

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



November 25, 2012

Ten Years in Tarsus

The dramatic conversion of Saul began the career of one of the greatest of Jesus' apostles. But that career didn't begin right away; there was something else Saul needed.

In the history of Christianity, few men compare to the apostle Paul. His writings still provide valuable knowledge and practical application in the lives of Christians. Yet he's probably most well-known for his spreading the gospel to so many new places. It would be easy to assume that being an incredible tool, God converted him and started using him right away. It would also be an incorrect assumption.

In Acts 9, Luke records that Paul was converted, spent a little bit of time in Damascus, came to Jerusalem and then was sent off to Tarsus. Then after a couple stories with Peter, Paul was reintroduced as Barnabas came to get him to help with the church in Antioch (Acts 11:22-25). If all you have is Luke's account, you might believe that these events occur within a matter of months. However, Paul's timeline in Galatians demonstrates a different story.

Galatians 1:15-17 is equal to Acts 9:1-25. Galatians 1:18-24 is equal to Acts 9:26-30. Take note of the time lapse that occurred. It wasn't a matter of months that Paul spent in Damascus

(and the surrounding Arabian region), it was three years! We don't have any record of any success in Paul's evangelistic efforts, only of people trying to kill him (Acts 9:23-25; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33). After he went to Jerusalem and people tried to kill him again, he was sent to his home in Tarsus. How long did he spend there?

Galatians 2:1-10 is equal to Acts 11:27-30. This event occurred eleven years after Paul was sent away to Tarsus (the fourteen years in Galatians 2:1 is from the conversion, not the previous trip to Jerusalem, so you subtract the three years in Arabia). Thus if you allow for even up to a year that Paul spent in Antioch before he went up to Jerusalem in Galatians 2 / Acts 11, this means Paul spent about ten years in Tarsus.

Can you imagine? Such an incredible tool for God was put on a back burner for an entire decade! How much could God have done with Paul in that time that he spent twiddling his thumbs? Why would God do such a thing?

It's hard for us to fathom in our "we want it right now" culture, but some-

times good things *do* come to those who wait. God was apparently setting up the pieces on the chessboard just right to use Paul as *He* desired to use him. We know the story: When used at the time of *God's* choosing, Paul became one of the most effective evangelists of all time. And perhaps there's an indication that Paul wasn't just spending that time twiddling his thumbs in Tarsus. Maybe it was this time of maturity, study and reflection that made him into the Christian juggernaut he became.

We need patience in our lives. Perhaps right now you're going through your own "Ten Years in Tarsus." Are you feeling underutilized by God? Are you feeling abandoned or disappointed thinking God could be doing so much more with you right now? Let me suggest that you do not know what God has in store for you. Like Paul, use this time now in study, meditation, and reflection so that when God *is* ready to use you, you'll be ready to be used.

– Chris Huntley