

## **Paul – an apostle called by revelation of Jesus after the resurrection**

Our interest in Paul lies in his life story and what he preached, but as well, the influence he had on the church at his point in history, between the death of Christ and the late 60's A.D.

He was a contemporary of Peter's but not one of the initial group of disciples and apostles, who were with Jesus in Galilee and Judea. Like Peter, he was a Jew, but his mission centred on the non-Jews so his concerns were a little different from Peter's. Unlike Peter he was not born in Israel but in the Diaspora of those born outside Israel, in Tarsus of Cilicia, a city in Asia Minor.

*Our readings are from Acts, chapters 8-28 and Paul's letters*

### **Paul's life**

He had a Jewish name – Saul and a Roman name – Paulus [Paul]

#### **Jesus changed his life**

He met Jesus, "His Lord", on the road to Damascus when he was on his way to kill the Christians. Around 35 AD Acts 9.3-30, 31

In Galatians 1.11-2.14; Philippians 2.4-7; 2 Cor 11.18 -12. 18 He recounts his life in the context of how Christ changed him.

The following is an attempt to give a time-line of Paul's life from references spread over Acts and his letters. It is very difficult to be accurate about certain periods in Paul's, particularly his early life in Tarsus, the period of 14 years when he left Damascus and his later years after his imprisonment in Rome and his martyrdom.

For our purposes these times of Paul, while open to debate, fit into the general period of his life, being born about the same time of Jesus and dying about the same time as Peter in the late 60's AD. Our main purpose is to see what influence he had on the fledging Christian Church.

#### **Timeline of Major events in Paul's life**

Year - AD	Event	Reference
<i>His early life. Possibly born around 5 AD</i>	Born of Jewish parents in Tarsus of Cilicia, of the tribe of Benjamin. His father was a Pharisee and also a Roman citizen. So Paul was born a Roman citizen, which gave him certain privileges, even of appeal to the emperor when accused. He would have experienced Greek and Roman influences as well as the strong Jewish household of a Jew living in the Diaspora, ie outside Israel. A "Hebrew of Hebrews" He had the trade of tentmaker, worker of leather. [Jewish teachers of the Law were encouraged to have a trade to support themselves] He was not a physically imposing figure; and had a "thorn in the flesh"- unclear what this but it weakened him.	Phil 3.5-6; Acts 16.37-39; 18.3; 21.39; 22.3, 26-28; 25.7-12; 26.32 2 Thess 3.8-10  2 Cor 10.1-10 2 Cor 12.1-9; cf Gal 4.13-15

## 2 - Who do we think we are?

### Investigating the Story of the Early Church - The apostle Paul

	<p>In his early teens, he went to Jerusalem to train under Gamaliel a highly respected Pharisee and teacher of the Law., mentioned in Acts 5.27-28.</p> <p>He belonged to the party of the Pharisees, a zealous keeper of the Law and was authorised to approach synagogues outside Jerusalem, and in Damascus to persecute those of "The Way".</p>	<p>2Cor11.22; Rom 4.1; 9.3; 11.1; Gal 1.14, Acts 26.4-5  Acts 8.1-4;9.1-3</p>
34/35	<p><i>Stephen martyred in Jerusalem. Stephen had argued with men from a synagoue of Freedmen which had many Hellenistic Jews from places outside Jerusalem, including Cilicia, Paul's home province. The men who accused Stephen came from this synagogue. Saul /Paul witnessed it. Great persecution broke out against the believers in Jerusalem, especially those of Hellenistic background. Many scattered, taking their new found faith wider to places outside Jerusalem. So the church spread.</i></p>	Acts 6.8 - 8.1-3
c 34/ 35?	<p>He was converted on the road to Damascus where he was going to capture any who belonged to the Way and bring them back to Jerusalem.</p>	Acts 9.1-18; 22.1-21; 26.2-18
34-37	<p>He preached in Damascus and went into the surrounding area of Arabia for about three years. In Damascus King Aretas threatened to arrest him so he fled after being lowered over the wall in a basket.</p>	Acts 9.19-25; 2 Cor 11.32f
37	<p>Went to Jerusalem for 2 weeks; met Peter &amp; James the Elder. They discussed his teaching</p>	Gal 1.18-19; Acts 9.26-29
	<p>Barnabas introduced him to the Christians in Jerusalem. He clashed with Hellenistic Jews. The brethren heard about it and sent him to Caesarea and then onto Tarsus.</p>	Acts 9. 26-30
37-43	<p>He stayed in Tarsus of Cilicia, his hometown and around Syria. Little is known of this time</p>	Gal 1. 21 – 2.1
44	<p><i>Herod died. In Jerusalem, he had beheaded the apostle James, son of Zebedee and brother of John and imprisoned Peter, who escaped by angelic rescue , visited a local meeting in Jerusalem and then left.</i></p>	Acts 12.1-23
43-44	<p>Barnabas searched Paul out to help in the fellowship at Antioch in Syria. This was a significant group of Jewish and Gentile background believers. It was the first place where believers were called Christians. Barnabas had been sent from Jerusalem to check them out. Paul was with them for a year.</p>	Acts 11.20-26
44	<p>Barnabas and Saul go to Jerusalem with contributions for the church there as relief in drought. [during the reign of Claudius]</p>	Acts 27.30
	<p>They returned to Antioch with Mark, Barnabas' nephew</p>	Acts 12.25

## 2 - Who do we think we are?

### Investigating the Story of the Early Church - The Apostle Paul

	The elders in Antioch laid hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them away "to do the work to which God had called them".	Acts 13.1-3
46-48	<b>1st missionary journey.</b> Barnabas, & Paul begin their journey in Cyprus, Barnabas' home region. At Paphos pro-consul Sergius Paulus believed and Elymas, the magician, was blinded. They sailed to Perga in Asia minor. John Mark, Barnabas' nephew, left them to return to Jerusalem. They went inland and preached in Jewish synagogues in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra & Derbe where were received by some rejected by others, persecuted and stoned. They reported back to the Antioch church how God had opened the door to the Gentiles	Read about this journey in Acts 13.2-14.28
49	<i>50,000 Jews were expelled from Rome by Claudius. A Roman, Suetonius wrote "since the Jews were continually making disturbance at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" Chrestus probably means Christ and it points to dissension between the Jews and the followers of Jesus who had been thought of as a Jewish sect. The Christians, Aquila and his wife Priscilla, whom Paul later met in Corinth were among these.</i>	Acts 18.2
Winter 49-50?	Paul wrote <b>the letter to the Galatians</b> from Antioch in Syria. Sometime before this he had clashed with Peter in Antioch over Peter's refusal to eat with the Gentiles because of the pressure of Jewish legalists.	Galatians esp 2.11f
49/50	Council of the church in Jerusalem - the major issue was whether Gentile believers should observe the Mosaic Law of the Jews and, in particular, be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas went. Peter reminded them of his experience with Cornelius and James. Jesus' brother, now an Elder in Jerusalem, spoke about abstaining from food offered to idols, sexual immorality/ fornication and meat strangled and blood. These were things that were an offence to Jews and where Gentiles had particular weaknesses. Removal of these practices allowed them to fellowship together. Circumcision was not listed as a necessary practice for Gentiles.	Acts 15
	Paul & Barnabas returned to Antioch with Judas and Silas, other representatives from Jerusalem to deliver the decision of the Council. They stayed there for a time.	Acts 15.30-35

50-53	<p><b>Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey</b>, with Silas. He &amp; Barnabas had separated. They revisited churches in Syria and Cilicia and south Galatia, visiting churches where they had been before, delivering the decision of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Joined by Timothy at Derbe. They went across to Macedonia via Troas to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and through Athens and Corinth, where he stayed 18 months, and then back to Ephesus. He was joined on his journey by Luke, author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts. He sailed for Caesarea and then returned to Antioch in Syria. He spoke in Jewish Synagogues initially but the Jewish leaders rejected him and stirred people against him then he went to the Gentiles. He was imprisoned in Philippi, saw many come to believe in Jesus and others strongly opposed to him.</p>	Acts 15.36 – 18.22
<b>51</b>	<b><i>Writes 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians from Corinth</i></b>	
<b>51/52</b>	<b><i>writes 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Thessalonians from Corinth</i></b>	
53 -57	<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey</b> ending in Jerusalem. He returned to the churches in Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples; spent over 2 years in Ephesus, preaching outside the synagogue in the Hall of Tyrannus &amp; did many miracles, clashed with local shrine maker, who caused a riot. "All the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the Word of the Lord" [19.10] "The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" [19.20]. From there he travelled to Macedonia and Greece again. In Troas, a young man, Eutychus was raised from the dead. He retraced his route to visit churches again. He determined to go to Jerusalem, despite warnings that he would be imprisoned there.</p>	Acts 18.23 -21.17
<b>55</b>	<b><i>1<sup>st</sup> letter to Corinthians from Ephesus</i></b>	
<b>56</b>	<b><i>2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Corinthians from Macedonia</i></b>	
<b>57</b>	<b><i>Letter to Romans from Corinth or Cenchrea</i></b>	
<b>57</b>	<p>He reported to the brothers in Jerusalem about what God had done among the Gentiles. He, with 4 of his men, underwent purification rites for the sake of the Jewish brethren. Jews from Asia stirred up the city and dragged him from the city to beat &amp; kill him. The Roman commander arrested him. Paul declared his Roman citizenship, was released and the Roman commander put him before the Sanhedrin. He is removed to Caesarea for protection from the Jews so that his case would be heard by Felix, the Roman Governor.</p>	Acts 21.17-23.22
57-59	<p>Imprisoned in Caesarea by Felix for 2 years. Festus replaces Felix, tries him but, as is his right as a Roman citizen, Paul appeals to have his case heard by Caesar in Rome. He comes before King Agrippa &amp; Festus.</p>	Acts 23.23 -26.32

59-60	Voyage to Rome, Shipwrecked off Malta. Stays 3 months, heals official's father and others, honoured by the people.	Acts 27.1-28.16
59-61/2	1 <sup>st</sup> Roman imprisonment – under house arrest for 2 years. Lived in a rented house. Received by believers in Rome; preached to Jews.	
60	<b>wrote letters to Ephesians , Colossians , Philemon from Rome</b>	
61	<b>Letter to Philippians from Rome</b>	
62	Release from Roman imprisonment	
62-68	Left Rome, possibly went to Spain, suggested by Clement, an early father, in his letter or back to Greece and Galatia; visited Crete	Titus 1.5
63?65	<b>1<sup>st</sup> letter to Timothy from Philippi Letter to Titus in Crete</b>	
67- 68	2 <sup>nd</sup> Roman imprisonment under Nero, chained in a dungeon	2 Timothy 4.6-8
	<b>2nd letter to Timothy</b>	
67/68	Trial and execution by beheading. A death penalty suited to a Roman citizen.	

The timeline given is based on the one in the NIV Study Bible published by Zondervan 1985 [pages 1664-1665] but there are variations of a couple of the years in other timelines. e.g Paul's conversion may be as early as 33 AD ; the meeting in Jerusalem some date in 48AD. If you are interested to study the details of the dating, perhaps you could look at more detailed books such as The life and Times of St. Paul by Conybeare and Howson [published by Eerdmans in 1975] Or Paul and His Letters by John B. Polhill.[published by Broadman and Holman in 1999] Also individual letters of Paul's give material on dating.

Some of these dates are debatable, especially the writing of Galatians' letter and the times when Paul visited Jerusalem. – However, it is clear that he had gone to Jerusalem several times and that he was known by the apostles and elders there, especially Peter and James, and that they were aware of what he was preaching to the Jews and Gentiles.

#### About him -

A powerful intellect with insights into the foundations of natural theology and moral philosophy; fearlessly independent as he withstood Peter, protective and indignant in warning against those who would draw new believers away; patriotic to his people, the Jews, with great anguish over their condition; self-denying , impatient of exclusive formalism eg with Galatians; loved and nurtured those he knew, his converts tender in friendship seen in his relationship of watching over Timothy but also knew times of deep loneliness; called himself 'the chief among sinners' but a passionate servant of Christ who persevered to the end to tell the world of Christ.

He suffered many things for the sake of Jesus' name 2 Cor 11.22-33 Some of the actual events are recorded , such as the stoning at Lystra in Acts 14.19 and beatings and shipwreck.

### **Paul's legacy - His Influence on the Church in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century:**

**1. His Message** - His body of letters, written to young churches, formed part of the foundations for the church's doctrine.

Read Paul's recorded preaching in Acts

Acts 13.16-43 at Pisidian Antioch in synagogue to Jews and God-fearers. and the Gentiles v47

Acts 17.22-32 to Greek philosophers in the Areopagus in Athens

His farewell address to Elders in Ephesus Acts 20.17f

Acts 22.1- to Jews in Jerusalem, explaining his conversion on meeting Jesus

Acts 24.10-21 His defence before the Roman governor, Felix

Acts 26.1-32 his story before King Agrippa

#### **His emphases –**

Being learned in the Law, and extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers, he was a serious practitioner of what he was taught - to the point that he excelled his contemporaries in this zeal. However, his later writings - Galatians and Romans in particular - show that he had formed a deep perception that the way of life associated with the performance of 'keeping Law' suffered from the weakness that lodged in the fallen human heart.

He called this the weakness of the flesh. It undermined the actual doing of the law. His profound critique of this way of life is delivered in Romans 2, where the issue of acting from the heart mirrors Jesus teaching from the Sermon on the Mount, and in Romans 6-7 where he traces the power of sin at work in the flesh - the desires and impulses of the bodily life - as the place where the law was weak and unable to bring a man to righteousness.

The righteousness of a man is based solely on God's grace and faith in his Son, not doing works of the Law. Through union with Christ by faith, a righteousness - available to men and women - solely by God's grace alone, Paul traced back to Abraham the founder of the Jewish race and the receiver of the promise of blessing for all the nations, Jew and gentile alike. This teaching was the basis of Luther's understanding centuries later.

Righteousness was only received through faith in Jesus Christ who was God's son, sent by the Father in heaven as Messiah to live as a man, and die for man's sins and who was raised from the dead to give men life with the Father. Paul emphasised that Christ is risen and alive. He called on men to believe in Jesus as Lord whom God had raised from the dead, to receive forgiveness of sins and then to live lives, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit of God, which were consistent with this calling - lives centred on Jesus and in love to other men and women. They were a new creation.

To Paul this was for all men whether Jew or Gentile - to all who believe in Jesus and call him Lord.

Romans 10.8ff Acts 20.17-38; 26.22-23; 28.26-29; 20.

In his missionary travels he established elders to order the local fellowships, based on pattern in synagogues.

He conflicted with the Jews and the place of Mosaic Law for Christians and warned against false teachers who would lead the believers away from faith in Christ.

He looked forward to the return of Christ when the believers would rise to meet him and the new kingdom would reign on the earth.



### 2. His missions -

He took the gospel to the Gentiles, particularly in Galatia [modern Turkey] Macedonia and Greece as well as Rome and possibly Spain. So it spread from Jerusalem to Samaria and to the wider world. There were others who also took the gospel throughout the Mediterranean area.

### 3. His gospel teaching

He held line in the face of Judaisers who wanted to keep Christianity as a Jewish sect. Some have suggested that if the gospel had not gone to the Gentiles and remained a Jewish sect, it would have died out when the Jewish Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people dispersed all over the known world. Christianity certainly would not have become a major religion of itself, which would come to threaten the Roman Empire.

#### **Pressures from within the church**

1. Unity was a major issue within the Church.

The church threatened to divide over how to incorporate Gentiles into a group who lived according to Jewish custom and law.

A major pressure at that time in the early church was from Judaisers. These were Jewish believers who had confessed Jesus as Lord and Messiah. They had continued to observe the Jewish practices of circumcision and dietary laws as well as Sabbath observance. They wanted new believers, who were originally Gentiles, to practise the law as they did. So the question that arose was how should new Gentile believers in Jesus, the Messiah, live? Should they join in the Jewish way or reject that and find a new way? How did they fit with Jewish law? The outcome of the answers to these questions impacts upon us who are Gentile Christians today.

#### **Some suggested readings about the issues of Jew and Gentile believers are:**

##### **In Acts**

Acts 10-11 Peter changed his mind about "unclean" Jewish prohibitions to enable him to take the gospel to Gentiles when he had the vision to go to the Roman Cornelius. When Cornelius received the Holy Spirit, Peter baptised him and ate with him and his household. He then had to explain what he had done to the Jerusalem brothers.

Acts 11.19 the establishment of the church in Antioch where it was noted that they first began to talk to Greeks. As a result, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to encourage them. Antioch became a major centre of Christian learning and sending out of missionaries. It was the third largest city in the Roman empire, after Rome and Alexandria and the first place where believers were called Christians.

Acts 15 the issue at the council of Jerusalem was what to do about the new Gentile believers as a result of Paul and Barnabas' mission in south Galatia. The ruling that was made enabled the Jews and Gentiles to have fellowship and eat together.

Acts 16.1-5 Paul had Timothy circumcised when he joined his party in Derbe. He did this because of the Jews who lived in the area. Timothy was a believer whose mother was a Jewess but father a Greek.

However, Titus, who was Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised when they were in Jerusalem, even though there was pressure from the Jews. Gal 2.1-6

Acts 21.20f Paul, along with his 4 companions, underwent purification rites. He did this to appease the local Jews, for he was still a Jew.

in Paul's letters -

To the Galatians 1-6 - when Judaisers from Jerusalem came to Antioch, a Gentile church, to persuade them to be circumcised and refused to eat with the locals, even drawing Peter and Barnabas to their side, Paul is appalled. He sees that the new believers inherited God's promise to Abraham to make a people from all the nations based on faith in his word, rather than a keeping of law. To be circumcised, in keeping with Jewish rules, they would lose the freedom they have in trusting Christ and place themselves under a works mentality, based on keeping the law. To Paul, there are no racial, social or gender distinctions in Christ. They are all one so the Jewish/ Gentile division is no longer valid in Christ.

To the Romans in chapters 2-3. Paul points out that the Jews cannot rely on their Law, including circumcision, to save them. These are outward observances, not of the heart. Before God there is not one person, Jew or Gentile whose heart is wholly right, all are sinners and all need salvation. He recognises that the Jews have a special history of relationship with God.

And in Romans 9-11. Paul is at pains to show that the Jews are not replaced by Gentiles for their calling is irrevocable, but the Gentiles have been called by God and grafted into the people of God, which is based on Israel.

And to the Ephesians in chapters 2-3, Paul is stressing that both Jew and Gentile are one in Christ. He appeals for unity. The dividing wall between the two has been broken down- they are fellow citizens, all members of God's household. This was a mystery which is now made clear that "through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus" 3.6

In Philippians 3.2ff he staunchly opposed those who wanted to circumcise as "mutilators of the flesh" and warned against putting confidence in the flesh rather than in Christ

The book of Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians to make clear to them that Christ has revealed and fulfilled the requirements of the old covenant with its laws, priesthood and sacrificial rites. Christ has brought a "better" covenant. It is an appeal to the readers not to go back to the old ways for now they live under a better covenant, in Christ where the law is written on their hearts and is an encouragement to persevere in faith.

2. Another major question that Paul was forced to defend himself against was the authenticity of his apostleship. This originated from a personal attack on him but it did threaten the unity of the church for it caused the believers, especially in Corinth, to pit one man against another and to divide the church into parties based on which man they followed rather than being one in Christ.

He claimed to be authorised directly by the Lord. 1 Cor 15.8-10; 7.1-6

Ananias was told of Paul's commission to carry the name of the Lord to the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. Acts 9.15 cf Gal 2.7-8

Sent out by the church in Antioch to tell the message of Jesus to peoples nearby. Acts 13

Qualities of an apostle



he saw himself as the least of the apostles because he persecuted the church, but nevertheless an apostle. 1Cor 15.9

He commends himself to the Corinthians as in "no way inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though a nobody, for he performed the signs of a true apostle among them, by signs, wonders and miracles" 2Cor 12.11-12

Rather than exalting oneself, he saw an apostle as the bottom of the heap in 1 Corinthians 4. expressing power in weakness and servanthood. 2 Cor 12.9-10

he also named others as apostles, so he had a wider definition of apostleship than that confined to the original 12, who were directly commissioned by Jesus, when he was in Israel. eg Junias and Andronicus Rom 16.7; Eph 4.11

*[An Aside about the fate of the Jewish Christian community:*

*The first cultural movement that Christianity made was from Judaism to the Gentile world. The earliest Christians were, of course, Jews. The Jewish Christians and some of the early apostles resisted this movement initially. But it was significant that it happened because the Jewish state disappeared in the wars with the Romans in 70AD and 135AD, when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the surrounding territory. If Christianity had remained a solely Jewish sect, it would have disappeared with it. As it was, the early Jewish Christians moved to Pella in Transjordan just before the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD.*

*Eusebius, an early Christian historian, wrote in 374AD*

*"The whole body, however, of the church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city, and dwelt at a certain town beyond the Jordan, called Pella. Here those that believed in Christ, having removed from Jerusalem, as if holy men had entirely abandoned the royal city itself, and the whole land of Judea; the divine justice, for their crimes against Christ and his apostles finally overtook them, totally destroying the whole generation of these evildoers from the earth. (Eusebius, 3:5.)*

*The Christian community in Pella, continued but the city was taken over by Moslems and declined by 8<sup>th</sup> century. In 135Ad some returned to Jerusalem.*

*Gonzales writes that "In the desolate regions beyond the Jordan, Jewish Christianity made contact with various groups who had also abandoned orthodox Judaism. Lacking in contact with the rest of the church, that Jewish Christian community followed its own course and was often influenced by the many sects among which it lived. .... Later Christian writers would speak of its heretics and its strange customs. It faded out of history in the 5<sup>th</sup> century." [Justo Gonzalez -The Story of Christianity p22]}*

### **Pressures from Outside the Church**

As has been seen in the life of Paul, the constant attack came from

1.the Jews, who stirred up hatred against those preaching that the Messiah had come and had crucified him by the Jews but risen.

2. Those who earned money from idols such as the silversmith, Demetrius in Ephesus.

3. The Roman authorities, who initially saw Christians as a Jewish sect and that the squabbles were an internal Jewish matter. In fact saw that there was no problem with these preachers. But later they began to persecute them as a group on their own as evidenced in Nero's treatment of Christians which was mentioned in the study of Peter. We will see more of this and the reasons for it in later studies as this Roman persecution of the church increased.