

A Biblical Case Study of Paul

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July 14, 2018

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In the narratives of the book of Acts the reader is first introduced to Paul when he was Saul of Tarsus. He was standing over the first Christian martyr Stephen looking on as Stephen was stoned to death. As a dedicated Jew, Saul sought to quiet the quickly growing movement of men and women who followed Jesus Christ. Paul was born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia. His father was of the tribe of Benjamin, (Philemon 3:5) and a Pharisee, (Acts 23:6). Paul's Hebrew name was Saul. He was born a Roman citizen, which means his father also was a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 22:27-28; 23:27). He was educated in Jerusalem under the most famous Rabbi of the time, Gamaliel. From this introduction to the completion of his missionary journeys Paul has become a champion and hero in the Christian faith. His Letter to the Romans has had a profound impact upon our understanding of guilt and grace, predestination and faith. Wherever reformation has come to the church the ideas of this epistle have played a leading part. His letters were prized by the early church. His fellow apostle Peter recognized their worth and included them with the other scriptures.

Paul received an official commission from the high priest in Jerusalem to travel to Damascus in Syria to arrest, imprison, and even have executed any members of the Jesus movement who had fled the city under persecution (Acts 7:54-8:1). It was on the road to Damascus that he had his dramatic heavenly vision of Jesus, who commissioned him as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:3-9; Acts 22:6-11; Acts 26:12-18). In the narratives we read of the sudden light from heaven; the voice of Jesus speaking with authority to his persecutor; Saul struck to the ground, blinded, overcome; the three days suspense; the coming of Ananias as a messenger of the Lord and Saul's baptism. The Lord further instructed Ananias to lay his hands upon Saul and restore to him his sight, baptize him, confer upon him the Holy Ghost, and strengthen him (see Acts 9:1-19). The same hour Saul received his sight under the hands of Ananias. After Saul tarried with Ananias and the disciples at Damascus for "certain days" (Acts 9:19), he retired to Arabia for three years.

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After his solitary preparation he reappeared at Damascus seeking to preach the gospel. At the end of this time Barnabas went to find Paul and brought him back to Antioch (Acts 11:26).

The twelve apostles, who dwelt in Jerusalem, had all “seen” Jesus Christ. This is one of their qualifications as apostles. And now, Paul also says he has “seen” Jesus Christ.

Saul was a witness of the literal bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the Damascus road. His second recorded vision of the resurrected Lord was at the house of Justus in Corinth. Therein, the Lord visited His newly chosen vessel in a night vision. Here, the resurrected Lord told him to preach boldly and that He would protect him (see Acts 18:7, 9–10). His third visit by the Lord took place in the temple at Jerusalem. His call to serve was reconfirmed, “While I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and *saw him* saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:17–18).

The church in Antioch wanted to send out missionaries to preach and start new works. The great leader Barnabas and the growing Christian Paul were chosen. They traveled together and were known as Barnabas and Paul. Paul began to take a more active role in leadership and direction for their traveling ministry. In the narratives we read that Barnabas respected the obvious leading of God on Paul’s life. They continued to travel together until Acts 15. In this chapter they took opposing views on taking the young John Mark with them on their next journey. John Mark had abandoned them during the first missionary journey and Paul did not want to give him a second chance. Barnabas took the young man and mentored him like he had done for Paul. The result was that two great preaching teams were then starting churches where there previously was only one.

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The first journey begins when Paul, Barnabas, and Mark set out from Antioch (Acts 13:4). The first journey took Paul from Antioch to Cyprus then into southern Asia Minor. In the synagogues Paul reviews Israelite history from life in Egypt to King David. He introduces Jesus as a descendent of David brought to Israel by God. Paul said that his team came to bring the message of salvation. He recounts the story of Jesus' death and resurrection. The Gentiles accepted the Gospel message. The influential Jews were angered. Paul used this occasion to announce that from then on his mission would be to the Gentiles. The first journey ends in Antioch, Syria, where Paul and Barnabas stay there a long time (Acts 14:28).

On the second missionary journey Paul takes Silas through Syria and Cilicia (now southeastern Turkey). They came to Derbe and Lystra, where they find Timothy, who goes with Paul and Silas throughout Phrygia and Galatia. But they are forbidden by the Spirit to go into Asia or Bithynia. They passed through Mysia to Troas, the island of Samothracia, and then to Neapolis in Macedonia (now northern Greece). At Philippi, God opens the heart of Lydia and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:14-34). Paul then makes his first visit to Corinth where he stays a year and a half (Acts 18:1, 5, 11). Here, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, who had just come from Rome, from which Claudius Caesar had banished all Jews. Silas and Timothy rejoin Paul. First Thessalonians was written from here (1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 6). Second Thessalonians was also written from Corinth. Paul left by boat with Aquila and Priscilla to Cenchrea and then across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus. Aquila and Priscilla stay there where they would later meet Apollos (Acts 18:19 and 26). Paul sails on to Caesarea and then goes up to Antioch in Syria, where the second journey ends.

The third journey begins with Galatia and then Phrygia (Acts 18:23). Then Paul arrives at Ephesus where he stayed for 3 years (Acts 20:31). Paul meets disciples of John the Baptist. He

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preached in the synagogue for 3 months (Acts 19:8). Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead into Macedonia, but Paul stayed in Asia for a season (Acts 19:22). Paul wrote 1 Corinthians near the end of this stay in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 16:8-19). Paul had rejoined Timothy when Second Corinthians was written (2 Corinthians 1:1). Paul had come to Troas, and continued to Macedonia (2 Corinthians 2:12-13 and 7:5) where he was joined by Titus. Second Corinthians was written from somewhere in Macedonia (northern Greece), possibly at Philippi. After going through Macedonia, Paul came to Achaia where he stayed 3 months (Acts 20:2-3), making a third visit to Corinth. The Book of Romans was written at this time (Rom 15:23-26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3). Galatians was written from Ephesus during Paul's 3 years there. The third journey ends at Jerusalem. Paul is beaten by Jews, preaches to them (Acts 22:1-21), and is brought before Sanhedrin. Jesus Christ tells Paul that he will go to bear him witness in Rome. Many Jews vow to kill Paul (Acts 23:12). Paul is taken to Governor Felix (Acts 24:10). Paul then spends 2 years in prison in Caesarea in Judea. Paul appeals to Caesar (Acts 25:11). Herod Agrippa II hears Paul.

Paul, still a prisoner, sails to Sidon with Luke and Aristarchus (Acts 27:1-2) on the way to Italy. Paul spends 2 years in his own hired house (Acts 28:30) as a prisoner in Rome. During this time he wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. After his release, he wrote the epistles of Hebrews, Titus, First Timothy, and Second Timothy, not necessarily in that order. At some time after being released from the prison in Rome, Paul went to Corinth and Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). He also went to Troas (2 Timothy 4:13), Crete (Titus 1:5), and Nicopolis for the winter (Titus 3:12). Paul left Titus in Crete after Paul's imprisonment in Rome ended. Paul did not go there during the first 3 journeys. The letter to Titus was probably written here (Titus 3:12).

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The Bible does not say how the apostle Paul died. The tradition is that Peter was crucified upside down and that Paul was beheaded due to the fact that Paul was a Roman citizen and Roman citizens were normally exempt from crucifixion. But, from all indications, he died for his faith. We can assume he died declaring the gospel of Christ, spending his last breath as a witness to the truth that sets men free.

### **Questions**

1. What was it about Paul that made him the “chief” apostle?
2. What leadership skills did Paul most exhibit?
3. What was it about Paul’s gospel message that drew people to Jesus?