

The Life and Ministry of Saul (Paul) of Tarsus
The Apostle of Grace

Summary:

- ca. 5-15 AD: Saul was born in Tarsus, Cilicia, a Roman colony, into a devout Jewish family where he spent his earliest years.
 - ca. 15-31AD: He resided in Jerusalem, perhaps with his family, where he studied under Gamaliel, the rabban, and became a devout, zealous Pharisee.
 - ca. 32-35: As a devout Pharisee, he became host to the witness of Jesus and John the Baptist, particularly the formers claim that was the Messiah. With the birth of the church on 24 May 33 AD, his obstinacy boiled over into outright persecution.
 - ca. 35: In an act of divine grace, Jesus appeared to him. He believed in Jesus and was called to proclaim the message he sought to destroy.
 - ca. 35-37: The embryonic apostle went immediately into seclusion somewhere in Arabia where he studied his Scriptures and sought to discern what had transpired in his life.
 - ca. 37: He returned to Damascus, joined the Christian community, and fearlessly proclaimed that Jesus is the Messiah until he was force out by religious opposition.
 - ca. 37-38: Saul returned to Jerusalem, the first time after his conversion, and was initially treated with rejection by the fearful believers until Barnabas, a leader among the believers, witnessed to his conversion. As in Damascus, Saul boldly proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God/Messiah until threats on his life cause the church to send him to Tarsus.
 - ca. 38-43: Saul proclaimed Jesus in the town of his upbringing, Tarsus. "Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21)."
 - ca. 44-46: Saul ministered in the church at Antioch, Syria, the growing Christian community.
 - ca. 46: Barnabas and Saul in Jerusalem, the famine visit.
 - ca. 46-48: The first missionary journey.
 - ca. 49: The Jerusalem Council: The affirmation of Paul's message and the letter to Antioch. Works of the law rejected; redemptive grace without works affirmed.
 - ca. 49: The conflict with Peter in Antioch, one of Peter's darker moments!
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ca. 49: Paul's desire to visit the Galatian churches.

"Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing (Acts 15:36)."

ca. 49: Controversy reformulates the team.

"Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company (Acts 15:37-38)."

Observations

1. There are times when godly people disagree, some see what others do not and it is time to resolve the conflict. For them, it was separation.
2. Paul sent Judas and Silas from Jerusalem to accompany him, with the letter from the Jerusalem Council, to Antioch.
3. Were either Barnabas or Paul wrong in their judgments?

ca. 50-52: The second missionary journey.

A. Revisiting the churches of Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia.

“He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches (Acts 15:39).”

“Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers (Acts 16:1-3, 5).”

B. The uncertainty of the next step.

“Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us (Acts 16:6-9).”

Observations

1. Why did Paul circumcise Timothy when he has the knowledge of the Jerusalem letter? How does Paul escape duplicity as in the case of Peter?
2. The team is now three (Paul, Silas, Timothy), Titus did not join them staying likely in Antioch. It also seems that Luke is with them (16:10: “we”).
3. Sometimes the Spirit guides Paul with a “No” until the options are eliminated.

C. The establishment of the church in the city of Philippi.

“From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days. On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home (Acts 16:12-15).”

“The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he

received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:22-24)."

"The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' (Acts 16:29-30)."

³The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed. They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. ⁴After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left (Acts 16:38-40). "

Observations

1. Philippi was a Roman city meaning soldiers for the empire could return there after twenty years of service, with land and privilege.
2. God turns evil into good, but it often requires a long-term perspective.
3. The account of Lydia's conversion gives us a wonder picture of redemption and what it means (it fundamentally touches the heart, the faculty of affections).
4. The jailor's response to the gospel tells us much of the external changes it brings about for us.
5. Again, Luke is with them (16:11, 16: "we") though he seems that he did not go further. Perhaps he stayed to strengthen the believers.

D. The establishment of the church in the city of Thessalonica.

"When Paul and his companions had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue.

As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures (Acts 17:1-2)."

"But other Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city... They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd. ⁶ But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials... When they heard this, the crowd and the city officials were thrown into turmoil. Then they made Jason and the others post bond and let them go (Acts 17:5-6, 8-9)."

Observations

1. The spread of the gospel brings with it conflict in as evidenced in Paul's experience throughout his story.
2. The ruler in the synagogue seems to have embraced the gospel since the crowd held him accountable. Jason had to post a bond promising no further riots.
3. Clearly Paul was preaching Christ as the only Messiah/king so the mob made an unwarranted deduction for their own advantage.

E. The establishment of the church in Berea.

“As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true (Acts 17:10-11).”

But when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The believers immediately sent Paul to the coast, but Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea (Acts 17:13-14).”

Observations

1. Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea to serve the church since only Paul departed.
2. What a different response in Berea, than Thessalonica. Is this why Paul wrote the Thessalonians twice?
3. We all need to be Bereans!

F. The establishment of believers in Athens

Athens was the greatest city in Greece, the center of cultural heritage and the intellectual center of the Roman world. It was steeped in tradition, immorality, and superstition.

“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, ‘What is this babbler trying to say?’ Others remarked, ‘He seems to be advocating foreign gods.’”

They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-19).”

“”Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you (Acts 17:22-23).”

“When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, ‘We want to hear you again on this subject.’” At that, Paul left the Council. Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others (Acts 17:32-34).”

The Epicureans were followers of the approach to meaning in life taught by Epicurus (341-270 BC), an Athenian. They were strict materialists meaning that pleasure in this life was the highest of goals since there was not life after this one. Their motto was, “Enjoy Life now!.”

The Stoics, founded by Zeno., a Cypriot who moved to Athens about 300 BC, believed that God existed in nature (pantheism) and humans must live in harmony with it. Reason, self-control, and self-sufficiency were the highest of moral ideals. They believed that all humans have a divine principal within, reason, enabling that to realize their highest potential. Because they taught in the painted porticos where Zeno taught (the stoa), they became known as Stoics.

Observations

1. Paul traveled alone to Athens and continued the approach of going to the Jews first.
2. Two philosophical schools, Epicureans and Stoics, must have joined the gathering. Remember, the philosophers in Athens loved to talk, debate and hear new ideas (17:21). As always, the group was divided in opinion, some believing in Christ and the resurrection.
3. Paul is taken to the public forum on Mars Hill, the Areopagus, where was permitted to share his ideas.
4. Notice that in a radically secular setting, Paul's message changed in form. He knew the culture into which he was speaking. His message was that there is only one true God. To sustain his point, he quotes from the writings of four Greek philosophers, including the greatest: Plato, well as Aratus and Euripides.

There is only one true God.

This God alone is the creator of all things.

This God preserves mankind so that they might seek Him, but people look for Him in the wrong places.

All mankind is answerable to this one and only God.

The escape for mankind is repentance toward God.

His hearers are ignorant of Jesus.

G. The establishment of the church in the city of Corinth

Corinth was the capital of the region of Achaia. It was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and rebuilt by Julius Caesar in 46 BC, becoming a Roman colony and the major commercial city in Greece. Corinth controlled trade laterally across the empire and was a major center of the Greco-Roman world. The city had over 200,000 inhabitants and its importance was highlighted in that it was the site of the bi-annual Isthmian games.

The city was located on an isthmus, a small land mass or corridor of ten miles wide, connecting the northern and southern (the Peloponnesus) portions of Greece. Because shipping was dangerous, and the route lengthy around Greece, Corinth connected the Adriatic Sea and the Aegean Sea (cargo was carried over the land mass and reloaded from Laechaeum, two miles west of Corinth, to Cenchrea, nine mile east of Corinth. In Paul's day, it literally was where "East meets West," as well as north-south commerce.

"After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 18:1-5)."

Dependent on a secular trade for a living, tent making or leather working, Paul joined a Jewish Christian, Aquila, and his wife Pricilla, likely a woman from aristocratic Roman culture, that had been expelled from Rome by an edict of Emperor Claudius (41-54) in 49. The edict expelled the Jews for riots over a person called “Crestus,” indicating that disputes between Jews and Christ-followers may have reached a boiling point.

“One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.’ So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God (Acts 18:9-11).

“While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. ‘This man,’ they charged, ‘is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law. (Acts 18: 12-13).”

Observations

1. Paul was joined in Corinth sometime after his arrival by Silas and Timothy. While alone, he had no income. So he joined Aquila and Priscilla in their shared trade. When they arrived, likely with love-gifts from the Philippians, he was freed to evangelize full time. (Perhaps through the generosity of the Philippian believers, Phil. 1:5, “fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now”).
2. Serving Christ in such a hostile location brought fear to Paul (this reveals his humanity) but God came to reassure him. Does He not do this for us!
3. The ruler of the synagogue, Titius Justus, believed and troubles emerged from the unbelieving Jews.
4. Paul was arrested on false charges and taken to court, the bema seat. The new ruler of the synagogue, Sosthenes (a common name of the time, it may or may not be the Sosthenes of I Cor. 1:1, Paul’s companion), is beaten by the Jews for an unstated reason.

H. A short stop in Ephesus.

The city was a significant commercial center having an excellent harbor facilitating East-West trade. Being a free city, it was governed by local leadership without the presence of a Roman garrison. The prestige of the city is evident in that it was the only Asia city to host the bi-annual athletic games, the Asian Games. Religiously, it was the site of the Temple of Artemis (the many breasted goddess Diana to the Romans), one of the seven wonders of the world. It was grand with 127 columns, each 60’ tall with 86 overlaid with gold. Behind the glitter it was a very immoral, multi-cultural city.

“Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, “I will come back if it is God’s will.” Then he set sail from Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21).”

Observations

1. Paul kept his Jewish heritage, a vow. He did not cease to be what he was, a Jew (a true one).
2. The team with Priscilla and Aquila stopped in Ephesus where the couple remained behind.
3. Paul promised to return.

I. The return to Antioch, Syria, via Jerusalem.

“When he landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the churches and then went down to Antioch (Acts 18:12).”

Observations

1. Note that by this time there were multiple churches in Jerusalem.
2. Paul again demonstrates accountability.