

## CHAPTER 7

### LIFE OF PAUL

Besides Jesus Christ himself no one has had a greater impact on the development of the Christian church and the history of civilizations impacted by Christianity than Paul. Paul was perhaps the most zealous advocate for Judaism among the apostles, but he led in taking the gospel to the Gentiles and in shaping the church of the new dispensation.

#### Chronology of Paul's Life

Event in Paul's Life	Suggested Date (A.D.)
Birth	1-5
Conversion	36
First Jerusalem Visit	38
Move to Antioch	45
Second Jerusalem Visit (Famine Visit)	46
First Missionary Journey	47-48
Third Jerusalem Visit (Jerusalem Council)	49
Second Missionary Journey	49-51
Third Missionary Journey	51-54
Arrest in Jerusalem	54
Caesarean Imprisonment	54-56
Voyage to Rome	56-57
First Roman Imprisonment	57-59
Final Missionary Travels	59-67
Second Roman Imprisonment and Death	67

Parts of this chronology are approximate, such as the date of his birth and the date of his second Roman imprisonment and death. Other parts are set more closely by a few links to secular history:

- Paul's escape from Damascus and first visit to Jerusalem took place during the time King Aretus of the Nabateans ruled Damascus (A.D. 37-40; 2 Cor 11:32).
- Paul's ministry in Corinth during his second missionary journey took place during the short time that Gallio was Proconsul there (A.D. 51-52; Acts 18:11-12).

- The end of Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment and his voyage to Rome took place immediately after Festus became prefect of Judea (A.D. 56; Acts 24:27).

These points from secular history can provide a framework from which it is possible to construct the chronological summary of Paul’s life in the table above.

## Survey of Paul’s Life

### *Paul’s early life*

Paul was born of fervent Jewish parents, who kept alive the Aramaic language in their home even though they lived in Tarsus, a Greek-speaking area. Paul was named by his parents Saul, after the most famous person from their tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3:5). Since they were Roman citizens, they also gave him his Roman name of Paul. In the NT Paul is referred to as Saul until he began to lead his mission to the Gentiles, from which point it normally uses his Roman name of Paul.

There are three major aspects of Paul’s background that impacted his life and ministry:

1. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 21:39)—this gave Paul a cosmopolitan outlook, with knowledge of many different cultures and a sympathy for people of various nationalities. Since Tarsus was an important trading city, he learned of many places in the Roman Empire.
2. Born in a pious Jewish family (Phil 3:5)—this gave Paul a love and appreciation for the OT and the Jewish people. He became thoroughly trained in the Jewish Scriptures and traditions.
3. Born a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28)—this gave Paul an appreciation for the unity of the Empire and the importance of reaching its major cities and centers of influence, leading to Rome itself. As a citizen he was afforded state protection in his travels and when he was accused and attacked by his fellow Jews.

Thus Paul could be called “a cosmopolitan Roman Jew.”

As a devout and talented Jew, Paul as a young man went to Jerusalem to be trained by the famous Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Under his influence Paul developed great zeal, calling himself “a Pharisee of the Pharisees” (Acts 23:6; 26:4; Phil 3:5). As such he persecuted the early Christian church (Acts 26:10; Gal 1:13-14). He particularly is remembered for approving the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57; 22:20). He was sincere but ignorant at the time (1 Tim 1:13).

## ***Paul's conversion and early Christian experience***

### **Conversion**

Paul was converted by a vision of Christ while Paul was on his way to Damascus to persecute Jewish Christians there. Paul's conversion is related three times in Acts, showing its importance:

- Acts 9 – actual conversion
- Acts 22 – speech to Jews in temple
- Acts 26 – speech to King Herod Agrippa II

Each account provides different details, appropriate to the context in Acts. Paul's conversion is one of the most significant events of human history.

### **Three years in Damascus and Arabia**

Paul, temporarily blinded by the vision of Christ, was taken on to Damascus. There, in response to an earlier vision from God, Ananias, a pious Jewish Christian, baptized him. Paul remained there in Damascus and in the desert of Arabia for three years (Gal 1:17). During this time Paul studied, prayed, and reoriented his thinking to see that Jesus was indeed the Messiah predicted in the OT.

Near the end of that time his preaching in Damascus caused the Jewish leaders there to seek to kill him. Paul escaped Damascus by being let over the wall in a basket (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor 11:32-33).

### **First Jerusalem visit**

Paul fled from Damascus and came back to Jerusalem, now trying to associate with the believers. Barnabas led the way in the Christians' accepting him. At this time most of the apostles were scattered from Jerusalem; so Paul met only Peter, along with James the brother of Jesus. Paul stayed there only 15 days (Gal 1:18).

As Paul publicly preached Jesus, Greek-speaking Jewish leaders sought to kill him. Paul received a vision from God instructing him to leave Jerusalem quickly; the disciples, also concerned for his safety, agreed with this plan and sent him off to his home in Tarsus (Acts 9:30; 22:17).

### **Seven years at home in Tarsus**

These years are mainly silent in Acts. We know he preached Christ in that region (Gal 1:23). During that time he also suffered many persecutions, mainly from his fellow Jews (2 Cor 11:24-26; many of the persecutions listed must have been during this interval). It was perhaps during this time that God gave him great visions (2 Cor 12:2-8; “fourteen years ago” from A.D. 54 would be ca. A.D. 40).

### **A new ministry in Antioch**

Antioch of Syria was one of the great cities of the Roman Empire. Early Greek-speaking Jewish Christians had traveled there as a result of persecutions in Jerusalem, and had preached, not only to other Jews in Antioch, but to Gentile pagans as well. Many Gentiles became believers. The Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were interested in this development and sent Barnabas to investigate and to help the new church there.

In Antioch Barnabas realized that more help was needed; therefore, he traveled to Tarsus to fetch Paul and bring him to Antioch. Paul stayed in Antioch a year, assisting Barnabas and the other leaders in the church there. Paul was the junior teacher there (Acts 13:1). During this interval the believers in Antioch were called “Christians” by the pagans (Acts 12:26). This designation would not have been used by Jews, who had no desire to associate this movement with the Jewish Messiah. However, the pagans of Antioch had no such association with the term; they used it merely because these believers followed someone they called “Christ” (the Greek word for “Messiah”).

### **The “famine visit” to Jerusalem**

The prophet Agabus from Jerusalem predicted a world-wide famine that would affect Jerusalem. This famine took place at the predicted time (ca. A.D. 46; Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 20:2:5; 20:5:2) during the reign of the emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54). The disciples in Antioch collected an offering for the Jerusalem saints, and sent it to Jerusalem by Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:27-30).

This “famine visit” would be the second time that Paul visited Jerusalem as a Christian. Those who date Galatians very early identify this visit with that spoken of by Paul in Gal 2:1-10; traditionally the visit of Gal 2:1-10 is identified with the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15.

Luke states that Barnabas and Paul took the offering in Acts 11:30. According to Acts 12:25, Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, taking young John Mark with them. Sandwiched between their coming to Jerusalem and their return, Luke has inserted an account of the rule and death of Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great and son of Aristobolus; Herod died a horrible death because of his pride (Acts 12:1-24; also in Josephus). Luke introduces the account of Herod’s activities with the words “about this time.” Actually, Herod had died in A.D. 44, two years before the famine visit. Luke also tells of the martyrdom of James brother of John and the imprisonment and miraculous escape of Peter. It seems that Luke has inserted these accounts here in order to bring the readers up to date regarding events in Jerusalem, since that

city has now been brought back to the readers' attention, and to introduce the readers to John Mark. By the time Barnabas and Paul reached Jerusalem Peter and most of the other apostles had left the city (Acts 12:17). Returning to Antioch, Barnabas and Paul took with them young John Mark, a relative of Barnabas.

### ***Paul's life plan and missionary strategy***

According to Rom 15 Paul had a strategic purpose in his missionary travels—to start and develop a strong Gentile church throughout the Roman world, centered around the Mediterranean Sea. This Gentile church was to be grafted into the continuing Jewish church as one church. Paul's grand strategy seems to have evolved during these journeys. He speaks of evangelizing the Roman world in a "circle" (Greek *kuklo* in Rom 15:19), so that the gospel would progress from Jerusalem and Samaria to Antioch in the north, to Cilicia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia, and on to Rome, Spain, and back east along the northern coast of Africa. His strategy was to evangelize the major cities and population centers, from which point the gospel would spread into the surrounding cities and countryside (as evidenced in his ministry in Ephesus).

### ***Paul's First Missionary Journey***

- Recorded in Acts 13-14
- Personnel: Paul, Barnabas, John Mark
- Areas covered: Cyprus, southern Galatia

### **Major events**

- Called by Holy Spirit, set apart by church in Antioch
- In Cyprus
  - Home province of Barnabas
  - Cities of Salamis (on east coast) and Paphos (on west coast)
  - In Paphos: sorcerer Elymas struck blind; conversion of proconsul Sergius Paulus
  - From this point on, Acts calls Paul "Paul," his Roman name
  - From this point on, Paul listed first, shows he was now leader of the mission (Acts 13:2; cf. vv. 13, 42, 46, etc.)

- In southern Galatia:
  - In Perga, John Mark deserts the mission (caused trouble later, Acts 15:36-41)
  - In Galatia: Paul suffers health problems, probably dealing with his eyes (Gal 4:13-15)
    - Antioch-Pisidia: first recorded sermon to Jews (Acts 13:6-41); success with Gentiles; flees from city
    - Iconium: chased out by Jews
    - Lystra: heals lame man; Paul and Barnabas worshiped as Hermes and Zeus (same as Roman gods Mercury and Jupiter); Paul stoned; young Timothy probably sees him there (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim 3:11)
    - Derbe: successful stay
    - Return trip through cities of Galatia: ordain elders in every church (Acts 14:23)
- Return from Perga directly to Antioch

### ***The Jerusalem Council***

- Recorded in Acts 15
- If Galatians dated as traditionally, also recorded in Gal 2:1-10
- Occurred in A.D. 49
- Provides a pattern for church government—higher courts of the church
- Events of Council
  - To counteract teachings of Judaizers (Acts 15:1, 5; cf. Gal 2:3-5)
  - Authoritative members of council: apostles and elders (Acts 15:2, 6, 22-23; 16:4)
  - Moderator: James brother of Jesus, leader of the Jerusalem church
  - Proceedings: both sides heard; Peter and Paul give testimonies; James makes suggestion; Council adopts suggestion

- Results: circumcision not required, but Gentile Christians required to observe certain customs to avoid scandal in Jewish populations (Acts 15:23-29)
- Silas sent back with Paul and Barnabas to confirm Council's decision to churches
- Machen called this decision "The Charter of Gentile Freedom"
- Paul's controversy with Peter (Gal 2:11-21)
  - According to traditional date for Galatians, this controversy took in Antioch place at this point, after the Council; early date advocates place this controversy before the Council
  - Paul states that he and Peter shared the same beliefs and doctrines; he criticized only Peter's inconsistent actions

### ***Paul's second missionary journey***

- Recorded in Acts 15:36 – 18:22
- Personnel: Paul, Silas, Timothy, Luke (briefly)
- Areas covered: southern Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia (emphasis on Corinth)

### **Major events**

- Controversy over John Mark causes division
  - Barnabas and Mark go to Cyprus
  - Church sends Paul and Silas to Galatia
  - Subsequently Mark's ministry was restored and strengthened
    - Apparently repented his deserting the mission (came back to Antioch)
    - Discipled more by Barnabas
    - Became useful to Paul again (Col 4:10; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11)
    - Became spiritual son of Peter (1 Pet 5:13)
    - Brought together Peter's preaching to make the Gospel of Mark

- In southern Galatia:
  - Revisited cities started on first missionary journey
  - Picked up Timothy in Lystra, had him circumcised (half Jewish)
  - Tried to go west into province of Asia, prevented by Holy Spirit
  - Tried to go north into province of Bithynia, again prevented by Holy Spirit
  - Thus forced northwest, to Troas
  
- In Macedonia:
  - While in Troas—vision of the man from Macedonia, “Come over and help us”
  - Luke joins mission in Troas (“we section,” Acts 16:10-17)
  - Philippi: first Pauline European church; Lydia, demon-possessed girl, jailer, miraculous release
  - Thessalonica: three Sabbaths in synagogue; Paul supports himself; gifts from Philippi; chased by mob
  - Berea: more noble; chased again
  
- In Achaia:
  - Athens: sermon to Greeks in the Areopagus (Acts 17:22-31)
  - Corinth—where Paul stayed the longest (1½ years)
    - Wicked city; sea trade
    - Aquila and Priscilla, his tentmaker hosts
    - Moves church from synagogue to house of Titius Justus, next to synagogue (Acts 18:7)
      - Separation principle (2 Cor 6:14 – 7:1)
    - Encouraging vision of the Lord (Acts 18:9-10)
    - Writes 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians
    - Perhaps writes Galatians (“middle date” for Galatians)

- Charged before proconsul Gallio (brother of Seneca); charged dismissed
- Return to Antioch:
  - Stopover in Ephesus; promises to return to Ephesus; Aquila and Priscilla go with Paul, stay in Ephesus
  - Travels to Jerusalem, then on to Antioch

### ***Paul's third missionary journey***

- Recorded in Acts 18:23 – 21:16
- A major purpose of the trip: gather collection from the Gentile churches for saints in Jerusalem, thus tying the Gentiles to the Jewish church
- Personnel: Paul, Timothy, Titus, Luke (most of return trip), many delegates from the churches as the offering is collected (Acts 20:4; 2 Cor 8:19-21)
- Areas covered: southern Galatia, Asia (most time in Ephesus, 2½ years), Macedonia, Achaia

### **Major events**

- In Galatia:
  - Visits Galatian churches for the third time
  - Meanwhile, Apollos
    - Background and training in Alexandria, LXX, baptism of John
    - Comes to Ephesus, taught by Aquila and Priscilla
    - Mighty preacher and defender of faith
    - Moves to Corinth and preaches there
- In Ephesus in Asia:
  - Successful preaching, 2½ years

- Separates believers and meets in lecture hall of Tyrannus (cf. Eph 5:6-7)
- Gospel spreads widely in region (Acts 19:26)
- Writes Galatians (traditional date)
- Writes 1 Corinthians
- Riot started by Demetrius the silversmith; case dismissed by city clerk (cf. “wild beasts at Ephesus in 1 Cor 15:32)
- Nervously awaits Titus’ coming from Corinth with news
- Travels to Troas to meet Titus; not there
- In Macedonia:
  - Continues taking up collection for Jerusalem saints (poor Macedonians give generously, 2 Cor 8:1-5)
  - Finally meets Titus, who gives good report about the Corinthian church
  - Writes 2 Corinthians
- In Corinth:
  - Stays the winter (3 months)
  - Perhaps writes Galatians (latest possible date)
  - Plans to take offering to Jerusalem and then travel to Rome
  - Writes Romans
  - To avoid plot of Jews to kill him, changes plans from sailing to Jerusalem to going back through Macedonia
- Return trip to Jerusalem:
  - Preaches in Macedonia (Philippi)
  - Preaches in Troas (Eutychus falls out window)
  - Preaches in Miletus to Ephesian elders (Acts 20)

- Prophetic warnings about arrest and bonds in Jerusalem (Philip’s daughters, Agabus)
- Arrives in Jerusalem with offering (end of 3 missionary journeys)

### ***Arrest and imprisonment***

God had predicted that Paul would “carry the Lord’s name before the Gentiles and their kings” (Acts 9:15). Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem would begin a whole new phase in his career—he now would indeed testify before kings, but as an accused criminal and a prisoner. God has his own ways of fulfilling his plan! These events are related in Acts 21-28 and provide the background for Paul’s Prison Epistles.

### **Events in Jerusalem**

- In the Jerusalem church:
  - The Jewish church receives Paul, his companions, and his offering “warmly”
  - James tells of false rumors about Paul’s attitude toward the Jewish laws and suggests a way for Paul to prove these rumors false—helping in the sacrifices of a group of Jewish believers
  - Paul accompanies them in the temple
- In the temple:
  - Jews think he has brought a Gentile (Trochimus from Ephesus) into the temple seize him, drag him out, start to kill him
  - Roman tribune Claudius Lysias (rank above centurion, highest military officer in Jerusalem) rescues Paul and arrests him
- In the Antonia fortress:
  - Paul’s speech to the Jews from the fortress stairs (Acts 22)
  - Paul saved from scourging by Roman citizenship
  - Taken by tribune to be questioned before the Sanhedrin (Pharisees and Sadducees and the resurrection of the dead); chaos
  - Reassurance by God in a vision: he will testify in Rome

- Plot of 40 men to kill Paul uncovered by Paul's nephew
- Tribune moves Paul by night from Jerusalem to governor's palace in Caesarea (his letter to Felix, Acts 23:26-30)

### **Events in Caesarea**

- Under Felix:
  - Trial before prefect Felix (Acts 24)
    - Accusations by Jews through lawyer Tertullus
    - Paul's speech to Felix, emphasis on the doctrine of the resurrection
  - Felix desires a bribe (a former slave; his character and reputation)
  - Two years waiting in Caesarea (this period of time may be when Luke researched and wrote his Gospel)
  - Nero replaces Felix with Festus (A.D. 56, according to coin)
- Under Festus:
  - Renewed trial; Festus wants to take Paul back to Jerusalem
  - Paul appeals to Caesar
  - Festus invites visiting king Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice to hear Paul, to get advice on how to write to Nero
  - Paul's speech to Herod Agrippa II (Acts 26)

### **Events during journey to Rome**

- Guarded by Julius, centurion of the "Imperial Regiment"
- Voyage to Rome (Acts 27) shows eyewitness account, agrees with sailing information (Capt. James Smith, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*)
- Sail to Myra (on southern coast of modern Turkey); change ships
- Sail south of Crete, caught by "Northeaster" gale

- Driven southwest, give up for lost
- God's vision to Paul: all to be rescued, ship to be lost
- Shipwreck on Malta
- Spend winter on Malta
- New ship to Puteoli, Italy
- Accompanied by Roman Christians into Rome

### **Events in Rome**

- First Roman imprisonment (A.D. 57-59): 2 years, in comfortable conditions in his own hired house; chained to a Roman soldier
- Extensive witnessing to Roman soldiers, reaching the palace itself
- Roman Christians somewhat divided over Paul's imprisonment
- Final witness to Jews at end of Acts (rejection, turns to Gentiles)
- Writes Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians
- Book of Acts ends at this point, no indication of result of Paul's trial (strong evidence for this as the date of Acts)
- Paul's trial before Nero (A.D. 59): not recorded, but we assume he was acquitted and released, since he apparently traveled extensively again before his second arrest and imprisonment in Rome

### ***Final journeys***

Although the book of Acts does not cover the latter part of Paul's life, information can be gathered from his Pastoral Epistles. In the Prison Epistles he had expressed the desire to visit Colossae in the province of Asia, Philippi in the province of Macedonia, and Spain in the West. In addition the Pastoral Epistles show that he did indeed travel widely, including times spent in Ephesus, Macedonia, Crete, Miletus, Troas, Corinth, and Nicopolis.

During these travels he left Timothy in charge of the large church in Ephesus. He also preached the gospel and started churches in the island province of Crete; he left Titus there to organize and establish those churches. He sent each man a letter of instructions: 1 Timothy and Titus.

## ***Second Roman imprisonment and death***

In A.D. 64 Nero set fire to Rome and began his severe persecution of Christians in Rome. This continued for four years, until his death in A.D. 68. During those years Peter, living in Rome, was arrested and put to death. We don't know if Paul was arrested elsewhere (maybe Nicopolis) and brought to Rome, or if he was in Rome when he was arrested (2 Tim 2:9). In any case, his second imprisonment in Rome was much more severe than his first. It was from this prison that he wrote his son in the faith, Timothy (2 Timothy). Apparently he needed his cloak because of the cold, and books and writing implements (2 Tim 4:13). In addition, many of his friends or disciples could not be with him, or actually forsook him (2 Tim 4:11-12). Luke, his faithful physician, however, was still with Paul; and he asked Timothy to come to him, bring John Mark as well.

Paul expected to be put to death for his faith soon (2 Tim 4:6-8). According to the united testimony of the early church fathers, Paul, as Peter, was put to death in Rome by Nero. As a Roman citizen Paul would have been spared crucifixion or some other degrading form of execution; the acceptable methods for citizens were beheading or being shot with arrows. Apparently Paul was beheaded (ca. A.D. 67).

## **Good books on Paul**

Frank Goodwin, *A Harmony of the Life of St. Paul*

W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*

William Ramsay, *St. Paul, the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*

James Stalker, *The Life of St. Paul*

J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*

F. W. Farrar, *The Life and Work of St. Paul*

Herbert S. Seekings, *The Men of the Pauline Circle*

William Paley, *Horae Paulinae*

Herman Ridderbos, *Paul, An Outline of His Theology*

W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Criticism of the Acts of the Apostles*