurrection alone, apart from the works of the Law. Once he saw this, he sided with me (Acts 15.7-11).

Stachys: The Law was bad?

Paul: Heavens, no! The Law was holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7.12). The problem was not with the Law but with us. This is another truth the Lord revealed to me alone. The nature we inherit from Adam cannot keep the Law. I learned this truth through hard experience and wrote about it in Romans 7. When the Law encounters our fallen, Adamic nature it excites sin. It does so because our fallen nature, which I also called the flesh, is in rebellion against God (Romans 7.8, 11, 21, 23, 25). To counter this and conform us into the image of Christ, God has given us a new nature (Romans 7.22; 2 Corinthians 5.17) and placed us under the administration of grace (Romans 6.14). By this arrangement, we can more ably obey Christ. This new relationship operates through faith, hope, and love. The love of Christ constrains us (2 Corinthians 5.14) and through the superintending work of the Holy Spirit, God transforms and sanctifies us to Himself (Romans 8.29), in a way the Law never could (Galatians

5.16-26). We are to “reckon” or “consider” ([λογίζομαι](#)) ourselves dead to sin but alive to God (Romans 6.11). This is an act of faith and the key to sanctification and living the Christian life.

Stachys: What about national Israel? What is their future? Do they have a future?

Paul: Yes! God’s covenants and purposes for Israel will be fulfilled. When God establishes a plan and makes a promise, He keeps it (Romans 11.29). At present, national Israel is blind. God revealed this secret to me and I wrote about it in Romans 9-11. When God called Abraham, He began a new program. He laid the foundation for the creation of the Jewish people. He revealed Himself to them and gave them covenantal promises. God promised they would become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19.6; Isaiah 61.4-6). He promised they would become the preeminent nation upon the earth and that He Himself will reign as their King and rule the earth (Deuteronomy 28.1, 13; Zechariah 14.9). But at the present time, they are blind (Romans 11.7-8). God removed them (they removed themselves by rejecting Him) from the place of blessing and placed Gentiles into that position. But God will reestablish them into the place of blessing (Romans 11.11-12, 25-27). One day, they will recognize Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. They will repent and be saved (Matthew 23.37-39; Zechariah 12.10-14, 13.6; Romans 11.26). The prophecies and all God’s promises to Israel will be fulfilled. But this cannot occur until the Lord removes the Church, the body of Christ (Romans 11.25-26). Therefore, the future of Israel is bright!

Stachys: What do you mean, “removes the Church?”



The Ἀρπάζω: the resurrection of believers of Paul's gospel.

Paul: We can close with this secret—the believer's great hope (Titus 2.13)—the return of the Lord and the resurrection of our bodies. People get confused about the subject of the Lord's return. The Lord revealed to me His return for His Church, the body of Christ. This return was a secret and an entirely different event from His return which the prophets taught and which He taught in His earthly ministry. That return will occur at the end of the Tribulation, to deliver Israel and the nations. The return the Lord revealed to me comes *before* the Tribulation. The Lord will deliver the Church from His wrath (1 Thessalonians 1.10, 5.9). This return was secret (1 Corinthians 15.51). The Rapture and the 2nd Advent are separate events and cannot be harmonized. The word translated "Rapture" comes from the word [ἄρπάζω](#) I used when I taught the Thessalonians this wonderful truth (1 Thessalonians 4.13-18). It means to seize or snatch away, which describes what the Lord will do for believers—He will snatch them from the grave and from their mortal bodies and transform them to have resurrection bodies. In my follow-up letter (2 Thessalonians), I wrote to correct the false teaching that the persecution they were experiencing was the Tribulation, the Day of the Lord, I used the word ἀποστασία for "Rapture."

Stachys: Can you say a bit more why did you use these words? Snatch away and departure from what?

Paul: Jewish theology has two great themes: One is the kingdom of God on earth, in which Christ will rule and Israel will be supreme among the nations, and the other is the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord encompasses a long period. It begins with the seven-year Tribulation and continues to God's creation of the New Heavens and New Earth. But most of its focus is upon the Tribulation—when God will exercise His wrath upon the earth. David was the first to write about it in Psalm 2—which is a short course and summary of Jewish theology—no extra charge for that (*laughter*). But before God pours out His wrath upon the earth He will remove His body, the Church. No believer of my gospel will experience the judgments in those terrible seven years. I taught the Thessalonians this comforting truth (1 Thessalonians 1.10, 5.9) and used ἀρπάζω to describe how the Lord will “snatch away” believers to meet Him in the air before He begins to vex the earth. This amazing truth means one generation of believers will not experience physical death. I had hoped to experience this myself but had no idea the Lord would extend His program of the Church for so long. I used ἀποστασία to correct the false teaching the Thessalonians had received that they were experiencing the Tribulation. Believers will depart (ἀποστασία) before the Antichrist, the Beast is revealed (2 Thessalonians 2.1-3). They will experience none of the events of the seven years of God's wrath.

Stachys: Why do so few know these things? Why is there so much confusion?

Paul: Several reasons account for the confusion. The primary reason is the failure to recognize the vast differences in my ministry and the ministry of Peter and the Eleven, or put another way, God's program for Israel. When one reads my doctrines and the secrets the Lord revealed to me—God's program for the Church, the body of Christ—into His covenantal program for Israel, the result is confusion. The two programs are entirely different and cannot be mixed. If they are,

confusion results. I dealt with this regarding the gospel at the Council of Jerusalem in 51 A.D. Fortunately, God had prepared Peter for that battle long before, when He commanded him to go to Cornelius' house. Because God gave him that experience, he was able to grasp what I was saying and come to my aid. Beyond justification, on the matter of the believer's sanctification, I wrote the whole book of Galatians. The Galatians, influenced by the Judaizers, were being taught that believers of my gospel had to obey the Mosaic Law. They were abandoning my teachings of grace and placing themselves under the Law. They thought they could be conformed into the image of Christ through the Law. I fought that battle but lost. I lost all of Asia. I had spent so much time there—in Galatia, Ephesus, Colossae, Iconium, Derbe, Lystra, Antioch Pisidia—I lost them.

Stachys: You lost them?

Paul: Yes. It was a bitter pill and heart-wrenching to see these believers abandon their freedom in Christ and the truths of grace for the yoke of the Law. I wrote Timothy of this great tragedy (2 Timothy 1.15, 4.14-16). The syncretism in Christendom today—the mixing of Law and Grace, conflating God's program for the Church and His program for Israel, failure to distinguish the Rapture and the Second Coming, not understanding salvation by faith alone from salvation by faith and works, thinking God has replaced Israel with the Church, believing Peter and I preached the same gospel, the teaching that Peter and the Eleven ministered to Gentiles—I could go on—all these have their roots in the battle I fought in my lifetime. Confusion results from failure to understand the Scriptures—to understand my letters—to see God saved and commissioned me as THE apostle of the Gentiles and that with *me* He began an entirely new program, the Church, the body of Christ.

Stachys: Thank you. This is sobering. It also is an encouragement to concentrate on your letters and study the

truths the Lord revealed to you. Finally, what are your thoughts about today, what concerns you most?

Paul: I am the epitome of God's love and grace. I was so misguided. I thought I was doing God's will but had become a religious monster. But God loved me. He chose and commissioned me to reveal His grace and revelations He had kept secret—to all—Jews and Gentiles. God chose me to be to the Church what Abraham and Moses were to Israel. My greatest concern is for those without Christ, without hope, and without eternal life. God wishes all to be saved and come to the truth (1 Timothy 2.4). Christ has done all the work and has made salvation so simple. One need only trust in His work—in His death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15.1-4). Living the Christian life is not easy. But God has provided freedom in Christ. Peter noted at the Council of Jerusalem that the Law was a burden, a yoke (Acts 15.10). It was. I know. I was a Pharisee. But those who believe my gospel are under grace. They are free. God has given us the indwelling Holy Spirit to guide us. As we came to life by faith, we are to live by faith. God is Life. The more we trust Him the more alive we become. He is our blessed hope—and He is coming—soon!

¹ This fictional interview serves as a vehicle to present Paul's life and doctrines. Luke's account in Acts is distinctly Jewish and differs in emphasis from Paul's letters. Luke's intended audience was Jews and his purpose was to explain Israel's fall from God's favor and why the kingdom of God did not come. Paul's letters addressed Gentiles primarily. In them, we find Church doctrine—doctrines the risen Lord gave for the Church, the body of Christ.

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