

LIFE OF PAUL (ACTS)

| | |
|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Five Periods: | (3) missionary activity |
| (1) early life | (4) imprisonment |
| (2) preparation | (5) after Acts |

I. PERIOD OF EARLY LIFE (AD 1-34)

A. Tarsus

1. Jewish Family—about seven years younger than Jesus; tribe of Benjamin which gave Israel her first king and Saul his name; tent making trade; some family lived in Jerusalem (sister)
2. Roman World—Cilicia a Roman province, Roman citizenship inherited, so perhaps oldest son; Roman peace, Roman roads, Roman law
3. Hellenistic Environment—quotes Aratus the Stoic in Athens; speaks of that which is “fitting” (cf. Col. 1:16–17)

B. Jerusalem

1. Pharisaic Training—under Gamaliel, grandson of Hillel; no evidence of personal knowledge of Jesus

- a. *Scripture Knowledge*—style of argumentation, intimate familiarity with Israel’s scripture
 - b. *Belief System*—in tune with events unfolding with Jesus: eschatology, resurrection doctrine, angeology
 - c. *Progressive Attitude*—especially toward the place of Gentiles in God’s world
2. Distinctive Zeal—excelled among his brothers, Paul’s own Achilles Heel, whether as a practicing Pharisee or preaching Christian; set the stage for later persecution of church, but also for his own life crisis

C. Tarsus/Jerusalem?

1. Pharisaic Activity—if Tarsus again, as synagogue rabbi? marriage?
2. Persecution Campaign—death of Stephen, “ravaging the church” (Acts 8:3), the fruit of being “zealous” for God

D. Damascus

1. Damascus Road—conversion if you must, but call is closer to Paul
 - a. *Paul’s Terms*
 - (1) “revelation,” Gal. 1:16
 - (2) “appearance,” 1 Cor. 15:8
 - (3) “new creation,” 2 Cor. 5:17
 - b. *Paul’s Thoughts*

(1) Authentication of Apostleship

(2) Call to Gentile Mission

2. Damascus Ministry—brief, not notable, preaching in synagogue

II. PERIOD OF PREPARATION (AD 35-48)

A. Arabia—three years, but the what and the why are mysteries

B. Damascus Again—preaching again, but hostility of Jews, becomes a “basket case” when lowered over wall (King Aretus IV, d. A.D. 39)

C. Jerusalem Visit #1—(A.D. 37), none too productive; rejected by apostles; rescued by Barnabus, but still has to leave

D. Tarsus—(A.D. 37) in retreat from Jerusalem, but no record; between the lines in Acts success is hinted (“churches of Cilicia,” Acts 15:41)

E. Antioch

1. Gentile Growth—Jewish missionaries do not preach Jesus to Gentiles (Acts 11:19), but men of Cyprus and Cyrene do in Antioch with success

2. Jerusalem Concern—Barnabus commissioned by Jerusalem mother church to inspect the situation in Antioch, and is overwhelmed but

approving; yet he knows the Gentile mission will not play well in Jerusalem (need for a “resolute heart,” Acts 11:23)

3. Saul Sought—Gentile success in Antioch makes Barnabus think of Saul in Tarsus, and fetches Saul to work in Antioch—all without approval of Jerusalem

F. *Jerusalem Visit #2 (A.D. 48)*

1. Famine Relief—Barnabus and Saul, the Agabus prophecy, reign of Claudius
2. John Mark—Barnabus’s cousin, returns with group to Antioch

III. PERIOD OF MISSIONARY ACTIVITY (AD 48-57)

A. FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY (ACTS 13–14)

1. Statistics
 - a. *Companions*—Barnabus, John Mark
 - b. *Time*—2 years (AD 46–48 or AD 47–49)
 - c. *Distance*—1200+ miles, Cyprus and South Galatia
2. Significance
 - a. *Gentile Success*—illustration of theme #1 of Stephen Speech
 - b. *Synagogue Failure*—illustration of theme #2 of Stephen Speech

c. *John Mark's Departure*

B. *Jerusalem Visit #3—The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15)*

1. Background

a. *Exegetical Concerns*

(1) integrating Galatians 2 into Acts 11 and 15

(2) *Dating Galatians*—early (pre-Council) or late (post 3MJ)

c. *Precipitating Events*

(1) 1MJ—disturbing Gentile result of 1MJ

(2) Agitators—“some from Judea” with a conservative spin on the Law of Moses upsetting the church in Antioch, Acts 15:1

2. Church Crisis

a. *Lukan Redaction*—the church avoids a judgment disaster

(1) Ananias and Saphira—preliminary literary device serving as interpretive episode for later narrative; Peter to Saphira, “why do you test the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9)

(2) Jerusalem Council—Peter to the Jerusalem Council, “why do you test God?” (Acts 15:10)

b. *James's Compromise*

(1) Entrance Requirements—circumcision not an entrance requirement for the church = you do not have to become a

Jew to become a Christian (today's issue exactly opposite =
you do not have to become a Gentile to become a Christian)

(2) Social Sensitivities—Gentiles still need to respect Jewish
sensitivities in social interaction

C. SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY (ACTS 15–18)

1. Statistics

- a. *Companions*—Silas, Timothy, Luke
- b. *Time*—2.5 to 3 years (AD 49–52 or AD 50–53)
- c. *Distance*—2700+ miles (1290 by sea, 1410 by land), Asia Minor,
Macedonia, Greece

2. Significance

- a. *Paul's Failure*—the John Mark affair, the Spirit's boycott of Paul
(Asia, Acts 16:8; Bithynia, Acts 16:7, N.B. same verb, *πειράζω*,
as Acts 5:9, 15:10); Vision at Troas = renewal of call
- b. *Claudius's Edict*—Jews are expelled from Rome. Synagogue
riots over *Chrestus*, says Suetonius (*Claudius* 25.2). If *Chrestus*
is a Roman misspelling of *Christus*, “Christ” = “Messiah,” then
Christian Jews preaching Jesus as Messiah in Roman synagogues
might have been the problem. Acts 18:2 provides incidental
confirmation of this expulsion. Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish

Christians from Italy, arrive in Corinth due to Claudius's Edict and work with Paul. *Point*: such an expulsion would have a dramatic effect on the composition of the Roman church, leaving mostly Gentiles by default in leadership roles. Claudius died in A.D. 54, so presumably sometime thereafter Jews such as Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome—hence, their mention in Paul's greetings in his letter to Rome (Rom. 16:3). Would the return of Jewish Christians cause friction for Gentile leaders?

- b. *European Mission*—the gospel advance grows, with the Gallio Inscription helping to date this Corinthian part of the 2MJ.
- c. *Thessalonian Correspondence*—from Corinth

D. *Jerusalem Visit #4*—“greeted the church,” concludes 2MJ

E. THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY (ACTS 18–21)

1. Statistics

- a. *Companions*—Luke, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus
- b. *Time*—4 years (AD 53-57 or AD 54-58)
- c. *Distance*—2500+ miles (1190 by sea, 1325 by land)—assuming:
 - (1) passage through Lycaonian cities to get to Phrygia/Galatia,
 - and (2) leaves from Troas to go to Macedonia, and (3)

penetration into Greece estimated; major places are Asia Minor, Ephesus, then through Troas, Macedonia, Greece and back.

2. Significance

- a. *Paul's Success*—back on track, biggest success, Ephesus as the crown jewel of the Pauline missionary enterprise = what could have been years before
- b. *Corinthian Crisis*—the setting for at least four known letters to Corinth, only two of which we have
- c. *Collection Crisis*—Luke carefully suppresses this disaster in the ministry of Paul. He saw it as one of Paul's best ideas ruined by one of Paul's worst ideas. Paul's best idea was that Paul had determined to take up a collection for the saints in Jerusalem not only to relieve the poor, but to invest the delivery of the collection to Jerusalem as the spiritual symbol of Jerusalem's full, unequivocal, and public acceptance of the Pauline mission to Gentiles (Rom. 15:25–28; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9). This collection Paul considered as validation of his mission work by Jerusalem; he spent more than a year working on gathering up this collection (1 Cor. 16:1–2; 2 Cor. 9:2). Paul's worst idea was that he must deliver that collection personally himself. Yet the

Holy Spirit had made clear to Paul that all his life his presence in Jerusalem had spelled trouble for God's purposes with God's people. Because Paul created havoc by insisting against the warnings of the Holy Spirit on personally going to Jerusalem to deliver this collection, Luke suppressed the *reason* for the trip to Jerusalem—the collection—to keep Paul's best idea from being tarnished by Paul's worst idea. Yet, even without spelling out *why* Paul was going to Jerusalem, Luke *still* made clear that Paul's insistence on going to Jerusalem was out of the will of God:

- (1) Disciples at Tyre—(Acts 21:4)
- (2) Agabus Prophecy—(Acts 21:12) N.B. Acts 15:10 = would
Luke include himself in the group begging Paul not to go—it is a “we” section— knowing full well the full implication of resisting the Holy Spirit spelled out in the crisis of Acts 15?
- (3) Retroactive Vision—(Acts 22:17–21), God long ago had warned Paul in a vision to stay out of Jerusalem because Paul's presence there always was going to be a problem of a rejected witness

So Luke makes patently clear Paul went into a spiritual crash and burn by his arrest and imprisonment in Jerusalem. God *still* was able to get Paul to Rome—the original divine plan all along.

- d. *Ephesian Charge*—Paul’s charge to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17–35) is the major sermon in Acts preached to a Christian audience, Luke’s hidden agenda—a challenge to his church.
- e. *Prison Correspondence?*
- f. *Romans Correspondence*—Corinth, ca. A.D. 55

IV. PERIOD OF IMPRISONMENT (AD 57-61)

A. *Jerusalem Visit #5*—Paul’s delivery of the collection is a disaster, the John Mark affair that opened the 2MJ comes back to roust, but just as at Troas, God delivers graciously and sets Paul back on track—to Rome, where he should have been years before now.

B. Caesarea (Acts 23–26)

1. Paul’s Appearances—before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa II; a chance for Luke to parade Lukan themes in Acts to decisive conclusion
2. Paul’s Appeal—last desperate move to escape certain death in Jerusalem

3. Prison Correspondence?

C. **Rome (Acts 27–28)**—Paul’s journey of self-realization

1. Paul’s Legacy

a. *Damascus Road* = whose call is it?

b. *Ephesian Charge* = whose charge is it?

c. *Paul’s Story* = whose story is it?

2. Luke’s Conclusion—all themes wrapped up from opening lines of Gospel Infancy Narratives to Paul in prison in Rome. Acts presented as a theological history of the early church, whose story is the extension of the story of Jesus, whose destiny is world mission—the theme of the advance of the church into world mission by the impulse of the Holy Spirit, a story that reverberates throughout Christian history as a definitive challenge to respond to the call of world mission—the duty and destiny of the church.

3. Prison Correspondence?—clearly, we have difficulty placing the prison epistles. The strongest argument seems to be for Rome, and that probably is the majority opinion of scholars, but many good arguments have been raised for Caesarea, and even Ephesus.

V. AFTER ACTS (post A.D. 61)

A. Acts Ends—historical ignorance begins

1. Release?
2. Missionary Activity in Crete, Ephesus, Macedonia?

B. Pastoral Epistles—the difficulties of historical reconstruction

1. Second Imprisonment?
2. Neronian Persecution?