

## **Paul the Mystic**

### **November 18-19, 2006 by Ken Wilson**

A mystic is one who dives headlong into mystery, mystery being one of Paul's favorite words. A mystic slips into what the Celts call a "thin place."

Jesus presented himself to Nathaniel as the staircase between heaven and earth. A reference to Genesis 28: 16-17.

This was in it's time radioactive! The sacred temple in Jerusalem was considered the intersection between heaven & earth, not Jesus. This is what got Jesus killed.

And Stephen, the first martyr: Acts 7:48-49. The message of the messianic movement was mystical in nature, having to do with the tear in the fabric of space time--not the temple, but Jesus and those who come in by him. Stephen died with Jacob's vision open before him: *'Look,' he said, 'I see heaven open and the son of Man standing at the right hand of God'* (Acts 7: 56)

And Saul was there, incensed by all this blasphemy, approving of Stephen's stoning. (see Acts. 7: 59-8:1)

From there Saul in a religious rage, a terrorist of the first century conducting his own holy war against the messianic movement, went to Damascus, looking to hunt them down.

Acts 9: 1-6: Paul slips into the thin place opened by Jesus.

Galatians: 1: 11-18. Paul's retelling: *"God was pleased to reveal his Son in me."* Language of mystical experience: God revealed (lit. uncovered) his Son in me. Jacob's experience under the stars also took place "within him." Paul's experience follows the pattern.

Paul goes into the Arabian peninsula, giving him time for silence and solitude, and the working out of his gospel of grace.

Ever after, Paul writes like what he is now: a mystic. 2 Cor. 12: 1-10.  
Side bar: Can't judge ancient writers by modern standards.

Hold this awareness of Paul before you as you read his letters. It's everywhere!  
Eph. 1: 18; 2:6; 3: 1-6, 16

Bible says some of Paul's writings are hard to understand: 2 Peter 3: 15-16

To say Paul is a mystic is not to say mystical experience the measure of our spirituality. Love is the measure of spirituality.

A boondoggle: "I need to experience what Paul did the way he did"

Thinking we have to be like each other is what keeps us from listening to each other. And when we don't listen to each other we don't love each other nearly as much as we might, and we miss out on God, who is Love.

The point of Paul is not that we become "Pauline."

The point of Paul is to convey Jesus as he knew him.

Paul was the recipient of a "love intervention."

When we let Paul be Paul, and we really listen--curious about how this man encountered Jesus and how that encounter shaped him--the listening does us good and "the wisdom God gave him" (2 Peter) is conveyed to us.