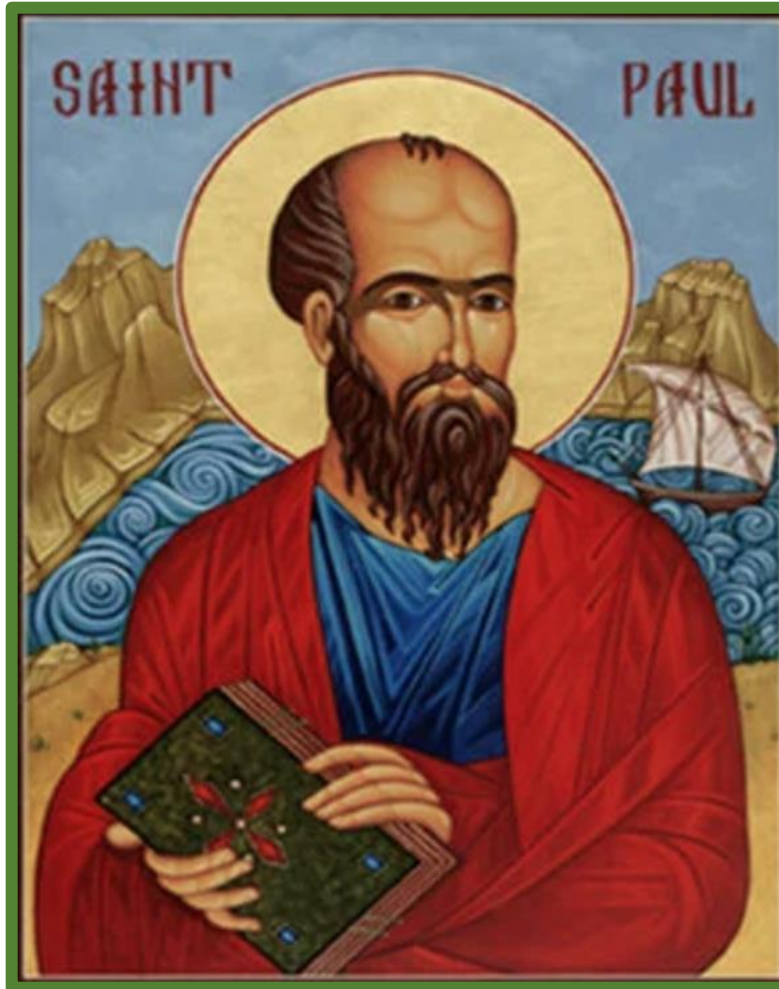


16 August 2026

Saul of Tarsus, the Unlikely Apostle

Lesson Text: Acts 22:3-15



Key Text: *"Then [Ananias] said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.' "*(Acts 22:14-15 NIV)

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, we will be able to:

1. Retell Paul's encounter with Jesus and call as Christ's witness.
2. Compare the motivations for Paul's zeal before and after encountering Jesus.
3. Compose his or her own story of meeting Jesus and explain what personal weaknesses God has used for good.

Lesson Text
Acts 6:7-10; 7:54-60

³ And Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he cleaved the wood for the burnt offering and rose up and went unto the place of which God had told him.

⁴ **Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off.**

⁵ And Abraham said unto his young men, “Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”

⁶ **And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand and a knife, and they went both of them together.**

⁷ And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” And he said, “Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

⁸ **And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” So they went both together.**

⁹ And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

¹⁰ **And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son.**

¹¹ And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here am I.”

¹² **And He said, “Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fear God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me.”**

¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked; and behold, behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

¹⁴ **And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh [that is, The Lord will provide]; as it is said to this day, “In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.”**

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time

Introduction

Early in 2024, my small town in the Texas Panhandle was among those affected by a series of wildfires that devastated over 1.2 million acres of land. This was not the first time our town had suffered severe damage from a wildfire. Thankfully, there were no fatalities, but the damage was substantial.

We know all too well the destructive capabilities of fire! It's not surprising, then, that fire is prime imagery for anger, wrath, and destruction. Even so, we continue to use fire in various ways—for warmth, cooking, incineration, and even for controlling other fires.

Our relationship with fire is complicated. We acknowledge it can be both helpful and harmful. So, it is with the fiery disposition of zeal. It can ignite a passion for good or unleash a destructive force. Ultimately, it all depends on how and for what purpose zeal is used.

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Lesson Context

Around AD 58, after finishing his third missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem for the last time (Acts 21:17). The focus of this journey was his long ministry in Ephesus (19:1, 8–10; 20:31), which was filled with controversy. Both Paul and others expected his visit to Jerusalem to be just as controversial, if not more so (20:17–38; 21:4, 10–14). Still, Paul decided to go.

When Paul arrived, he met with the leaders of the Jerusalem church and told them about his ministry (Acts 21:17–19). The leaders warned him that his presence could be dangerous (21:20–24). Their concerns proved true when Paul was arrested on a false charge of defiling the temple (21:27). If Roman soldiers had not stepped in to restore order, Paul likely would have been killed on the spot (21:30–36). After being rescued, Paul surprised everyone by asking to speak to the crowd that had just tried to kill him. The Roman commander allowed it (21:40–22:2), and this is where our lesson begins.

Recounting the Past

“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel.” Paul’s defense of his ministry includes a description of his remarkable transformation. This story appears three times in Acts: here, in Acts 9:1–19, and in Acts 26:12–23.

Paul starts by talking about his background as a Diaspora Jew. The Greek word diaspora means *“dispersed” or “scattered,”* and appears in John 7:35, James 1:1, and 1 Peter 1:1 (see also Deuteronomy 4:27). Because Paul was born in a Roman province, he was able to become a Roman citizen (see Acts 22:27–28). Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia in what is now Turkey, is about 360 miles north of Jerusalem. In the first century, Tarsus was a busy trading city and home to many cults. The city was very Greco-Roman, which created challenges for Jews living there. However, Paul makes it clear that he did not adopt the local pagan customs, since he was raised in Jerusalem.

Paul goes on to share his background to show he was a faithful Jew. Sitting at the feet of a teacher was a common practice for Jewish students (see Luke 10:39). Studying under Gamaliel was especially impressive, since Gamaliel was known for his wisdom and respect among the people, as shown in Acts 5:34–39.

“And I was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.”

The phrase 'the law of our ancestors' is not often used; usually, people say, 'the Law of Moses' (compare Acts 28:23). Using this wording likely helped Paul connect with the Jewish crowd.

The word 'zealous' recalls someone who is deeply passionate and committed to a cause. This can be seen in a good or bad light (see John 2:17 and Galatians 4:17). In ancient times, people often saw zeal as a quality to admire. In the period between the Old and New Testaments, Jewish writings linked zeal with religious heroes (see 1 Maccabees 2:23–27, 50–58; the last part mentions Phinehas's zeal in Numbers 25:5–13). The word can also suggest being willing to use force to protect religious traditions or God's name. Paul's approach to the Scriptures and how he applied them is like what he describes in Galatians 1:14 and Philippians 3:5–6.

Persecuted Followers

“I the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison,”

Paul now remembers how he took part in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58–8:3; see lesson 10). This was the start of his persecution of the church (8:1). His strong commitment to this is also mentioned in Acts 9:1–2, 14, 21; 26:10–11; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13–14; Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13).

The term 'This Way' means the early group of people who followed Jesus (see Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). This name connects to Old Testament ideas about God's path for his people (Psalm 16:11). It also fits with Jesus calling himself 'the way' (John 14:6; see also Hebrews 10:20; lesson 9).

As the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

Because Paul used to persecute people in 'The Way,' it makes sense to ask why he now speaks for them. He tries to connect with a crowd that wants to harm him, so what changed? Paul explains by telling the story first shared in Acts 9.

Earlier, Paul (then called Saul) acted with the high priest's support, probably Caiaphas, who was in charge until AD 36. Saul planned to go after Jewish followers of Jesus in Damascus (see Acts 9:1–2). Since Damascus is more than 130 miles from Jerusalem, this shows how determined Saul was. Luke, who wrote Acts, does not say exactly how the gospel reached Damascus. However, Acts 2:5 mentions that Jews from all over the world came to Pentecost, and Acts 11:19 says that after the persecution in Acts 8, believers spread out as far as Phoenicia, which is next to Syria where Damascus is.

Questions and Revelation

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me.

The main new detail here, compared to Acts 9:3, is that Paul says this happened around noon (see also Acts 26:13). This shows just how bright the light was, since it stood out even at the brightest time of day.

“I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.

The words Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me, found here and in Acts 9:4–5, left Saul confused. The light was so overwhelming that he fell to the ground and could only ask, Who are you, Lord? Saul's use of the word Lord does not mean he knew it was God speaking. In Greek, this word can also mean “sir,” as in Matthew 27:63.

Saul was probably even more confused when the voice said it was Jesus of Nazareth. There is no record that Saul had met Jesus before this. As Saul's confidence faded, he realized that persecuting Christians was really persecuting Jesus himself. This shows how closely Jesus identifies with his followers.

This moment started a complete change in how Saul thought about God, who was at the center of his life. We see this change in places like 1 Corinthians 8:6, where Paul includes Jesus as both Lord and God in statements of faith. This encounter also changed how Saul lived. He went from persecuting the church to spreading its message and serving Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13–16, 23; 1 Timothy 1:13). Saul's transformation began on the road, but he still needed time to grow (Galatians 1:17–18).

“My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

We need to keep in mind who Paul is addressing: a hostile crowd who wants him dead. It's important to remember that Paul is speaking to a hostile crowd who wants to kill him (Acts 21:40). Because of this, he focuses on how the Lord revealed himself to him and how he obeyed the Lord's will (see Galatians 1:11–12). Two notable variations. Acts 9:7 states that Saul's traveling companions (1) saw nobody, although they (2) heard the sound. Yet here in Acts 22:9, Paul notes that the companions (1) saw the light, but they (2) did not understand the voice.

The first difference may mean that the companions saw the light but could not see the person in it. This makes sense if the light was brighter than the sun at noon (see Acts 22:6 above). The second difference can be explained in a few ways. One way is to look at the Greek word for understand. Sometimes it just means “to hear” (see Mark 6:20), and other times it means “comprehended” or “understood” (see 8:18).

The second way is by examining the word translated voice in Acts 9:7. It could have the more general meaning of “sound” (example: 1 Corinthians 14:7); if that idea applies here, it suggests that the companions heard an unidentifiable sound rather than comprehensible voice. Third, and less likely, is the possibility that they perceived someone addressing Saul in a language they could not understand. Acts 26:14 says it was Aramaic (compare Acts 21:40–22:1).

Reply and Command

“Get up,” the Lord said, “and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.” My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

The beginning of this passage echoes Jesus’ words in Acts 9:6 and 26:16, but there is a small difference. Acts 9:6 says what Saul “must do,” while this passage says what Saul was assigned to do. Later in the same chapter, it explains that Saul’s role is to share God’s “name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

Paul may have chosen not to mention his mission to the Gentiles because his audience was hostile and held anti-Gentile views (Acts 21:27–29; see also 21:19). This seems likely, especially considering how the crowd reacted just a few verses later (22:21–22).

Renewed Sight

“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there.

Acts 9:10–17 provides a more detailed account of the actions and attitude of Ananias. He is designated as “a disciple,” marking him as a follower of Jesus. It’s important to note that this **Ananias should not be confused with men of the same name mentioned in Acts 5:1–11; 23:1–5; or 24:1.** To describe him as a devout observer of the law who is highly respected by all the Jews suggests that Paul aims to reassure the crowd that a Jew who is above reproach could testify truthfully about Paul’s claims.

“He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. The content of this verse is a condensed version of Acts 9:17–18. Here, as in 9:17, Ananias reveals a willingness to refer to Saul as brother because of the Lord’s revelation to Ananias. This is despite Ananias’s initial consternation about Saul as a persecutor of Christians.

Chosen Witness

“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.

Acts 9 does not include as much conversation between Ananias and Saul, so this passage is not the same. However, it matches what the Lord says in Acts 9:15. Luke, who wrote Acts, may have shortened the story in chapter 9 to avoid repeating details. Paul, on the other hand, includes Ananias’s words because they support his own testimony.

A particularly significant part of Ananias’s words is how he calls God the God of our ancestors. This phrase, or something similar, also appears in other parts of Acts (Acts 5:30; 24:14) and has strong connections to the Old Testament (for example, Deuteronomy 26:7; 1 Chronicles 12:17; 29:18). By using this language, Ananias shows God’s faithfulness by linking Old Testament promises to what God has revealed in Jesus.

When Saul hears Ananias mention the Righteous One, he might remember that Stephen also spoke about “the Righteous One” (Jesus) in Acts 7:52 (see also 3:14).e, appears only twice in the New Testament, both in Acts (here and in Acts 7:52; compare 3:14). This designation highlights Jesus’ innocence and divine vindication. But it also signals his fulfillment of prophetic hopes about God’s “righteous and just” one (the Hebrew and Greek terms can be translated either way).

Acts 3:13–14 connects to Isaiah 53:11 by calling Jesus God’s servant, which fits with the idea of God’s righteous and just servant. This description might also remind readers of the wider hope for God’s chosen ruler, a just leader sent to Jerusalem (see Jeremiah 23:5–6; 33:15; Zechariah 9:9).

“You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.” The commission Paul receives to be

Being a witness for Jesus to all people shows that Paul has become one of his disciples. In Acts, this also means Paul shares in the mission given to the apostles (Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 13:31). The mention of what Paul has seen and heard highlights his personal experience (see Luke 7:22; Acts 4:20; 1 John 1:1, 3). To make Paul an apostle to the nations, God wanted him to be a witness of the risen Jesus. That is why Paul met Christ directly when God stopped him on the road to Damascus.

Conclusion

When we read stories about God appearing to people, it is important to remember that these moments are not the main point. A theophany, or God’s appearance, happens to show that something or someone truly comes from God.

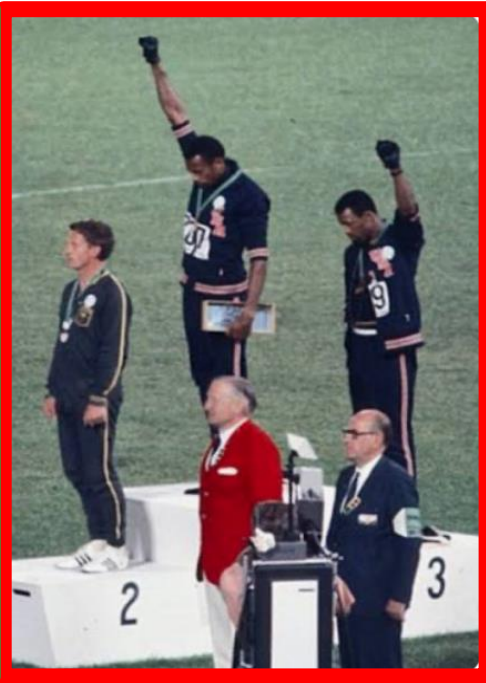
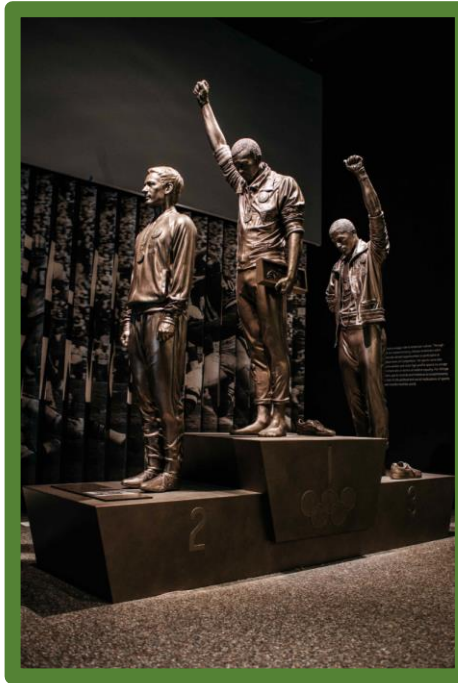
Today, we have the full New Testament to guide us. We do not need a theophany like Paul’s to inspire us to share our faith, because the New Testament encourages us on its own. God calls us to shape our lives according to his Word. When we do this, God’s Spirit changes us so we can serve him. In this way, we become people who share the gospel with others.

Paul's meeting with the risen Jesus was the beginning of his place in the church, which is Christ's body. Our own stories are also part of this bigger story. Like Paul, who started his important work after meeting Jesus, we can honor God by helping others grow. Let's think about our own lives and what God has done for us, so we can encourage others and bring glory to God.

Take Aways

Closing Prayer

Daily Bible Readings*



*(*Liturgical Color: Green (Life, growth, and hope))*

Daily Scripture Reading

Monday: The Conversion of Saul

- **Read:** Acts 9:1–31
- **Focus:** Saul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus and changes from a strict enemy of the church to a chosen follower. [[2](#), [3](#)]

Tuesday: The Missionary Journeys Begin

- **Read:** Acts 13:1–12 and Acts 16:6–15
- **Focus:** Paul is sent out on his first major journey and receives the Macedonian call to take the gospel into Europe.

Wednesday: Preaching in Athens

- **Read:** Acts 17:16–34
- **Focus:** Paul speaks to the thinkers in Athens at the Areopagus, explaining the unknown God and the resurrection.

Thursday: Paul's Life Story and Defense

- **Read:** Acts 26:1–23
- **Focus:** Paul shares his personal testimony and his faith in front of King Agrippa. [[1](#)]

Friday: Shipwreck and Arrival in Rome

- **Read:** Acts 27:27–44 and Acts 28:16–31
- **Focus:** Paul survives a dangerous storm at sea and finally arrives in Rome under house arrest, where he keeps preaching.

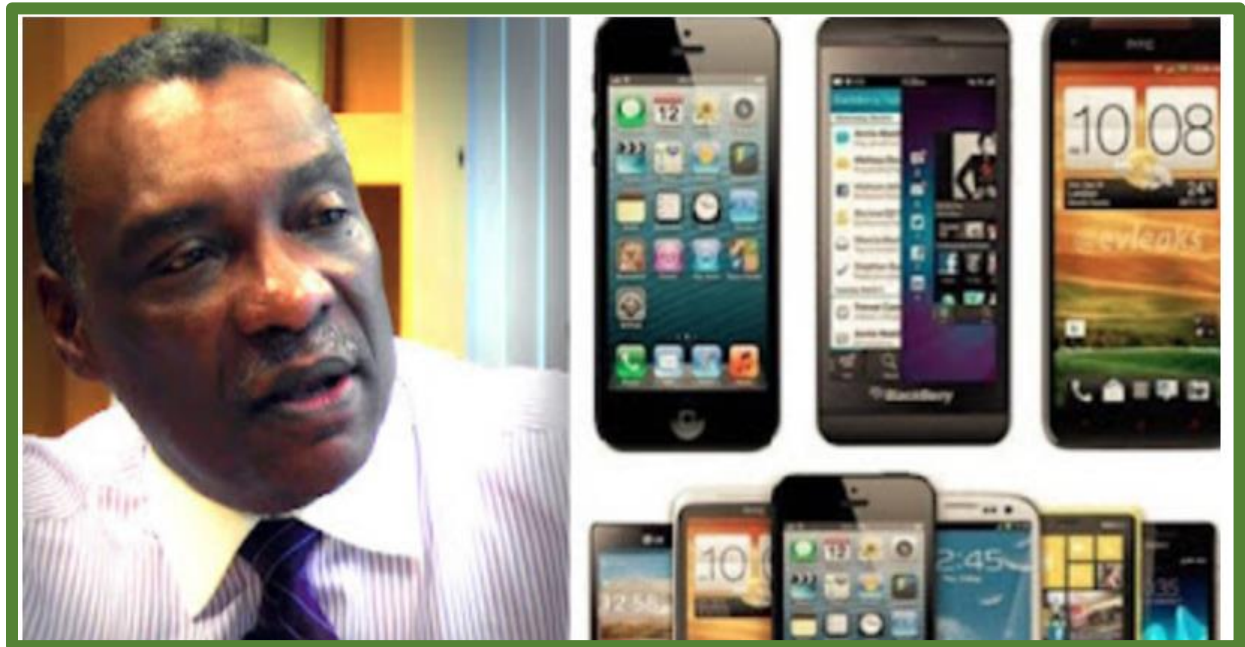
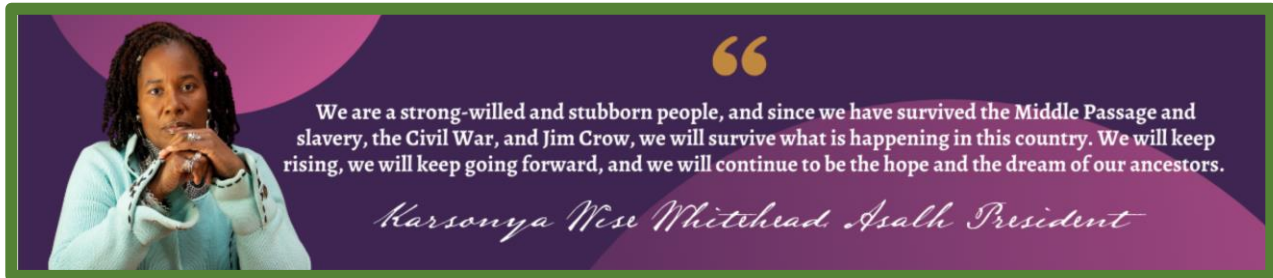
Saturday: Core Theology on Grace

- **Read:** Romans 3:21–31 and Romans 8:1–11
- **Focus:** Paul explains how people are made right with God through faith in Christ and how to live a new life by the Holy Spirit.

Sunday: Reflection and Love

- **Read:** 1 Corinthians 13 and Philemon 1–22
- **Focus:** Read Paul's famous chapter on love and his personal letter asking for forgiveness and mercy for a runaway slave.

BLACK HISTORY



the Black Inventor Who Created the First Digital Cell Phone

Jesse Eugene Russell

The invention of the smartphone is often attributed to Europeans, the first digital cell phone was invented by Jesse Eugene Russell, an African American engineer. Russell was a key pioneer in modern wireless communication, recognized for leading the team at AT&T Bell Laboratories that introduced digital cellular technology (2G) and for inventing the digital cellular base station.

Russell was born on April 26, 1948, in Nashville, Tennessee. His family resided in an economically disadvantaged area of Nashville. He attended a summer education program at Fisk University, where he excelled academically. Subsequently, he pursued electrical engineering at Tennessee State University, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering (BSEE). In 1973, Russell obtained a Master of Science degree in Electrical Engineering (MSEE) from Stanford University.

While working as an engineer at AT&T Bell Laboratories in 1988, Russell developed the concept for wireless digital telephony and communication. At that time, mobile devices were primarily installed in vehicles. Russell designed a cell phone capable of transmitting signals between handsets and cell phone towers, thereby increasing the convenience and affordability of mobile phones. As Russell stated, "Most of the time people are not in their cars. I said, 'Well, that seems like an easy problem to solve, right? Why don't we take the phones out of the car and put them on the people.'"

Russell contributed additional innovations to the field of wireless communication systems. He also founded [incNETWORKS Inc.](#), a New Jersey-based company specializing in 4G broadband wireless technologies, networks, and service

Association for the Study of African American Life and History

The mission of the ASALH® is to promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community. Established on September 9, 1915, by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, we are the Founders of Black History Month and carry forth the work of our founder, the Father of Black History. We continue his legacy of speaking a fundamental truth to the world—that Africans and peoples of African descent are makers of history and co-workers in what W. E. B. Du Bois called, “The Kingdom of Culture.” ASALH is in short, the nexus between the Ivory Tower and the global public.



The Negro Historical Association with Carter Woodson (with bow tie) seated next to Mary Church Terrell (in white) in front row, center, of this portrait (1925). Source: Courtesy of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives, Howard University, Washington DC

We are in the final stages of organizing the Northern Virginia Branch. Interested, contact: *Deac Joe Boutte, Bro Harvey Woodson, or Rev Gillis M. Taylor.*

Join The ASALH NOVA Branch!!