

“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God” (I Cor. 1:1)

I. Why is St. Paul so important to the Church?

- A. Of the 27 books of the New Testament, half have St. Paul’s name attached.
 - 1. Seven are undisputed as having been written by St. Paul.
 - 2. Paul’s undisputed letters are the earliest documents in the New Testament.
- B. Over half of the Acts of the Apostles deals with the missionary work of St. Paul. Through the Acts of the Apostles and St. Paul’s letters, we know more about his works and thought than we do of any of the other Apostles.
- C. Although the letters of St. Paul were written to individual churches and deal with specific issues being faced by those churches, and thus are not an exercise in either systematic theology or Church history, they do provide insights into both aspects of the development of the Church in the years immediately following Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.
- D. “The ultimate gift of Paul is to have preached a gospel that had enormous power in itself and could not be chained, even when its proponents were.” Raymond Brown, S.S. An Introduction to the New Testament, Doubleday, New York, NY, 1997, pg 455.

II. St. Paul’s Background

- A. Born in early in the common era (5-10 AD) during the reign of the Emperor Augustus to a Hellenistic Jewish family that could trace its roots to the tribe of Benjamin.
- B. Raised and educated in Tarsus, a city in southeastern Asia Minor (Cilicia), which had a large Jewish population.
 - 1. Tarsus was a meeting place of Greek and oriental cultures and had some eminence as a university city.
 - 2. As a strict Pharisaic Jew, Paul would not have attended the university but would have received his early education in the local synagogue.
 - 3. Had a trade as a tentmaker.

C. Received the final stages of his education in Jerusalem under the guidance of the Rabbi Gamaliel.

D. Roman citizen by birth, although how exactly this occurred is unclear.

1. Provided social and economic advantages.
2. Prevented punishment without a fair trial.

E. Pharisaic Jewish background

1. The Christian Paul looks back with pride on his life as a Jew of the Pharisaic tradition (Phil. 3:5-6; Gal. 1:14; II Cor. 11:22).
2. Thinks and expresses himself in Old Testament categories and quotes the Old Testament almost 90 times.
 - a. Quotes from the Septuagint and is familiar with the Deuterocanonical Old Testament books that were written/preserved only in Greek.
 - b. Most of his theology and anthropology clearly reveal his Jewish background.
 - c. Use of the Old Testament is similar to that in works written at Qumran and in other inter-testamental literature.

F. Hellenistic background

1. Wrote good koinē Greek whose style indicates that he had a good Greek education.
 - a. His mode of composition and expression show the influence of Greco-Roman rhetoric and the use of diatribe (Rom. 2:1-20; 3:1-9; 9:19; I Cor. 9).
2. Had knowledge of Gentile life and of the importance of the household.
 - a. Uses Greek political, legal and commercial terminology.
 - b. Refers to Greek games, the slave trade and celebrations in honor of an emperor.
3. Uses numerous Hellenistic concepts and ideas
 - a. freedom = elutheria (Gal. 5:1, 13)
 - b. conscience = syndeidēsis (I Cor. 8:7, 10, 12; 10:25-29; II Cor. 5:11; Rom. 2:15)
 - c. sufficiency/contentment (Stoic) = antarkeia (II Cor. 9:8)
 - d. nature = physis (Rom. 2:14)

G. Early encounters with Christianity

1. Did not encounter Jesus during his earthly ministry. This suggests that he came to study in Jerusalem in the early 30's AD after Jesus's death and resurrection.
2. Was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:53-8:1).
3. Led the persecution of the Christian church in Jerusalem after the death of Stephen (Acts 8:3; I Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13-14; Phil. 3:6).

III. Encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road

A. Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road changed his life.

- 1. Acts 9:3-19a** ³On his [Saul's] journey, as he was nearing Damascus, a light from the sky suddenly flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" ⁵He said, "Who are you, sir?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ⁶Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." ⁷The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, for they heard the voice but could see no one. ⁸Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him to Damascus. ⁹For three days he was unable to see, and he neither ate nor drank. ¹⁰There was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias, and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight and ask at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is there praying, ¹² and (in a vision) he has seen a man named Ananias come in and lay (his) hands on him, that he may regain his sight." ¹³But Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard from many sources about this man, what evil things he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem. ¹⁴And here he has authority from the chief priests to imprison all who call upon your name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for this man is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites, ¹⁶and I will show him what he will have to suffer for my name." ¹⁷So Ananias went and entered the house; laying his hands on him, he said, "Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and be filled with the holy Spirit." ¹⁸Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹and when he had eaten, he recovered his strength.

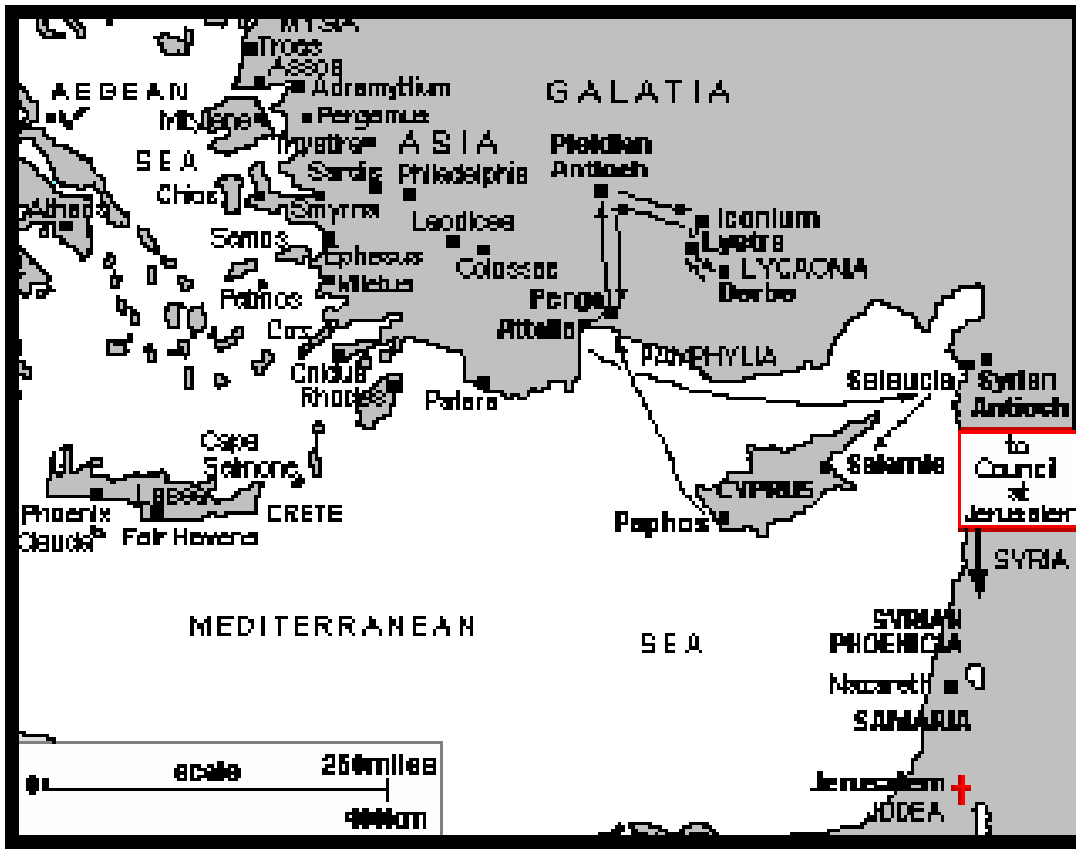
2. **Gal. 1:11-19** ¹¹Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. ¹²For I did not receive it from a human being, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it, ¹⁴ and progressed in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my race, since I was even more a zealot for my ancestral traditions. ¹⁵But when (God), who from my mother's womb had set me apart and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him to the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; rather, I went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to confer with Cephas and remained with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹But I did not see any other of the apostles, only James the brother of the Lord.
3. **I Cor. 15:18-20** ⁸Last of all, as to one born abnormally, he appeared to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been ineffective. Indeed, I have toiled harder than all of them; not I, however, but the grace of God (that is) with me.

B. Paul later described the effects of his encounter with the risen Christ in his letter to the Philippians.

1. **Phil. 3:7-14** ⁷(But) whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having any righteousness of my own based on the law but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God, depending on faith ¹⁰to know him and the power of his resurrection and (the) sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ (Jesus). ¹³Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus.

IV. Paul's Missionary Journeys

A. Mission of Barnabas & Saul to Gentiles; Approval at Jerusalem (Acts 13:1–15:35)



1. Barnabas and Saul are commissioned by laying on of hands to undertake a missionary journey (46–49 AD).
2. They first travel to Cyprus and speak mostly (?) to Jewish synagogues (Acts 13:4–12)
 - a. Cyprus seems to be Barnabas's territory because none of Paul's letters is to Churches in Cyprus and he never revisits the island during his later missionary journeys.
3. Next they travel to Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13–50; Gal. 1:21–22; Phil. 4:15)
 - a. From this point on only Paul is used.
 - b. Paul preaches a sermon in the synagogue.
 - e. Jewish hostility forces Barnabas and Paul to turn to Gentiles taking some Jews with them.
 - f. Finally Jewish hostility becomes so great that Barnabas and Paul are forced to leave the city.

4. Barnabas and Paul next travel to Iconium (Acts 13:51–14:5)
 - a. Their approach and the results are similar.
5. Barnabas and Paul next continue on to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:5–14:21a)
 - a. In Lystra, Paul heals a cripple as Peter had done earlier in Jerusalem. This results in Barnabas and Paul being proclaimed gods.
 - b. Jewish hostility results in Paul being stoned and left for dead.
6. Barnabas and Paul retrace their steps to Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 14:21b–28)
 - a. Appoint presbyters (elders) in every church.
 1. Some scholars question whether this degree of organization occurred so early in the Church development or whether this reflects the situation at the time Acts was written.
7. Journey ends with a report that “[God] had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27)
8. The Council of Jerusalem (49 AD) (Acts 15:1–35; Gal. 2:1–4)
 - a. The issue that was unresolved when Peter baptized Cornelius now must be dealt with; do Gentile Christians also have to become Jews?
 1. This issue probably was raised at this point because Barnabas and Paul were setting up whole Gentile churches whereas previous Gentile converts were being brought into a largely Jewish church.
 2. Acts describes the situation as being resolved by the ruling of James. The Gentiles are required to obey the same laws as were prescribed for aliens living among the Israelites in Leviticus 17–18.
 - c. Different from situation described in Galatians (Gal. 2:1–14)
 1. Differences about food laws remain
 2. Paul’s description of the Council of Jerusalem centers on his role and does not mention any restrictions that are placed on Gentile Christians.

B. Mission of Paul to the Ends of the Earth (Acts 15:36–28:31)



1. From Antioch through Asia Minor to Greece and Return (50-52 AD) (Acts 15:36–18:22a)
 - a. Paul travels with Silas rather than with Barnabas due to dispute over John Mark.
 - b. General features
 1. Everywhere resistance is encountered from Jews and/or Gentiles (Acts 16:19–24; 17:5, 13; 18:6, 12; 19:23–40)
 2. Everywhere some converts are gained from Jews and/or Gentiles (Acts 16:14–15, 29–34; 17:4, 11, 34; 18:7–11; 19:11–20)
 3. Apostles are blessed by divine protection (Acts 16:26, 35–40)
 - c. Paul first revisits Lystra and Derbe (Acts 16:1–5)
 - d. Next Paul moves through Phrygia and Galatia to Troas. There he has a vision of a man calling him to come to Macedonia (Acts 16:6–10)

- e. Evangelization of Philippi shows best and worst of a Gentile mission (Acts 16:11–40; I Thess. 2:2; II Cor. 11:9).
 1. Goodness of Lydia shows the desire of Gentiles for the gospel.
 2. Problems with the slave girl having a spirit of divination show the difficulty of dealing with the pagan and superstitious world of the Gentiles.
 3. Paul's escape from prison echoes Peter's earlier escape from prison in Jerusalem and shows that God is with his emissary to the Gentiles.
- f. At Thessalonica and Beroea, Paul runs into the same kind of Jewish opposition that he encountered in Asia Minor (Acts 17:1–15; I Thess. 2:2).
- g. At Athens, Paul reaches out to Gentiles through Greek philosophy. This had an impact on later theology (Acts 17:16–34; I Thess. 3:1).
- h. In contrast to his brief stays in other cities, Paul stays for some time (probably 18 months) in Corinth (Acts 18:1–18a; I Cor. 1:19; 11:7-9; 1 Thess. 3:6)
 1. The earliest of Paul's letters, 1 Thessalonians, was written during his stay in Corinth.
 2. Paul is shown to be forming a circle of friends and colleagues who will help with his evangelization efforts.
 3. Paul's encounter with Gallio shows that the initial Roman reaction to Christianity, which was then seen as a Jewish sect, was not hostile.
- i. Finally, Paul returns to Antioch by way of Ephesus and Caesarea (Acts 18:18b–22a). He appears to have stayed in Antioch for at least a year.
2. From Antioch to Ephesus and Greece and return to Caesarea (54-58 AD) (Acts 18:22b–21:24).
 - a. Paul sets out from Antioch through Galatia and Phrygia to Ephesus (Acts 18:22b–19:21; Gal. 4:13).
 1. Apollos, a Christian who had received John's baptism but knew nothing of the Spirit, is introduced (I Cor. 16:12).
 2. Paul is shown as a miracle worker (Acts 19:1–19).
 3. Ephesus becomes a major center of Christianity.
 4. The best estimate from a variety of sources is that Paul stayed in Ephesus for about three years (54-57 AD) (I Cor. 1:11; 16:17; 7:1).
 - a. It is almost certain that I Corinthians was written from Ephesus during this time.



- b. Paul may have been imprisoned in Ephesus although it is not mentioned in Acts (I Cor. 15:32; II Cor. 1:8). If this was indeed the case, it seems likely that Galatians, Philemon and Philippians were also written from Ephesus.
- c. Many of the interactions with the Corinthian church mentioned in Paul's letters to the Corinthians may have occurred during this time.
 - 1. Timothy sent to Corinth (I Cor. 4:17; 16:10).
 - 2. Paul's second 'painful' visit to Corinth (II Cor. 13:2).
 - 3. Titus's trip to Corinth with 'letter written in tears' (II Cor. 2:3).
- b. Paul's travels though Macedonia and Greece are briefly recounted (Acts 20:1–3a).
 - 1. Most likely writes II Corinthians before he arrives at Corinth and sends it with Titus (II Cor. 7:6, 16-17; II Cor. 13:1).
 - 2. Most likely writes Romans from Corinth during the winter of 57 AD (Rom. 15:25-29).
- c. Goes back to Troas through Macedonia and Philippi (Acts 20:3b–6).
 - 1. "We" form of the narrative resumes as Paul crosses to Troas.
- d. At Troas, Paul restores a dead person to life (resuscitation) just as Peter did with Tabitha in Joppa (Acts 20:7–12; II Cor. 2:12).

- e. Paul then hastens along the coast of Asia Minor so that he can arrive in Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (58 AD) (Acts 20:8–21:14).
 - 1. Gives a farewell sermon to Ephesians at Miletos (Acts 20:17–38).
 - a. Predicts that he will be arrested in Jerusalem and put on trial.
 - b. Admonishes presbyters to be faithful stewards and guard against false teaching. This suggests that presbyters were well established by the end of the 1st century AD.
 - 2. In the Pastoral Epistles, there is evidence that Paul returned to Asia Minor in the 60s AD (presumably after having been released from prison in Rome). Luke shows no knowledge of this.
 - f. Paul has another dramatic farewell at Tyre (Acts 21:1–6) and then continues to Caesarea (Acts 21:7–14)
- 3. Arrest in Jerusalem; imprisonment and trials in Caesarea (Acts 21:14–26:32)
 - a. Paul is received by James and the elders (Acts 21:18–25)
 - 1. This makes it clear that there is no problem between Paul and the Jerusalem Church.
 - b. Paul goes to the Temple to show his loyalty to Judaism and is arrested after a riot is started by a false rumor (Acts 21:26–40).
 - c. Paul gives a speech defending himself that causes conflict (Acts 22:1–19).
 - d. Paul is brought before the Sanhedrin and arouses dissent by appealing to the Pharisees' belief in the resurrection of the dead. (Acts 22:30–23:11)
 - e. Paul's nephew frustrates a plot to kill Paul, and Paul is transferred to Caesarea (Acts 23:12–35).
 - f. Paul is tried before Felix in Caesarea (Acts 24:1–27).
 - 1. Parallels Jesus' trial before Pilate
 - 2. Felix was procurator in Palestine from 52 to 60 AD.
 - 3. Paul is kept in prison not because he is guilty but because Felix is corrupt.

- g. Paul is interviewed by Festus and King Agrippa. He refuses to go to Jerusalem for trial and appeals to a trial before Caesar. (Acts 25:1–26:32).
 - 1. Festus was procurator in Palestine from 60 to 62 AD.
 - 2. Interview with Agrippa II parallels Jesus' interview with Herod.
 - 3. Luke again makes it clear that Paul does not deserve to be in prison.
- 4. Paul journeys to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27:1–28:11).
 - a. Paul travels up Syrian coast, past Cyprus, along the southern coast of Asia Minor and across to the southern coast of Crete where the ship spends the winter. His ship is then wrecked at Malta. Finally he lands at Puteoli and continues up the Italian peninsula to Rome.
 - b. Trip probably starts in the late summer of 60 AD and ends in 61 AD.
 - c. Story of the storm, shipwreck, escape to land and protection from snakebite show the power of the Spirit.
- 5. Paul at Rome (Acts 28:12–28:31). The witness of the Gospel arrives at the ends of the earth in triumph. The effect of Roman imprisonment is to allow Paul to evangelize the capital of the Roman Empire.

V. Acts does not tell of Paul's death

- A. Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* (early 4th century AD) writes that Paul was martyred under Nero about the same time as Peter (64 AD) or slightly later (67 AD).
- B. 1 Clement 5:7, written within 30 years of Paul's death, indicates that Paul traveled to 'the extreme West' (Spain ?) before he was martyred in Rome. This is consistent with Paul's plans outlined in Rom. 15:22-27.
- C. Date of Paul's death has a major impact on whether the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, II Timothy, Titus) are considered to be written by Paul or by a later disciple. If 1 Timothy and Titus are genuinely Pauline, then Paul must have again visited Ephesus, Macedonia (from which 1 Timothy is supposedly written) and Greece before his death during a second Roman imprisonment.