

**The Life and Ministry of Saul (Paul) of Tarsus  
The Apostle of Grace (ca. 5-68)**

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.
- ca. 57: Turmoil in Jerusalem

**"While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.... After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic... The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!' (Acts 21:31-32, 40, 22:22)."**

**"... the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. <sup>25</sup> As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, 'Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?' When the centurion heard**

**this, he went to the commander and reported it. ‘What are you going to do?’ he asked (Acts 23:24-26)”.**

1. Paul’s address to the crowd is evidence of the power of personal testimony in speaking about Jesus.
2. This is the second time that Paul invoked his Roman citizenship (the other at Philippi). A Roman citizens could not be punished without first a trial, the presentation of evidence, a defense by the accused, and a formal verdict.
3. Through the various trials and imprisonments there was no evidence for a charge worthy of death.
4. What could not be done through violence, they sought to attempted to do by silencing him by incarcerations. His chains turned into lecterns!

ca. 57: The appearance before the Sanhedrin.

**“Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.’ At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth (Acts 23:1-2).”**

**“My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.... There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. ‘We find nothing wrong with this man,’ they said (Acts 23:6b-9).”**

**“The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul... But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul (Acts 23:12, 16).”**

**“Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, ‘Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix’ (Acts 23:23-24).”**

Observations

1. What does our passage tell us about Paul’s sister? Likely, she was a believer, as her son.
2. The commander, Claudias Lysias, sent a letter as well. It seems that he was seeking exoneration for sending him to Felix without formal charges.
3. I often wonder if the soldiers Paul encountered, like Claudias, had an encounter with Jesus and carried the gospel with them on assignments.

ca. 57-59: The trials in Caesarea

**“Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.... ‘We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect <sup>6</sup> and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him’ (Acts 24:5-6).”**

**My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are**

**now making against me. However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets (Acts 24:12-14)."**

**"Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, 'That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.'" At the same time, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him (Acts 24:24-26)."**

**"When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison (Acts 24:27).**

**"After spending eight or ten days with them (the leadership in Jerusalem), Festus went down to Caesarea.**

**The next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. When Paul came in, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him. They brought many serious charges against him, but they could not prove them (Acts 25:6-7)."**

**'... I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. <sup>11</sup> If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!' <sup>12</sup> After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: 'You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!' (Acts 25:10-12)."**

**"A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.**

**Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king Acts 25:13-14)."**

**At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. Festus said: 'King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him' (Acts 25:23-26)."**

**"After they left the room, they began saying to one another, 'This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.' Agrippa said to Festus, 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar' (Acts 26:31-32)."**

Observations from

1. One of the early designations for Christ-followers collectively was "The Way," individually Christians.
2. Antonius Felix was the Roman procurator in Judea (52-60), Porcius Festus (60-62) followed.
3. Herod Agrippa II, Herod the Great's grandson and son of Herod Agrippa I (he murdered James, our Lord's half-brother [44 AD]), was a client king who ruled over Chalcis (parts Syria), the

Decapolis (ruled by his brother Herod Philip), later Nero gave him parts of the Galilee. He was lived incestuously with his stepsister, Bernice.

ca. 60: Paul's stormy voyage to Rome to Malta

**“When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us (Acts 27:1-2).”**

**“When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together... (Acts 27:13-17).”**

**“The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.**

**The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. <sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely (Acts 27:41-44).”**

**“But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days (Acts 28:5-7).”**

Observations

1. Paul betrays an “I told you so” propensity.
2. Why do you think Luke included the generosity of Publius, the island's governor?
3. Why does Luke often mention people in high Roman offices?

ca. 60-62: Paul's first imprisonment in Rome

**“After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. <sup>13</sup> From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup> There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome (Acts 28:11-14).”**

**“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance! (Acts 28:30-31).”**

Observations:

1. Sometimes what seems to be put on a shelf is just the opposite as in the case of four years of imprisonment. Have you ever had that feeling? Perhaps God has a rich field of service that you would never think of. The gospel is not limited by incarceration!
2. Paul, being a Roman citizen without formal charges, had a significant degree of freedom in Rome.
3. Social circumstance does not limit the gospel; indeed, it may open the door for its progress.

ca. 62-67: Paul release and travels

It is most reasonable that Paul was released after two years when no formal charges were brought against him. What follows is conjecture, with hints from the scripture, and it might be so.

Paul gives every impression that he planned to go to Spain, then the end of the known world (Rom. 15:24-28). Paul wrote romans from Corinth on the third missionary journey. He planned to return to Jerusalem, visit Rome, and proceed West.

Clement, a deacon in Rome (retrospectively recognized as a bishop and the second successor of Peter), gives evidence that Paul did travel to Spain, the end of the world in that day.

**“After that he had been seven times in bonds, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, had preached in the East and in the West, he won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West... (I Clement 5:5-6).”**

**“...(Paul), who from Jerusalem, and even unto Illyricum, fully preached the Gospel, and instructed even imperial Rome, and carried the earnestness of his preaching as far as Spain, undergoing conflicts innumerable, and performing signs and wonders (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 17.26).”**

-The time frame of Paul's laboring in the gospel on the island of Crete is uncertain. Did he evangelize on the island before or after going to Spain??

\*Paul is known to have spent some time at Fair Havens, Crete, when the ship briefly stopped there on Paul's journey to Rome (ca. 61).

**“We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.... Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:7-8,12).”**

\*It seems more reasonable that Paul came to Crete on his return from Spain and evangelized across island from a time perspective (ca. 66-67). As was often his custom he left a fellow servant behind to strengthen the new converts (Luke and Philippi., Silas and Timothy at Thessalonica).

**“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you (Tit. 1:5).”**

\*Titus was instructed to rejoin Paul in Nicopolis, Macedonia, where the apostle determined to winter and was likely arrested (67). From there he wrote the first letter to Timothy whom he left to serve the church in Ephesus.

**“As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there (Tit. 3:12)”**

**“Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.<sup>13</sup> When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments (II Tim. 4:9-11).”**

ca. 67-68: Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome.

**“So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner (II Tim. 1:8).”**

**“At my ... defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.<sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it (II Tim. 4:16-17).”**

**“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.**

**I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith (II Tim. 4:6-7).”**

#### Observations

1. A drink offering entails the pouring out of wine signifying complete dedication following sacrificial offerings. Paul sees the offering up of his life as his final dedicatory sacrifice wholly given to his Lord. What a beautiful picture of complete dedication! He is indicating that his task is complete and thus suggests victory!!
2. Paul’s last writing, II Timothy, was to a colleague who was not the most courageous or robust. When all need to hear, “Don’t be ashamed,” on our fear ridden moments.

ca. 68: Paul’s death

We have no record in the Scriptures of Paul’s death. The record of late first-century, early second century Christian writers is that he was martyred (beheaded) in Rome under Nero.

**“Thus, publicly announcing himself as the first among God’s chief enemies, he was led on to the slaughter of the apostles. It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero (Eusebius, Church History, 2:25).”**