

# From Saul to Paul

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## His transformation and our own

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### Chapter 1: The curtain rises

It happened before their eyes, but it was so difficult to assimilate that it seemed like a vision. They were watching one of the most remarkable scenes in all human history. Even this phrase seems too poor to describe it. Before their very eyes, the risen Christ ascended to heaven. They watched it all until a cloud hid him from their sight.

At first they could hardly believe it. It seemed like only yesterday that a group of women led by Mary Magdalene had told the apostles the news of the resurrection. But it was impossible, something crazy. Peter and John struck out running to the gravesite, only to find an empty tomb. They found nothing more than the linen sheets in the place where his body had been. The cloth that covered his head was neatly rolled up nearby. Angels appeared with their message and then Jesus himself, on the road to Emmaus, met with them to help them understand what had happened and, once again, share with them the bread and wine.

Following that, they became almost accustomed to see him alive and to be with him. For forty days they were able to talk with him and touch him, such as the occasion when the incredulous Thomas was invited by Jesus to touch his wounds. Thomas could only surrender before the evidence and recognize him as Lord and God.

They ate with him, and on one occasion he even prepared the meal. It was then that Peter, disheartened over his own failure and his triple denial, decided to go back to fishing

Others accompanied him. Jesus met them at the beach and led them to another miraculous catch, at the same place and in the same way as the first time when he had invited them to follow him and become fishers of men. On this second occasion, as the boat returned to the shore, again full of fish, he awaited them on the beach with bread and fish prepared over the coals.

Not only were they able to ask him questions; he also asked a few them. Poor Peter, questioned three times by the Lord as to whether he truly loved him. Perhaps it was because Peter needed to hear his own answer, even more than Jesus.

So often did the resurrected Jesus appear to them that even adding together all that the disciples wrote could not complete the account. He even appeared once before more than five hundred gathered disciples.

But now, after a cloud hid Jesus from their sight, and after receiving words of encouragement from an angel sent by God, a sensation of emptiness and vulnerability came over them.

Following Jesus' instructions, they returned to Jerusalem and stayed there, uncertain about what they should expect. They began by praying. They were a group of a hundred twenty disciples, both men and women. They met in an upper room, where the eleven now lived. They could not have known then, but in a few more days, they would receive the promise God made to their ancestors, the same promise Jesus made them before his departure. They would receive power, and nothing would ever be the same again. That small and timid group would become the preeminent force in the known world and beyond. Literally, human history would be divided between the times before and after Christ.

During those days of intense prayer, while they waited, Peter stood up before the group. After recalling the sad destiny of Judas who betrayed Jesus, he proposed that they name someone to assume the apostolic role together with the remaining eleven. It must be someone who had been with them from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, from his baptism by John to the day he was received in heaven. One who was an eye witness of the resurrection with the other apostles. They chose two candidates that met those requirements, Joseph the Just and Matthias. They prayed and, following Jewish tradition, cast lots. Matthias was chosen, who was from that time included in the apostolic group.

In the meantime, God was preparing another apostle. One that did not meet the conditions proposed by Peter. One who had been the least likely of all the candidates for the group of disciples. Someone who was not even a follower of Jesus, who had emerged as one of the worst enemies of the Lord's church. One who would soon be an accomplice to the death of the first martyr and become a fanatical persecutor and tormentor of Christians. One who against all human logic would be called, transformed and enabled by God to become one of the greatest forces of extension of God's kingdom in the entire history of the church. Saul, of Tarsus.

Dear reader,

I want to propose that we study together how it was that God took someone that would never be qualified and turned him into a chosen instrument. You and I are like Paul. At times it seems that we do not have the necessary gifts, that we are unqualified, that we have wasted the opportunities God gave us, or committed so many errors that we have ruined his plan for us. Then again, on occasions we believe that we deserve to be used by God; and that attitude impedes God's work. All these experiences were known to Saul. Whatever may be our situation, in the same way that God was able to work in Paul, he can work through us to fulfill his purpose in our life... if we allow him to do so. Come, I invite you to accompany me in writing this book. At the conclusion of each chapter you will find some questions and are invited to propose the answers for your life.

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