

Paul's First Missionary Journey

Acts 13-15

Early life of Saul (before his conversion)

Born in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3) around 5 AD. Saul was born a Roman citizen. Though born in Rome, he was raised in Jerusalem as a Jew (Acts 22:3, Philippians 3:5). He was a Pharisee, and a zealous one at that. Saul learned the trade of tent-making (Acts 18:3). He was respected by many as seen in his first mention in the Bible (Acts 7:58).

From Saul to Paul (his conversion and training that followed)

His conversion is recorded in Acts 9:1-19; and again in 22:3-16; 26:9-18. He also recounts it, briefly, in Galatians 1:11-17.

Following his conversion he was blind for three days in Damascus. After a short stay in Damascus (Acts 9:19b), Paul left for Arabia (Galatians 1:17). He likely spent time in meditation and working on his theology, however his later difficulties with the king of the Nabataeans (Aretas), suggests that he was engaged in active ministry during this time (2 Corinthians 11:32). Paul then returned to Damascus (Gal. 1:17 and possibly Acts 9:20-22). He was forced to leave the city when the Jews tried to kill him. A total of three years after his conversion (Gal. 1:18-20) Saul/Paul then traveled to Jerusalem. He spent 15 days getting acquainted with Peter (Gal. 1:19). Paul was then forced to flee to Tarsus (Gal. 1:21; Acts 9:28-30).

“Fourteen years later” (Galatians 2:1 – probably 14 years from the time of his conversion) Paul returned to Jerusalem with his recruits Barnabas and Titus. It was, perhaps, during these years in Tarsus that some of the things took place that Paul mentions but that are not narrated in Acts (2 Cor. 11:22-27).

Paul's conversion can be dated around 33 AD with his first post-conversion Jerusalem visit around 35 AD. Paul's time in Cilicia and Syria (Tarsus) can be dated at 35-46 AD. This would place Paul's second visit to Jerusalem around 46 AD, leaving Paul and Barnabas setting sail on the first missionary journey in 47 AD. So that the time between Paul's conversion and the first missionary journey would be 14 years.

The First Missionary Journey

The church at Antioch in Syria “placed their hands” on Barnabas and Saul and sent them off. Barnabas and Saul leave Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1) and land on the island of Cyprus where they minister in Salamis and Paphos (13:4-12). At Cyprus, Saul's name is changed to Paul (13:9) (“Saul” means “asked [of God]” and “Paul” means “little”).

The second stop is Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52). Paul is now listed first, as the leader of the group (13:13). When they return to Jerusalem it reverts to “Barnabas and Saul” (15:12).

The third stop is Iconium (14:1-7). Paul and Barnabas preach in the synagogues, as was their custom. They escape from a plot to stone them.

The fourth and fifth stops are Lystra and Derbe (14:8-20). It is in Lystra that Paul is stoned and left for dead (14:19). Paul then goes back into the city of Lystra and then onto Derbe (14:20).

They return back through Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Perga and Attalia on their way back to Antioch in Syria (14:21-28). They received a warm welcome back in Syrian Antioch. However, some people then came down from Jerusalem with some wrong teachings. Paul and Barnabas go up to Jerusalem to set things straight (15:1-21). The church in Jerusalem gives them a warm reception and sends a letter to the Syrian Antioch church saying that the wrongful teaching did not come from them. The letter is delivered by Paul and Barnabas (15:22-35).

The whole journey lasted approximately 2 years. From early 47 AD to late 48 AD. Paul's second journey begins sometime during 49 AD.

Theological/Doctrinal Issues from the First Missionary Journey

Grace vs. Works (15:1-11). Circumcision and obedience to the laws of Moses (15:1-21).

Paul's apostolic authority (he wasn't one of the 12 apostles but certainly preached and performed miracles like an apostle).

Notice how these issues are addressed in Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia (the churches he had just visited – with a letter written while in Jerusalem following the visit).

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Acts 15:36-18:22

Barnabas and Paul part ways (15:36-41)

Much has been made of the disagreement between Barnabas and Paul. The issue appears to be John Mark, who had deserted them on their first missionary journey (13:13). There is lots of speculation about why John Mark had deserted them, and speculation about why this was such a point of disagreement. It is interesting to note that Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus (the island of Barnabas' birthplace), while Paul takes Silas up to Syria and Cilicia (the area around Saul's birthplace). If nothing else, God used this in order to have two separate missionary journeys going on now (and Paul does commend Barnabas and Mark in later letters).

Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Derbe and Lystra (16:1-5)

The young disciple, Timothy, joins the journey – being circumcised so that his work among the Jews might be more effective (compare this with what Paul has said in Galatians 2:3 – circumcision is not necessary for salvation, but may be necessary for ministry).

Paul and his companions thru Phrygia, Galatia, Mysia, and into Troas (16:6-10)

Luke joins the traveling party (note the use of “we” and “us” beginning in verse 10. Some have suggested that Luke was the “man of Macedonia” – probably not. The Holy Spirit (a.k.a. Spirit of Jesus) may have led in any number of ways (vision, circumstances, good sense, or the prophetic gift).

Paul and his pals in Philippi (16:11-40)

Much has been made of Lydia, the woman at the river. She is really the first woman to be listed as playing a significant role in Paul's missionary journeys. Many more women would follow (Damaris, in Athens, and especially Priscilla, in Corinth). Paul and Silas gets in trouble with the locals by driving out an evil demon from a fortune-telling girl. They are imprisoned. During the night and earthquake allows Paul to witness to the jailer, who becomes a believer (he and his whole family). Paul flexes his “Roman Citizen” muscle at the end of his ministry in Philippi, which established their innocence for the sake of the church in Philippi and its future.

Paul and Silas in Thessalonica (17:1-9)

It is speculated that Timothy stayed behind in Philippi, and rejoined Paul and Silas in Berea since Timothy's name is not mentioned in this section, or the preceding section (but is mentioned in letter to Thessalonians); although it may just be that Timothy was watching and learning until Berea. Many Jews, Greeks, and “prominent women” became disciples. Other Jews were upset and forced Paul and Silas to leave much earlier than they desired (you really sense this in the letters to the church).

Paul and the gang in Berea (17:10-15)

The legacy of the Bereans is that they received the gospel message with eagerness and “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11b). Many Jews along with many Gentile men and women became believers. Unbelieving Jews from Thessalonica eventually came down to Berea and made trouble, causing Paul to head for Athens, while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea.

Paul in Athens (17:16-34)

Athens was a highly cultured, but unbelieving, city. Paul gives us a great view of how to do culturally sensitive ministry; that is, to do ministry in which you recognize and utilize the prevailing culture. There were some who became believers, two that are named: Dionysius (a member of the Aeropagus) and a woman named Damaris.

Paul with Priscilla and Aquilla in Corinth (18:1-22)

In Corinth, still awaiting Silas and Timothy (who were in Berea and Thessalonica), Paul meets Priscilla and Aquilla. It is notable that, after their first introduction, Priscilla's name always precedes her husband's name. The ministry in Corinth is quite successful. After a short visit in Ephesus, Paul heads back to the church in Syria Antioch.

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Acts 18:23-21:16

Paul visiting some old friends in Galatia (18:23)

Paul heads out on his Third Journey in the same direction as his Second Journey (region of Galatia and Phrygia) but in the reverse order (16:6). This may mean that he concentrated on the southern region – leading to Ephesus.

Meanwhile, down in Ephesus... (18:24-28)

While Paul was ministering to the Galatian churches, Priscilla and Aquila were ministering to a Jew named Apollo in Ephesus. The order of names suggests that Priscilla did the bulk of the teaching. Apollos then goes on to Corinth.

Meanwhile, Paul comes to Ephesus (19:1-41)

The focus switches back to Paul. In the first 6 verses of the Third Missionary Journey we read about the ministries of Paul, Priscilla and Aquilla, and Apollos. The gospel message is spreading like wildfire, and ministry is happening. Paul immediately discovers that the Jews in Ephesus, like Apollos, only knew about the baptism of John and had not received Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Paul proceeds to proclaim the kingdom of God – first to the Jews. For three months, Paul went to the Synagogues; but the Jews refused to believe. So Paul then proclaimed the kingdom of God to the Gentiles. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul and many Gentiles became believers.

Jewish exorcists tried to copy the work of God through Paul, but the evil spirits were not impressed. As a result, the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. People openly confessed their evil deeds.

Because of the decrease demand for man-made gods and idols, as a result of Paul's ministry, the local craftsmen started a riot in the city. The riot ended peacefully.

Paul in Macedonia and Greece (20:1-6)

Paul traveled from Ephesus up through Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea...) and down through Greece (Athens, Corinth). Because of a Jewish plot against him, during his three months in Corinth, he traveled back through Macedonia to Troas.

Paul preaches to long in Troas (20:7-12)

This is one of the most humorous, and amazing stories in all of Scripture. Paul arrived in Troas and only planned to be there for one day – result a really long “sermon.” Paul spoke to the people until after midnight. One young man, Eutychus, fell asleep while listening. He fell to the ground from the third story window where he was seated (no cushy pews to sit in). Paul went down and raised Eutychus back to life.

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian Elders (20:13-38)

Paul begins sailing back towards home. At the stop in Ephesus, Paul takes the opportunity to say farewell to elders of the Ephesian church. Paul was certain that this would be the last time that he saw them, face-to-face (although, as it turned out, Paul did revisit Ephesus near the end of his life). Paul's words to the Ephesian elders are passionate, and final. Paul even quotes Jesus in verse 35 (a rare instance of a saying of Jesus not found in the canonical Gospels).

Paul heads to Jerusalem (21:1-16)

Paul sails from Ephesus toward Jerusalem. Stops on the mainland in Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea bring warm greetings from the disciples along with warnings not to go to Jerusalem. Paul is convicted that he needs to go to Jerusalem, even if it means dying for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Additional note on the Third Journey:

Apparently, a major part of the third journey was to take up a collection for Jerusalem. This is never mentioned in Acts, but is mentioned in Paul's two letters to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 16; 2 Cor. 8 & 9).

Paul's "Fourth" Missionary Journey

From Jerusalem to Rome

Acts 21:17-28:31

Paul's Arrival and Arrest in Jerusalem (21:17-36)

Paul arrives with a warm greeting from the church. The Jews, however, are outraged at Paul. They are bothered not because Paul is teaching Jews about Jesus Christ; but because he is teaching Jews that they no longer need to live according to Jewish custom. Notice that they are not concerned about Paul teaching anything contrary to Scripture, but contrary to custom.

Paul and four Christians join in purification rites in order to convince the Jews that Paul is not anti-Jewish. The Jews are still infuriated. The whole city is aroused. The Jews seize Paul and begin beating him to death. However, the commander of the Roman troops comes on the scene and the beating ceases. The commander tries to find out what is going on, but the uproar of the crowd makes that impossible; so Paul is taken away to be put in the barracks.

We often get more upset about changes in our customs and traditions than about anti-Christian (that is, opposed to the teaching of Scripture) teachings. While customs and traditions are helpful to maintaining the faith, they can also get in the way. However, don't be too quick to listen to people who suggest that things taught in Scripture are just cultural teachings. The Word of God is unchanging; but we do need to differentiate Christ from culture. This can only be done when you understand Christ, as he is revealed in Scripture, and when you understand culture (past, and present).

Paul Speaks to the Maddening Crowd... (21:37-22:30)

On the steps going up toward the barracks Paul asks the commander if he may speak to the crowd. Permission is granted and Paul begins to speak, in Aramaic – which surprises everyone and they become quiet and attentive.

Paul gives his testimony about his days as a zealous Pharisee and his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. The people are listening until Paul says that Jesus told him that he was to go to the Gentiles. Notice, again, that the people are not upset because Paul is doing anything that goes against Mosaic Law; but it goes against Jewish custom.

In the next scene, Paul is to be flogged and questioned. Just as the centurion is about to begin the flogging, Paul mentions that he is a Roman Citizen. Flogging and imprisoning a Roman Citizen without a trial is a big no-no. So the commander releases Paul to be examined by the Sanhedrin.

Paul Defends himself before the Sanhedrin (23:1-11)

The trial before the Sanhedrin does not begin well. The high priest, Ananias, orders soldiers to strike him on the mouth. Paul then makes a smooth move by bringing up the fact that he is a Pharisee who is on trial because he has hope in the resurrection of the dead. The Sanhedrin is made up of Pharisees and Sadducees – who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead. A debate arose, which took the focus off of Paul. The Pharisees, thus, sided with Paul; while the Sadducees opposed him (on theological grounds). The result is that Paul is thrown back into the barracks so that the commander can decide what to do next.

Paul Defends himself before Governor Felix (23:12-24:27)

While Paul is in the barracks a Jewish plot to kill Paul is stopped; and Paul is transferred up north to Caesarea where he is to go before Governor Felix. (Humor alert: Notice how the commander tries to make himself look good in his letter to the Governor – “but I...rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman Citizen” – when he actually was ready to flog him).

Paul's defense begins by noting that the Jews cannot prove their case against him – because it is a fabrication. Paul goes on, though, to admit that he is a “follower of the Way.” He affirms that he agrees

with the Law and the Prophets (that is, the Old Testament). Felix was hoping Paul would bribe him, but that wasn't going to happen. Paul is in a "Minimum-Security Prison" for two years under the rule of Felix.

Paul Defends himself before Governor Festus (25:1-22)

Paul is not able to get a pardon from Felix (if only Bill Clinton had been the Governor of Cesarea); so Paul has to defend himself, again, before the new Governor – Festus. Paul's defense starts in a similar manner. He states that the Jews have no case, because he has done nothing wrong against Jewish Law or Roman Law. Paul then appeals to Caesar (his right as a Roman Citizen).

Festus talks to King Agrippa about the situation, and Agrippa becomes intrigued by the case and wants to hear it for himself. SIDE NOTE – It is interesting to see the perspective that Festus has on the situation. He is neither a Christian, nor a Jew, and sees the case in purely legal terms. Just as Jesus could not be found guilty – in legal terms, neither can Paul be found guilty.

Paul Defends himself before King Agrippa (25:23-26:32)

Festus reassembles the court on the pretense that he is trying to figure out what to write about the case so that Paul can be sent to Rome. Therefore, Paul is not really on trial at this point (that is, he won't be found guilty or not guilty at this point – this gives him the freedom to speak boldly).

Paul shares his testimony, again, with Agrippa. And begins to share the truth of the gospel when he is interrupted by Agrippa who thinks that he is just some kind of insane lover of prophecy about the resurrection. Paul goes on, attempting to share the gospel when he is again interrupted by Agrippa who says, "Do you think...you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Agrippa finds that there is no reason to keep Paul in prison. He even suggests that he could have been set free; but if he wants to talk to Caesar then off to Caesar we go.

Paul Sails for Rome (27:1-44)

The trip to Rome is a long and rocky one. A "northeaster" storm kicks in (if they had listened to Paul it wouldn't have been a problem – but remember that God is sovereign throughout this whole journey). Paul encourages them saying that an angel of God told him that no one would be harmed. The storm causes them to shipwreck ashore the island of Malta.

Paul on Malta (28:1-10)

On Malta, Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake; but Paul survives. Paul also has an opportunity to heal the father of a chief official. Paul, undoubtedly, had ample opportunity to share the gospel.

Paul Arrives in Rome (28:11-31)

Paul finally makes it to Rome, which is exactly where he was planning to go on his next Missionary Journey anyway (this way Rome pays for the trip instead of Paul having to pay for the trip). The Christians in Rome are thrilled to see Paul.

Paul assembles the Jews together in order to talk to them about the charges against him. As it turns out, the Jews in Rome don't know anything about the charges made against him in Jerusalem. They just want to hear Paul teach them about Jesus. (God is amazing to sovereignly make all of this turn out this way).

And so, for the next two years Paul preaches the gospel under guard and in a rented house. This is a very minimum-security situation.