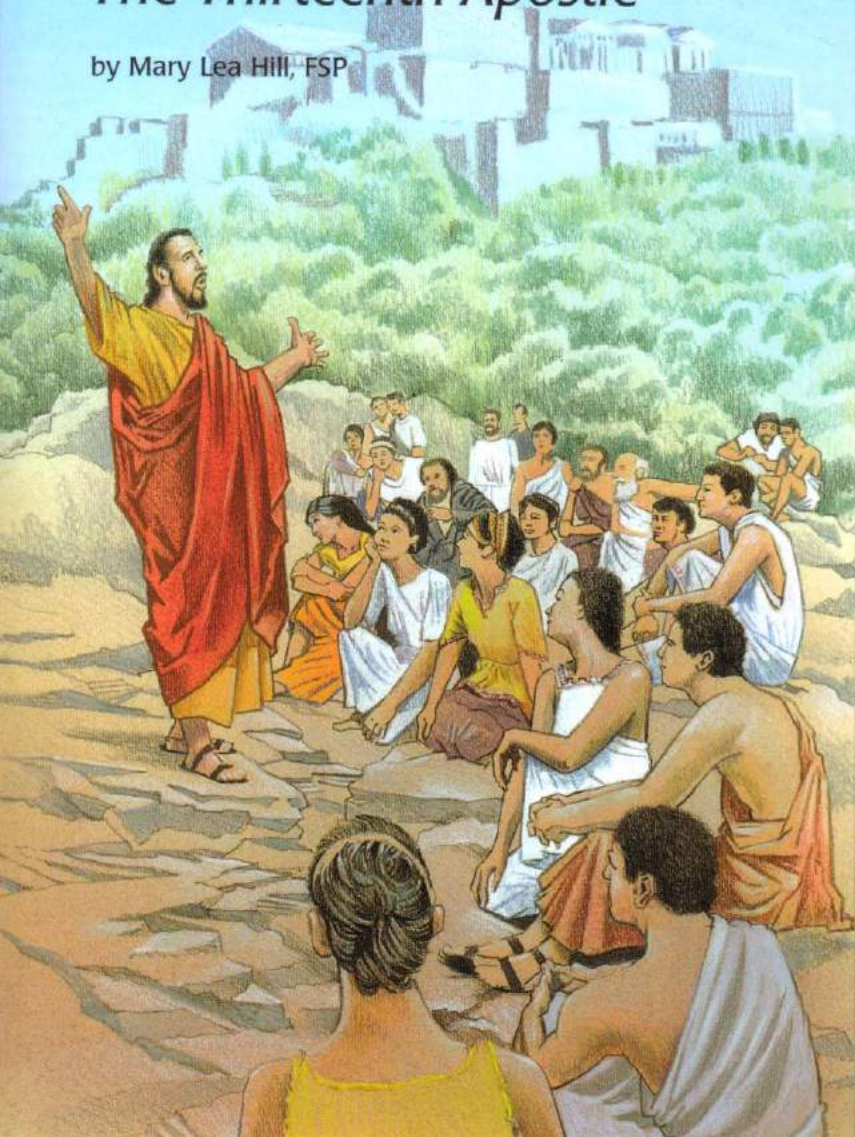


Saint Paul

The Thirteenth Apostle

by Mary Lea Hill, FSP



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Written by
Mary Lea Hill, FSP

Cover Art by
Dennis Auth

Illustrated by
Matthew Archambault

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CITIZEN OF TWO WORLDS

"It was the best decision I ever made," the tentmaker repeated. Squatting beside his son, he demonstrated the proper way to handle the tools of the family trade. The young man watched carefully.

"Is this right, Father?" he asked, deftly pushing a long needle through the animal skin.

"Yes, Saul. It's perfect." *This is a good time to teach the boy more important things as well,* the tentmaker mused, thinking back to the day he had made the choice to be civil to the Roman general. It hadn't been easy because every Roman—from the highest official down to the lowest servant, whose parents may have been slaves themselves—had a certain air of superiority about him or her. But the Roman Empire rewarded friendship with the same sweeping strokes that it punished offenders. Being in the right place at the right time, and being aware of it, had served the tentmaker well.

"A number of years ago, Saul," the tentmaker explained, "I joined a group of local merchants and craftsmen who assembled to greet the new consul arriving in Tarsus. The man was visibly pleased. In fact, he immediately asked if I could repair his field tent. My response? 'Of course, of course, Sir. It would be my pleasure.' My best decision ever! Son, you know that such cooperation with the Romans is possible here, but not in Jerusalem."

"Yes, Father," Saul replied. "Jerusalem is the holy city, and the Romans shouldn't be there. Here in Tarsus it's different...even though I don't remember *why*."

The tentmaker smiled. "Well, Saul, let me ask you this: Who owns the sky?"

"God, of course."

"And who owns the earth?"

"God does."

"What about all the trees and the grass, the plants, and the crops?"

"God owns them all."

"And to whom do the sun and moon and all the stars belong?"

Saul had no idea what his father was getting at, but he went along. "To God," he answered.

"Who owns all the nations of the earth?"

“God.”

“And to whom did God entrust the care and governance of all the earth?”

“To mankind.”

“So, in that sense, all the great nations, the cities, and all their people belong to men, right?”

“Yes, Father. God has allowed this arrangement for his glory.”

“Ah, but what about Jerusalem?”

“Jerusalem is the true glory of our people. It is God’s own city. God is our king, and we are his special people.”

Turning to his wife, the tentmaker said, “Do you see, Mother? This is why I want Saul to go to Jerusalem. He’s attentive and intelligent.”

“Now, Saul, as I was telling you, one of the most important things I ever did was to befriend that Roman general. Over the years, I was able to do several favors, and conduct a regular business with the Roman army. So when I approached the general about obtaining Roman citizenship, he not only agreed, but also presented my request himself. That’s why we’re now the proud possessors of a dual citizenship. It makes our trips between Tarsus and Jerusalem much easier—and safer, too, I might add.”



“When will I go to God’s city?”

“But being a citizen of God’s city is the most important thing, isn’t it, Father?”

“Yes. It’s the only citizenship that really matters, Saul. So we must be worthy citizens of these two worlds—of God’s world, because God is the Lord of our lives, and of the world of men, because our conduct among them glorifies God. Promise me that you’ll always remember this—even when you’re in Jerusalem.”

“I promise,” answered Saul in a solemn voice. “When will I go to God’s city?”

“Soon, my son, soon. But someone does not look very pleased about that, does she?”

Saul turned to see his mother drying the tears from her eyes with the corner of her apron.

“Mother, don’t worry,” Saul quietly said. “I still have to finish my studies before leaving for Jerusalem.”

Looking over at his wife, the tentmaker added, “Our daughter is already in Jerusalem. Her husband is a fine young man. I’m sure that they will welcome Saul into their home. There will be no need to worry. No need at all.”