

**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!
- ca. 49: Paul's desire to visit the Galatian churches, delivering the findings of the Jerusalem Council (the context of the writing of Galatians).
- ca. 50-52: The Second Missionary Journey.

ca. 53-57: The Third Missionary Journey.

A. The decision to return to the churches in Asia Minor (ca. 53).

"After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples (Acts 18:23)."

Observations

1. Notice how cryptic the account of visiting the church becomes on the third journey in Asia Minor.
2. The reason, perhaps for the cryptic nature of the record was two-fold: first, he realized that his work in the East was ending. Second, in closing he wanted to bring a love-gift to Jerusalem from the Gentile, a gift of appreciation for bringing to them the gospel. "After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings (Acts 24:17)."
3. Paul wanted a love-gift collected writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus (I Corinthians). The third journey seems clearly for that purpose. The verses below are quite illuminating.

"Now about the collection for the Lord's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me (I Cor. 16:1-4)."

B. The keeping of a promise, the return to Ephesus (ca. 53-56).

[Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire with an estimated population of 250,000. The Greek god Artemis, the god of hunting and wild animals, the daughter of Zeus, was known to the Romans as Diana (the goddess of chastity and protector in child- birth). It was obviously a major center of influence throughout the world. From here Paul wrote I Corinthians

- The encounter with John's disciples.

"While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-2)".

- Teaching in the synagogue (3 months) and the School of Tyrannus (2 years)

"Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:8-10)."

- The conflict with paganism.

“When this became known [Sceva seven sons] to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Acts 17:17-20).”

”After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. After I have been there,” he said, ‘I must visit Rome also.’ He sent two of his helpers, Timothy [convert from Lystra] and Erastus [city treasurer in Corinth], to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer (Acts 19:21-22).”

- The great riot.

“About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: ‘You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced whole province of Asia’ (Acts 19:23-26).”

“When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Soon the whole city was in an uproar.... The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there (Acts 19:28-29a, 32).”

Observations

1. The disciples of John lived after the event of Acts 2, but their trust was in John’s message of a coming one. These were OT saints in the NT era. Acts is a transition book, the experience of the Spirit’s indwelling was not consistent, but the point was to connect the gospel to the apostle’s message and their presence (Cornelius-Peter [Gentiles], Samaritans-Peter (mixed race), and John’s disciples [Paul]).
2. The enormity of what God did in Ephesus can be grasped by the burning of books at a cost of 50,000 drachmas (a drachma being a day’s wage meaning 137 years of labor). Little wonder is it not, that John concluded his ministry in Ephesus!
3. Paul frequently sent others ahead of himself to prepare the way.
4. Ruined economics, security, makes some people do strange things.

C. The return to the churches in Macedonia and Greece (ca. 57).

“When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said goodbye and set out for Macedonia. ²He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months (Acts 20:1-3).”

Observations

1. It is believed that Paul wrote II Corinthians from Macedonia, the Book of Romans from Corinth.

D. The return to Jerusalem (ca. 57)

“Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia (Acts 20:4).”

[A death threat discovered at Cenchrea caused Paul to do a land-sea return rather than a more direct route by sea to Syria. He sent seven of his co-laborers ahead (Spartan from the Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius and Timothy from Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus from western Asia Minor] by sea and traveled with Luke overland to Philippi and sailed from there.]

“These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. But we sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days (Acts 20:5-6).”

- The gathering in Troas

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on.... Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left (Acts 20:7-9, 11).”

- The gathering of the Ephesian elders at Miletus

“Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost. From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church... Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, ^y which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock (Acts 20 16-17, 28-29).”

Observations

1. Pentecost, usually in May in the Jewish calendar was the second great celebration in Israel, suggesting the blessings of a fruitful harvest. Was the financial love-gift from the Gentiles of Greece symbolic of first fruits among the Gentiles?
2. We are not told of the planting of a church in Troas; it must have happened on the second missionary journey or while Paul was at Ephesus for some three years. There are many gaps in the record.

3. Are not Paul's instructions and warnings to the Ephesian elders timeless, quite applicable positively and negatively today!
4. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a fall-of-the-year celebration connect with the great Day of Atonement and the Blowing of Trumpets [the Jews has a religious calendar and a civil calendar; the civil year began on the Day of Atonement in the fall and the religious year began on Passover in the Spring. Both had to do with the blessedness of life-sustaining harvests.

E. The journey to Jerusalem (ca. 56-57).

“... we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles’ (Acts 21: 8, 10-11).”

When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry (Acts 20:17-19).”

“When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, ‘Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place (Acts 21: 27-28).”

Observations

1. Travel and accommodations (lodgings) being unsafe in the first century the early church depended on the virtue of hospitality.
2. Phillip was a deacon in Acts 6 who encountered the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah. Twenty years later he is residing in Caesarea.
3. Paul was quite well known to friend and foe!