

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE (6)

THE 22 LETTERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The last 22 books of the Bible are letters written to churches and various individuals. The first 13 are called SPECIFIC letters because they were addressed to specific people or churches in specific locations. The next eight are called GENERAL letters because they are addressed to a broader audience. The SPECIFIC letters were all written by a man named PAUL who was originally known by the name SAUL. Paul was not one of the original disciples of Jesus who walked with Him on the earth, but was given a special call by God to carry the good news to the GENTILES. (GENTILES is a term used in the Bible which means "the nations". A GENTILE was anyone who was not from the nation of Israel).

Paul or Saul was from the nation of Israel. At first he did everything in his power to oppose Christianity, even killing believers or locking them in prison. Saul believed in the God of the Old Testament and was very dedicated to following the religion taught in the Old Testament. However, his strong desire to follow the traditions of his nation blinded him to the fact that Jesus was the one predicted by the prophets to be the Savior of the world. God knew that even though Saul opposed Christianity (See Acts 8:1-4), he was sincere in his heart and fervently acted on what he BELIEVED to be the truth. God chose this man to be his special messenger to the other nations, and Jesus made a special appearance to him to call him for this purpose. You can read about Saul's conversion to Christ (34 A.D.) and his early preaching in Acts 9:1-31 and Acts 11:19-30 and Acts 13:1-3. In the rest of the book of Acts, Luke (the writer of Acts and Paul's traveling companion) focuses on the travels and work of Paul in spreading the word about Christ to the rest of the Roman Empire (45-60 A.D.). Because of his belief in Christ, his friends in his former religion did their best to persecute him everywhere he went. They eventually had him arrested by the Romans in about 60 A.D. He was kept in confinement for two years by the Roman officials in Israel to protect him from those who wanted him dead. In 62 A.D., he appealed to Caesar and waited in confinement in Rome for two more years (until 64 A.D.). The book of Acts ends with him waiting for trial. We learn from some of his letters that make up the Bible that he was released for a while but was arrested again later and faced the death sentence. Even though the Bible does not give details, his death likely occurred about 66 A.D. at the hands of the Roman Emperor, Nero.

Paul's conversion is one of the evidences of the resurrection of Christ. There must have been an important reason for the turn around in Paul's life. He went from being the leading persecutor of Christianity to its greatest defender. Paul gave up everything he had achieved in his former life to follow Christ and spread the message of the gospel throughout the world. Because of preaching Jesus Christ, he was often in prison and was eventually killed because he was a Christian. If he did not actually see the risen Christ as he claimed, his zeal was very misguided. In our next lesson we will give a summary of the books that Paul wrote in the Bible. They are 13 in number (Romans through Philemon) and most people believe he also wrote the book of Hebrews.

QUESTIONS:

1. What one man wrote a majority of the letters in the New Testament?
2. What is the meaning of the word Gentile?