

Gamaliel, Stephen, Ananias

Memory Verse: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.* (1 Timothy 1:15b ESV).

Background Helps:

We begin our study of the personalities around Paul with a look at three men who figured prominently in his early development. Gamaliel was a prominent Jewish Rabbi at whose feet Paul was educated at Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). His teaching laid a foundation for Paul in his knowledge of the Scriptures, an asset which became invaluable to Paul in his years of Christian ministry that were to follow. The incident recorded in Acts 5:34-40 depicts Gamaliel as a reasonable and tolerant man, qualities that seemed to be lacking in his pupil, Saul of Tarsus (later, called Paul).

Stephen was one of the first seven deacons in the church at Jerusalem, chosen to help relieve the twelve apostles of their excessive burden in the ministry (Acts 6:1-7). Stephen was the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54-60), in whose execution the young man Saul played a part (Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20).

Ananias was a devout Jewish convert to Christianity, living in Damascus, who played a key role in the follow-up of the new convert Saul (Acts 9:10-19; 22:12-16).

Lesson Helps:

Teachers have a choice between building a lesson around the character of Stephen or Ananias.

1. My aim is to teach my students about the Christ-like character and life of Stephen, so that they will choose to follow in the steps of Jesus Christ. Study the story of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7. What parallels do you see between his life and character and the life and character of Jesus Christ? Notice, for example: his wisdom, faith, and fullness of the Holy Spirit (6:3, 5); his power to do miracles (6:8); his ability to refute his opponents (6:9-10); how he was falsely accused (6:11-14); his knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures (7:2-50); his courage in the face of his enemies (7:51-53); his faith in God at the moment of his death (7:59); his forgiveness of his enemies (7:60); and his unjust execution (7:54-60). Notice Saul's (Paul's) relationship to the martyrdom of Stephen (7:58; 8:1; 22:20). What influence do you think Stephen's martyrdom might have had on Paul's thought and life? You might use 1 Peter 2:21 as the theme verse for your lesson. Ask your students, "How can we be like Stephen and follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ in our lives today? What influence can our Christ-like character and life have on others?" Have each student write down one Christ-like step he or she will take this week. Commit to that step in prayer.

2. My aim is to teach my students the role of Ananias in the follow-up of the new convert Saul, so that they will participate in a ministry of following up new believers. Study the story of Ananias in Acts 9:10-19 and 22:12-16. What steps did he take in following up the new convert Saul? Notice, for example: his acceptance of the reality of Saul's conversion (9:10-16); his personal visit (9:11, 17; 22:13); laying his hands on Saul (9:12, 17); calling Saul his "brother" (9:17; 22:13); restoring Saul's sight (9:12, 17-18; 22:13); seeing to Saul's prompt baptism (9:18; 22:16); welcoming him into the fellowship of disciples (9:19ff.); and communicating to Saul his mission (22:14-15). What difference do you think Ananias's follow-up made in the future ministry of Paul? Ask your students, "How can we share in the follow-up of new converts today? Whom do you know that could use some help in taking their early steps as a Christian? What will you do to help them?" Colossians 1:28 might be a good theme verse for this lesson.

Note: The week's memory verse, 1 Timothy 1:15, is aimed more at the conversion experience of Saul (Paul). His conversion and first steps as a Christian were certainly influenced by the life and ministry of Stephen and Ananias.

Assignment:

-  Read about Barnabas and John Mark (personalities around Paul).
-  Memorize 1 Thessalonians 5:11.