

## **Part 4**

# The Apostle Paul, General Epistles, and Revelation



# The Life of the Apostle Paul

An Overview

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*“Few figures in Western history have been the subject of greater controversy than Saint Paul. Few have caused more dissension and hatred. None has suffered more misunderstanding at the hands of both friends and enemies. None has produced more animosity between Jews and Christians.”<sup>1</sup>*

These words, taken from a recent study of Paul by emeritus Princeton University professor John G. Gager, speak to the impact Paul has had in the roughly two thousand years since the emergence of the Christian faith. Paul continues to be the topic of much debate in the modern era, with books describing Paul as everything from the “real founder of Christianity”<sup>2</sup> to a “Jewish cultural critic.”<sup>3</sup> While it may be close to impossible to retrieve the historical Paul from the pages of the New Testament, this chapter will attempt to construct a brief biographical overview of Paul and his life, synthesizing information from the book of Acts and from Paul’s own letters while also remaining cognizant that there are several places where the New Testament sources are reticent or in disagreement.

## The Early Life of Paul

The majority of Paul’s life prior to his shift toward Christianity remains shrouded in mystery and must be reconstructed from the small glimpses given us through Paul’s letters and Luke’s

history. One of the most important statements comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians, where he writes:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. (Philippians 3:5–6)

While these may seem like small details, they are actually quite revealing. Paul's words suggest that religiously and ethnically he saw himself as a Jew. His descent through the tribe of Benjamin likely explains the origin of his actual name, Saul. While it is sometimes thought that *Saul* was Paul's name prior to becoming a Christian and that he took the name *Paul* after he became Christian, this is incorrect. *Saul* is a Hebrew name, and *Paul* a Roman name. The most notable member of the tribe of Benjamin was King Saul, the ruler who preceded David. While Saul is remembered somewhat negatively today, mainly owing to his improper offering of sacrifice and his acrimony toward David, he remained an important figure in Israelite history, and it is not surprising that Paul's Jewish parents would pass on that name to him. On the other hand, *Paul* means "short" or "small" in Latin and is a name likely connected with his family. Rather than being two names connected with two periods of his life, the names rather represent two cultural spheres. When Paul interacted with those of a Jewish background, he went by *Saul*; when his travels took him into gentile areas, he went by *Paul*.

Paul's statement that he was "circumcised the eighth day" tells us that his parents were observant Jews, a reflection that finds support in Acts 23, where Paul announces that "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee" (23:6). This suggests that Paul would have been raised in a devout Jewish home. Beginning at about age six, Paul would likely have begun studying the Law and the Prophets, probably committing several passages to memory. Quotations from the Hebrew Bible are strewn throughout Paul's letters, perhaps as a direct result of his early education. He probably used the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, as his primary text, but his education likely included the study of Hebrew and Aramaic as well.<sup>4</sup>

This Jewish education would have come in addition to the regular education he would have received growing up in the Hellenistic atmosphere of the city of Tarsus, where Luke tells us Paul was born (Acts 21:39). Tarsus, located in the northeastern Mediterranean area of what is now south-central Turkey, was a prosperous city, full of both economic and intellectual opportunities for Jewish families seeking to establish themselves in the diaspora. Receiving an education in Tarsus would very likely have brought Paul into contact with not only the Greek alphabet and language but also the writings of those whose works were considered the pinnacle of Greek literary achievement, such as the epics of Homer and the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides. This exposure to Greek literature may explain why Paul, when speaking at Athens on Mars' Hill, summons quotations from not one but two Greek poets, Epimenides and Aratus (see Acts 17:28).

In addition to his Jewish religious background and his Greek cultural background, Paul also appears to have been raised as a Roman citizen. While Paul himself never mentions his citizenship in his letters, Luke mentions it on multiple occasions (Acts 16:37–38; 22:25–28;

25:11). This citizenship was highly prized and would have entitled Paul to many important benefits, such as the three-part Roman name (*tria nomina*), exemption from ill-treatment at the hands of Jewish and Roman authorities, and the right to have a capital legal case brought before the Roman emperor himself. There were several ways one could obtain Roman citizenship. If one's father was a Roman citizen, then so were his children. One could be granted citizenship for military service or other favors to Rome. Likewise, one could also purchase it, although the price would be high and the practice prohibited (at least officially). Finally, slaves were given Roman citizenship at the time of their manumission from a Roman household. In Acts 22:28, Paul tells the Roman military tribune Claudius Lysias that he was born with his citizenship, meaning that his father would have been a Roman citizen as well. The two most likely scenarios are that either Paul's father (or perhaps grandfather) were manumitted slaves, or that someone in Paul's genealogical line had been granted citizenship based on service rendered to Rome. The origins of Paul's Roman citizenship may also help explain the roots of the name *Paulus*. If Paul's progenitors were manumitted slaves, they may have adopted the name of the person who granted them their freedom as a family name or nickname. Or perhaps, as others have suggested, *Paul* was selected simply because it was the closest sounding gentile name to *Saul*.<sup>5</sup>

At some point early in his education, Paul appears to have moved to Jerusalem. According to Acts, Paul was “yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day” (Acts 22:3; compare 26:4). Depending on how the Greek participle *anatethrammenos* (“brought up”) is understood, Paul could be seen as moving to Jerusalem with his family early in his life and thus receiving the majority of his education in Jerusalem, or he could be seen as receiving his primary education in Tarsus and then being sent to Jerusalem for more specialized education. Scholars remain divided as to when Paul made this move. Acts does contain the tantalizing detail that a nephew of Paul's, his “sister's son” (23:16), resided in Jerusalem during the time of his trial before the Sanhedrin, which may give weight to the idea that his family had moved to Jerusalem together. However, Acts also relays that Paul returned to Tarsus following his vision of the Savior, which could suggest existent family ties in Tarsus (9:30; 11:25). Perhaps the safest conclusion is that Paul “came to and settled in Jerusalem as a young adolescent and received his principal education there.”<sup>6</sup> Keeping in mind the arbitrary nature of dating the events of Paul's life, especially the early events, this move likely occurred sometime between AD 15 and 25.

Acts further informs us that Paul received some of his education from Gamaliel (22:3). Gamaliel appears only once in the New Testament, as a leading Pharisee who offers a somewhat sympathetic take on the early Christian movement (Acts 5:34–40). Traditionally, there were two primary schools among the Pharisees, the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel. The school of Shammai tended to be a more conservative approach to the Judaism of the Pharisees, with Hillel being more liberal. Several of Jesus's teachings, such as his stance on divorce as recorded in Matthew 19:3, can be seen as negotiating these two positions. Gamaliel later became the leader of the school of Hillel (he may even have been Hillel's son

or grandson) and is described by Luke as a *nomodidaskalos*, or “doctor of the Law” (Acts 5:34).<sup>7</sup> According to later Jewish tradition recorded in the Mishnah, “Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time” (Soṭah 9:15). Gamaliel’s emphasis on “reverence for the law” and “purity” may help us understand where Paul developed the zealotry for Judaism and its preservation that defines so much of his early career as a Christian antagonist.

There is also a fair amount of debate as to whether or not Paul was married. The only statement Paul himself ever makes regarding his marital situation comes in his discussion on marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Paul writes, “I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I” (7:8). The implication is that Paul is currently not in a marital relationship. The question is whether he has always been single or whether he was once married but was single at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians. Several ancient Jewish sources indicate that it was unusual for men who were dedicated to study of the Torah to be unmarried, although there are exceptions.<sup>8</sup> One later piece of folklore claims that Paul was involved with the daughter of the high priest and that her rejection of Paul led to his animosity toward Judaism:

Paul was a man of Tarsus and indeed a Greek, the son of a Greek mother and a Greek father. Having gone up to Jerusalem and having remained there a long time, he desired to marry a daughter of the (high?) priest and on that account submitted himself as a proselyte for circumcision. When nevertheless he did not obtain the girl, he became furious and began to write against circumcision, the Sabbath and the Law.<sup>9</sup>

This story contains a clear anti-Pauline bias, and it is unlikely to contain anything historical. However, in a provocative move, some of Paul’s biographers have tentatively suggested that Paul was married but lost his wife and possibly children at some point before becoming a Christian;<sup>10</sup> it was this loss of family that angered Paul and sparked his persecution of Christianity. One scholar, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, speculates:

Jerusalem is sited in an earthquake zone, and it cannot have been immune to the domestic tragedies of fire and building collapse, which were so frequent at Rome. Had Paul’s wife and children died in such an accident, or in a plague epidemic, one part of his theology would lead him logically to ascribe blame to God, but this was forbidden by another part of his religious perspective, which prescribed complete submission to God’s will. If his pain and anger could not be directed against God, it had to find another target. An outlet for his pent-up desire for vengeance had to be rationalized.<sup>11</sup>

Paul’s frustration at a perceived injustice in the loss of his family, combined with the importance placed on purity by Gamaliel and his school, may have kindled a fiery zeal within Paul that led him to pursue the path that first brought him directly into the pages of the New Testament, namely as an antagonist and persecutor of Christians. However, this scenario is entirely unsubstantiated and is pure speculation.

## Paul the Persecutor (ca. AD 33)

Paul's role as persecutor of the nascent Christian movement is supported by both the accounts related in Acts and Paul's own epistles.<sup>12</sup> In the years following his vision of Jesus, Paul would write that "I persecuted the church of God" (1 Corinthians 15:9), "beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it" (Galatians 1:13), and "concerning zeal, persecuting the church" (Philippians 3:6). It is difficult to know exactly what form these persecutory activities took and to what extent Paul went in punishing perceived violations. Paul is first introduced in Acts as being present and complicit in the execution of Stephen. While Paul was seemingly a minor character in the Stephen account, Luke's mention that the witnesses "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 7:58) suggests that Paul had already gained a stature or reputation as a punisher of Christians.<sup>13</sup> Following Stephen's stoning, Paul took the initiative and sought out permission from the high priest (Acts 9:2), or chief priests (Acts 26:12), to pursue, punish, and if necessary extradite Christians back to Jerusalem. One crucial point to understand here is that Paul appeared to have had no legal or judicial authority granted by Rome that would have allowed him to make arrests. Additionally, whatever legal or judicial authority the Jewish high priest and the Sanhedrin held probably did not extend outside Jerusalem. What Paul likely sought from the high priest and took to Damascus were letters condemning followers of Jesus and strongly recommending that any supporters be identified and strongly encouraged to deny any connections between Jesus and the Messiah. Paul relates in 2 Corinthians that "of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one" (11:24), referring to judicial floggings in the synagogues (compare Deuteronomy 25:1–3). Paul and his supporters may have cowed synagogue leaders into inflicting a similar punishment if members of their synagogues chose not to retract their stance on Jesus's messianic role. To resist this punishment would have left the Christians open to the far more damaging punishment of excommunication from the synagogue. Paul may have even relied on the threat of a potential charge of blasphemy, which carried with it a punishment of death by stoning. How successful these threats were is unclear. While Paul may have been exaggerating when he wrote to the Galatians that he persecuted the Christians "beyond measure," it is difficult not to see his activities having real consequences. Arrests, beatings, violent assaults, home invasions—all are very real means through which Paul would have attempted to suppress the "heretical" Christians. In the words of one author, "Paul did real damage over a period of time impossible to estimate."<sup>14</sup>

## Paul's Encounter with Jesus (ca. AD 34)

It was this charge to suppress Christianity that led Paul onto the road to Damascus. Separated from Jerusalem by about 135 miles, Damascus had a relatively large Jewish population and apparently had become a location for Christians to gather as well, as evidenced by Ananias's presence there. Paul set out with his letters and was apparently near the city when he encountered the resurrected Jesus. Luke records three versions of this visionary experience in Acts, and all three of them differ in certain respects (9:3–9; 22:6–14; 26:12–18). The two

consistent elements throughout all three accounts are the bright light Paul saw and the loud voice he heard. While Paul does not explicitly say that he actually saw Jesus Christ in Acts, Paul's letters imply it.<sup>15</sup> The message relayed by Jesus was clear: the God that Paul had been following and the leader of those he had been persecuting were one and the same. Jesus's statement to Paul, "it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 26:14), is perhaps better rendered "It is hard to kick a cactus (especially when wearing open-toed sandals)."<sup>16</sup> The kingdom spoken of by Jesus was going to move forward, and for Paul to try to stop its growth would be as fruitless and senseless as trying to "kick a cactus."

It is common to speak of this visionary encounter as Paul's "conversion" to Christianity. However, it is unclear whether or not Paul would have seen himself being converted in the same sense in which we use the term today. He may have processed this experience as something closer to a commission or call. Before his vision, Paul was a zealous defender of the God of Israel and the covenant relationship that had been implemented between God and Israel (i.e., the law of Moses). Following his vision, Paul remained a zealous defender of the God of Israel and his covenant. What changed was his understanding of how Jesus fit into this schema. Paul essentially went from one form of Second Temple Judaism (Pharisaism) to another (Jesus-centered messianism). Jesus never tells Paul to get baptized or to join his church. He simply asks Paul why he has been persecuting him. However, it is notable that Paul is baptized shortly after regaining his sight (Acts 9:18).

## Damascus, Arabia, and the "Missing Years" (ca. AD 34–47)

Being left blind as a result of his vision, Paul was led by his companions the rest of the way to Damascus, where he met Ananias, who subsequently healed Paul and may have performed his baptism (Acts 9:18). At this point, Paul's movements and whereabouts for the next decade of his life become very difficult to pin down with any kind of surety. Luke tells us that Paul was "certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues" (9:19–20), suggesting that Paul remained in Damascus and preached. Luke also relays that Paul went straight from Damascus to Jerusalem, where he tried to join up with some of the other Christian disciples (9:26). However, Paul's own letters suggest a different series of events. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes that "I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days" (Galatians 1:17–18). Luke's account of Paul's activities following his vision are clearly not all-inclusive, perhaps because Paul rarely spoke about them, or perhaps Paul's activities outside Jerusalem and its surrounding areas were not germane to Luke's focus on the Holy Land as the site of Christianity's founding and early growth.

Paul's reference to time spent in Arabia likely refers to the kingdom of the Nabateans, an area stretching from Damascus down into the Hijaz (modern Saudi Arabia). The king of the Nabateans at this time, Aretas IV (9 BC–AD 40; 2 Corinthians 11:32), was embroiled in a



dispute with Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, owing to the latter's divorcing of Aretas's daughter in order to marry Herodias.<sup>17</sup> Paul does not tell us why he first turned to Arabia.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps he needed time to think and consider what he had learned on the road to Damascus. Jesus's words were no doubt life changing for Paul and required a period of reorientation. Perhaps, like Moses and Jesus, he needed to pass through the wilderness, removed from his regular environment, to commune with God. Or perhaps he, demonstrating the zeal for truth that had defined his previous career as a persecutor, selected an area that had not been heavily proselytized by Christians and turned his efforts toward an area populated by non-Jews of Semitic origins. Whatever Paul's motivations for going to Arabia, he apparently did enough to rouse the ire of King Aretas IV. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that "in Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me; and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands" (11:32–33). The implication is that Paul had done something to upset King Aretas (who was already frustrated with Jews because of the scandal of his daughter's divorce) and had then left Arabia and returned to Damascus. However, the governor of Damascus, likely acting under Aretas's orders, attempted to arrest Paul. Paul was then forced to flee Damascus in a humiliating fashion, by being lowered out of the city in a basket (Acts 9:25). It is only at this point that Paul returned to Jerusalem.

These small details preserved in Galatians and 2 Corinthians are significant for three specific reasons. First, they establish, for the first time, a historical date for an event in Paul's life. It is unlikely that Aretas would have been able to exercise influence over Damascus until near or after the death of the emperor Tiberius in AD 37 and the subsequent ascension of Gaius.<sup>19</sup> Taking into consideration the "three years" mentioned by Paul in Galatians, this would put Paul's experience on the road to Damascus around AD 34. While we have no direct information on when Paul was born, his vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus could have occurred when he was around thirty years old, putting his birth somewhere between AD 1 and 10.

The second and third reasons are what these experiences tell us about Paul's own self-perception and understanding of his mission and role within the nascent Christian movement, namely, that he considered his primary responsibility to proselytize to the Gentiles and that he would pursue this responsibility somewhat independent of the Jerusalem leadership. Paul mentions specifically that one of the things Jesus revealed to him was that "I might preach him among the heathen [*ethnos*]" (Galatians 1:16). He later remarks that a division of responsibilities between Jewish and gentile spheres was officially made between himself and Peter (Galatians 2:9). Paul's subsequent travels to cities such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome demonstrate that he took this responsibility seriously. Yet while Paul certainly viewed his missionary efforts as complementing what Peter and others were doing, he goes to great lengths to establish his own independence. He states that he preached for three years before he even met Peter, and emphasizes that his understanding of the gospel came straight from Jesus Christ, for after his vision "I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:16). Paul's sentiment is clear; he owes none of what he teaches to the influence of anyone other

than Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Later on, in his letter to the church at Rome, Paul made a point to say that “so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:20). Paul’s normal method was to establish and build up churches in areas that had not already been evangelized by other Christians, and likewise he expected other Christians to not impose their ideas or directions upon his converts.<sup>21</sup>

This attitude, of course, raises a question about what exactly Paul means when he refers to himself as an apostle. While Latter-day Saints have a very definite idea of what it means to be an apostle, it is important to remember that the word literally means “one who is sent forth,” and Paul’s understanding of the title seems to come from that broad definition. Certainly Paul would include Peter and the eleven at Jerusalem as apostles, but he also includes himself, James (Acts 9:19), and those to whom the Lord appeared as well: “After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:7). In Romans, Paul also includes two otherwise unknown individuals, Junia and Andronicus, as being “among the apostles” (16:7). Paul’s understanding of what qualified someone to be considered an apostle was whether or not he had personally encountered Jesus Christ: “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1; compare Acts 1:21–22). This does not mean that Paul could not have become part of the official quorum of the twelve apostles, only that his self-identification as an apostle should not be taken to mean that he was.<sup>22</sup> Additionally complicating the matter is the fact that apart from the selection of Matthias in Acts 1:21–26, the New Testament records no instances in which the body of the twelve apostles is reconstituted following the death of one of its members, making it difficult to draw firm parallels between this ancient organization and the modern quorum of today.

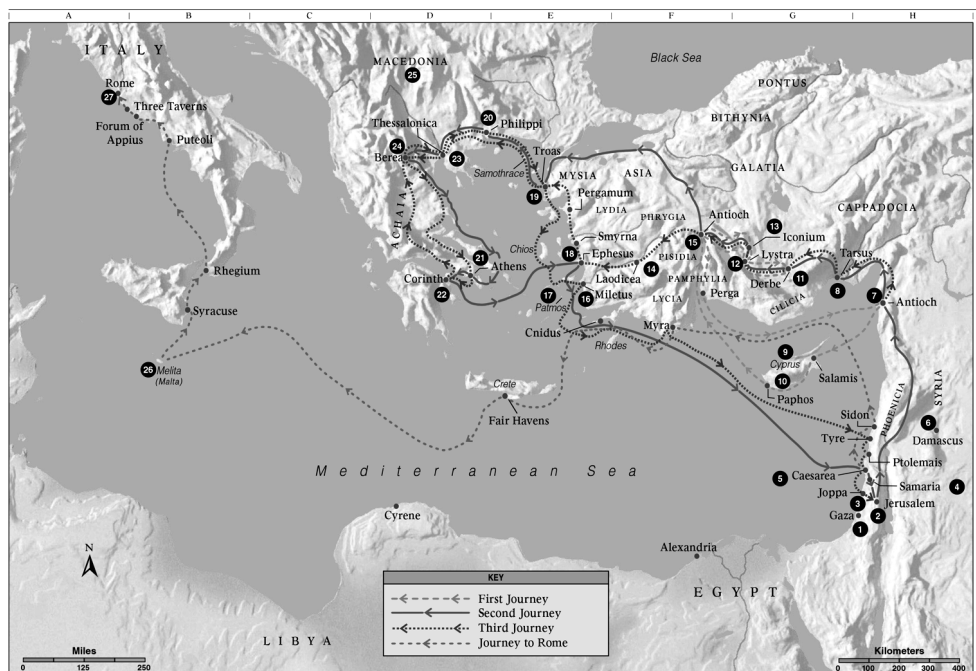
It is with this understanding of Paul that we should approach Paul’s long-awaited return to Jerusalem following his escape from Damascus. Paul tells us that the purpose of this trip was to finally meet and become acquainted with Peter (Galatians 1:18). Acts adds the detail that Barnabas brought Paul to Peter and provided a recommendation of Paul’s character and experiences since his vision. This introduction was likely necessitated because of Paul’s prior reputation as a persecutor, which apparently had not dwindled in the three years he was away (Acts 9:26). Paul states that he spent fifteen days with Peter (Galatians 1:18). This time would not have been devoted to Paul’s seeking a greater understanding of the gospel, as Paul appears to have felt like he understood all he needed to. Probably Paul approached Peter in order to get what he needed most, namely information from Peter on the life and ministry of the Savior from one who had witnessed it with his own eyes. During his time in Jerusalem, Paul also engaged in conversation and debate with some hellenized Jews, the result being that “they went about to slay him” (Acts 9:29). In a striking turn, Paul the persecutor had become Paul the persecuted. Clearly it was dangerous for Paul to remain in Jerusalem, so friends sent Paul to a place he likely hadn’t seen in several years, his home of Tarsus (Acts 9:30). At this point the events of Paul’s life become nearly impossible to trace. All Paul says is that “I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Galatians 1:21), and it is likely that some of the events Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 11:23–29 happened during this time in Tarsus.

This may also be the time during which Paul developed the craft and skill of a tentmaker or leatherworker, a trade that would be a great asset once he began his extensive missionary travels (Acts 18:3). What else Paul may have done during these missing years is impossible to know, and a lengthy period of time may have passed (ca. AD 37–46) before the details of Paul's life are picked up again.

## Antioch (ca. AD 47)

Two significant events led to Paul's reemergence in the affairs of the Christian movement. First, Peter's groundbreaking vision recorded in Acts 10 gave divine sanction to the idea that circumcision was no longer a requirement for covenant membership. Prior to Acts 10, those who wished to become Christians essentially had to become Jews if they were not already, meaning that they had to agree to follow the law of Moses and be circumcised. After Peter's vision, however, this barrier to membership was removed, meaning that one could become a Christian without having to become a Jew first. It is hard to overstate just how controversial this decision was, and it is likely that the gradual realization of this new policy, especially after its affirmation in Acts 15, would have caused many to part ways with Christianity. Second, Stephen's harsh condemnation of the Jewish people in Acts 7 had earlier led to an increased persecution of the Christians (Acts 8:1; 11:19). Those fleeing persecution found a haven in the city of Antioch, the capital of the Roman province of Syria and at the time the third-largest city in the Roman Empire.<sup>23</sup> Antioch quickly became a center for Christian growth, particularly among the Gentiles, and it is here that Christians were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). Previously, those who adhered to the messianic movement surrounding Jesus had been called simply followers of "[the] way" (Acts 9:2), an enigmatic title that perhaps refers to the "way of Jesus" (John 14:6) or perhaps connotes the "other way" of being a Jew.

It was to Antioch that Barnabas, a Christian who hailed from Cyprus, traveled in about AD 47 at the behest of the Jerusalem leadership, likely to strengthen and support what was quickly becoming a significant group of followers. Perhaps realizing that the task at hand was more than one person could adequately handle, Barnabas took a detour to Tarsus with the express purpose of finding Paul. Together, they traveled to Antioch and spent "a whole year" teaching the new converts and likely evangelizing others (Acts 11:26). During Barnabas and Paul's tenure in Antioch, a prophet named Agabus arrived from Jerusalem and prophesied that a famine was imminent (see Acts 11:28). Recognizing the dangers that the lack of food presented and mindful of the Christians in Jerusalem, the disciples at Antioch gathered relief (likely financial) and sent it to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Paul, the second time Paul had been to Jerusalem since his vision. While in Jerusalem, Paul reports that he met privately with some of the church leaders, including Peter, James, and John, and that they extended to him and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9). It was also at this meeting that it was formally decided that Paul and Barnabas would spearhead the mission to the Gentiles, while Peter would oversee the evangelizing of the Jews (2:9). Finally,



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Key: (1) Gaza (2) Jerusalem (3) Joppa (4) Samaria (5) Caesarea (6) Damascus (7) Antioch (in Syria) (8) Tarsus (9) Cyprus (10) Paphos (11) Derbe (12) Lystra (13) Iconium (14) Laodicea and Colosse (15) Antioch (in Pisidia) (16) Miletus (17) Patmos (18) Ephesus (19) Troas (20) Philippi (21) Athens (22) Corinth (23) Thessalonica (24) Berea (25) Macedonia (26) Melita (27) Rome.

Peter reminded Paul and Barnabas to “remember the poor” (2:10), likely a reference to the famine and the relief Barnabas and Paul had brought from Antioch.<sup>24</sup>

### Paul’s First Mission (ca. AD 48–49)

Following their brief stay in Jerusalem, Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch, taking with them a young man named John Mark, the nephew of Barnabas and future author of the Gospel of Mark (Acts 12:25). At some point after their return, the leaders of the church in Antioch, acting upon the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, selected Barnabas and Paul to begin moving the gospel out into the gentile world. They first traveled to the island of Cyprus, about sixty miles from Antioch, likely because Cyprus was Barnabas’s home. After a short time spent preaching in Salamis, the missionaries arrived in Paphos, the imperial capital of Cyprus. Barnabas and Paul must have been making strides in their evangelizing efforts, because they were summoned to meet with Sergius Paulus, the Roman proconsul governing Cyprus. In the first of what would become several encounters between Paul’s Christianity and the larger supernatural world, Paul was challenged by Sergius Paulus’s deputy, a “sorcerer” and false prophet named Elymas (Acts 13:7–8). Elymas is described as a *magos*, a wise

man or magician and may have filled the role of court astrologer. Elymas appears to have resented Sergius Paulus's interest in Barnabas and Paul and tried to turn him against the missionaries. But Paul, "filled with the Holy Ghost," blinded Elymas and denounced him as a "child of the devil" (13:9–11). The result of this encounter was that Sergius Paulus "believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord" (13:12).

Following their time preaching in Cyprus, Barnabas and Paul decided to travel to the mainland of Asia Minor and continue their work. Traveling to Asia Minor may have been part of their plan all along, or perhaps their success with Sergius Paulus encouraged them to continue preaching. After landing in Perga, Barnabas and Paul headed for Pisidian Antioch, a city north of the Taurus Mountains. At this point, John Mark returned to Jerusalem, perhaps feeling that traveling through Asia Minor was more than he wanted to do (Acts 13:13). That Paul bore some resentment at John Mark's early departure becomes clear in events that follow the Council of Jerusalem the following year (15:37–40). In Pisidian Antioch, Barnabas and Paul entered a synagogue on the Sabbath and Paul proceeded to give a lengthy speech, his earliest recorded oration. Themes that become focal points in Paul's letters can be observed in this speech: God's role in directing history, the extension of the Abrahamic covenant to all believers, and the justification of the sinner that comes through faith in the Messiah's sacrifice. Not surprisingly, the Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch responded favorably to Paul's message, while the Jews raised up opposition to the missionaries by stirring up resentment among the city's elite, which forced the missionaries to leave the city.

The two missionaries headed next for Iconium, a prosperous city that lay about eighty miles from Pisidian Antioch. Again Barnabas and Paul preached in the synagogue, and this time they found success among both Jews and Gentiles. However, resistance was again stirred up against them, and again they were forced out of the city to avoid being stoned. From Iconium they travel to Lystra, about twenty-five miles to the south. In Lystra, Paul healed a man who had been a cripple since birth. This miracle did not escape the notice of the Lystrans, who concluded that Barnabas and Paul must be gods in disguise, specifically Zeus and Hermes.<sup>25</sup> The priest of Jupiter brought oxen and garlands to begin officiating in sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul, but they stopped him by speaking about the "living God" who created the "heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein" (Acts 14:15). Unfortunately, this scene is quickly followed by the arrival of Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium who had traveled a considerable distance (about one hundred miles in the case of those from Pisidian Antioch) simply to track down Barnabas and Paul. After convincing several of the Lystrans to join their efforts, the Jews stoned Paul and dragged him out of Lystra, where they dumped his body, presuming him to be dead. In a fascinating scene, the Lystrans who were sympathetic to Paul formed a circle around him, and Paul was healed to the point where he was able to stand up and even depart from Lystra the following day (see Acts 14:19–20). Following a brief trip to Derbe, Barnabas and Paul turned around and retraced their steps, visiting Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch before finally sailing back home to Antioch, bringing their first mission to a close.

Paul's first mission included several key elements that would become part of the evangelizing process in Paul's subsequent missionary endeavors. First, Paul began his work in each city he visited by preaching in the local synagogues. He seemed to feel that even though his primary responsibility was to take the gospel to the Gentiles, he must first present it to the Jews (Acts 13:46–48). Second, Paul found success among the Gentiles but alienated the Jews, and the Jews remained Paul's frequent opponents throughout his ministry. As is typical, Paul obtained a sympathetic reaction from the Roman leaders he encountered. Generally when problems arose in the cities Paul visited, it was at Jewish instigation rather than from Roman interference. Third, Paul presented a message centered on God's role in initiating a new age through the death and resurrection of his Son. This age, Paul argued, is the time history hinges on, a turning point where the covenant is extended and the world prepares to enter into a new messianic period. Fourth, Paul's life as a missionary was not simply difficult; it was also dangerous. The stoning at Lystra is just one of several such threats Paul encountered over the next fifteen or so years until his eventual death in Rome.

### Trouble in Antioch and the Council of Jerusalem (ca. AD 49)

Barnabas and Paul returned to Antioch only to find that trouble awaited them in the form of the "Judaizers," conservative Jewish-Christians who insisted that gentile converts to Christianity must be circumcised according to the law of Moses or "[they could not] be saved" (Acts 15:1). Peter's vision combined with Barnabas and Paul's evangelization efforts had clearly raised tensions in Jerusalem. Paul recorded an encounter in Galatians that may well have resulted from this tension or perhaps even exacerbated it.<sup>26</sup> Paul tells us that while he and Barnabas were in Antioch, it was customary to enjoy table fellowship with Gentiles. When Peter came to Antioch to visit, he also shared table fellowship with Gentiles. This all changed, however, when "certain [men] came from James" (Galatians 2:12). These men represented the conservative, orthodox faction of the Jerusalem church, and upon their arrival both Peter and surprisingly Barnabas separated themselves from the Gentiles, "fearing them which were of the circumcision" (2:12). The reactions of Peter and Barnabas are difficult to understand, especially after the events of Acts 10 and Acts 13–14. Perhaps they were concerned that table fellowship might be seen as scandalous to those in the Jerusalem church and make an already-tense situation worse. Or perhaps the concern was what those Jews outside the church would think if they heard that seemingly orthodox Jews like Peter and Barnabas were behaving in a contradictory manner, leading the Jews to begin persecuting converts and severely hampering evangelization. Paul, however, felt no such concerns: "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Galatians 2:14). For Paul, the issue of gentile circumcision had already been decided, and to suggest anything else, for whatever reason, was extremely problematic. Unfortunately, we don't have Peter's side of this

debate, and Paul gave us no further information on how Peter and Barnabas took his public criticism.

It was perhaps this incident, or else others like it, that led to a gathering of important church leaders in Jerusalem around AD 49. The immediate issue was to finally resolve the vexing question of gentile circumcision, a matter that was causing “no small dissension and disputation” (Acts 15:2). Barnabas, Paul, and “certain other of them” traveled to Jerusalem from Antioch with Peter, James (the brother of Jesus), and “the apostles and elders” also in attendance (15:2). Peter spoke first, presenting a theological argument that the grace of the covenant that had been extended by God to the Jews for centuries had now been extended to the Gentiles. The Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit; they were also purified through faith. This was God’s will, and the church would do well to embrace this shift in covenant understanding rather than resist it. Barnabas and Paul spoke next. Although Luke did not give a recounting of anything specific that they said, he did mention that they declared “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles” (15:12). Barnabas and Paul would have provided a valuable witness of the reality that God was now working among the Gentiles, a substantiation of Peter’s theological position. Finally, James spoke and added an additional witness to Peter’s words through the use of Amos 9:11–12. James argued that Amos’s prophecy about the raising up of David’s fallen tent had been fulfilled in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—he is David’s heir, the Messiah. One of his primary reasons for coming when he did, James argued, was so that “the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles” (Acts 15:17). James then delivered the final decision of the leadership: “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (15:19).

Paul was no doubt thrilled at the decision reached at the Jerusalem conference.<sup>27</sup> The acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian church regardless of circumcision and other Jewish observances had been his position for some time. Armed with a letter from “the apostles and elders and brethren” that summarized the decision of the conference, Barnabas and Paul and a few associates traveled back to Antioch. After the letter had been read, the Christians “rejoiced for the consolation” (Acts 15:31). Likely encouraged by the results of both the conference and the reception in Antioch, Barnabas and Paul decided to undertake another mission to spread news of this milestone “in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord” (15:36). However, Barnabas wanted John Mark to accompany them. Paul, apparently still resentful after John Mark’s departure during their first mission, “thought [it] not good to take him with them” (15:38). Sadly, the argument became heated enough that Barnabas and Paul split up, with Barnabas taking John Mark as a companion and Paul taking with him Silas, one of those who had accompanied Paul to Antioch to deliver the decision of the conference. Fortunately, Paul’s letters hint at a future reconciliation with both Barnabas and John Mark (1 Corinthians 9:6; Colossians 4:10).

Accompanied by Silas, Paul first traveled “through Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 15:41) and later Derbe and Lystra, apparently revisiting the cities he and Barnabas had evangelized a few years earlier. There are likely two reasons why Paul decided to retrace his earlier steps

rather than set out for new territory. First, Paul wanted to spread the news from town to town regarding the decision reached in the Jerusalem conference. It is quite likely that questions about circumcision and Jewish observance had arisen during his first mission, and now Paul had good news that brought his converts no small relief. Notably, it is during his time in Lystra that Paul met Timothy, a young man who would be invaluable to Paul's ministry in the coming years. Paul wanted Timothy to travel with him and Silas and even offered to circumcise Timothy. While this may seem strange based on the decision of the conference and Paul's own stance on circumcision, the decision was likely a practical one. As the uncircumcised son of a mixed marriage, Timothy would be regarded with suspicion by Jews and might then be a hindrance to further missionary efforts, especially since it was Paul's custom (at least according to Luke) to begin his evangelization in the synagogues upon reaching a new city. Paul's circumcision of Timothy should be seen as practical rather than theological.

A second reason why Paul may have chosen to retrace his earlier steps was the continued persistence of the Judaizers. As discussed earlier, "Judaizers" is the name given to the conservative faction of the Christian church, those who insisted on full conversion to Judaism for those wishing to worship as Christians. It was likely that this group (or one like them) was responsible for Peter's actions in Antioch, and it was likely the actions of this group that provided the impetus for the conference at Jerusalem. Acts 15:1 relates that "certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." It is quite possible that these "certain men" did not stop in Antioch but actually continued traveling to other places where the Christian message had been preached, including the congregations founded by Barnabas and Paul during their first mission. The Judaizers were apparently quite convincing because Paul soon received word that his converts had either been circumcised or at least were under the assumption that they needed to be. It is this situation that provides the occasion for Paul to write his epistle to the Galatians, a fiery invective against the Judaizers and all those who would listen to them. While the exact dating of this epistle remains the topic of much debate, the circumstances immediately preceding the Jerusalem conference seem to indicate that this is the most likely time period.<sup>28</sup> It is also possible that the Judaizers, finding themselves rebuffed in Jerusalem, began to more aggressively spread their message, which could also have taken them to Galatia. This would mean that Galatians was written shortly after the Jerusalem conference, perhaps while Paul and Barnabas were still in Antioch. Perhaps Paul's visit to his converts in Iconium and Lystra was to see how they had responded to his letter: Had they been convinced by his argument, or were the Judaizers still posing a threat? If either of these scenarios is correct, then Galatians would be Paul's earliest extant epistle, with a date of AD 49–50.

## Paul's Second Mission (ca. AD 50–52)

After consolidating the concerns of the church in the cities of Galatia, Paul began what is generally referred to as his second mission. Whereas his first mission had been largely local



and constrained to the cities in Galatia, this second mission took Paul through Asia Minor and into what we call Europe. Whether or not he initially planned to travel as far as he did is unknown, but two key spiritual experiences provided a sense of direction and scope for Paul as he ventured farther out into the gentile world. First, Luke tells us that Paul and Silas initially attempted to continue their travels north into Bithynia, but “the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts 16:7). Instead, Paul and Silas turned westward, toward Troas. Second, while in Troas, Paul experienced a dream or vision of a man in Macedonia who pled with Paul to “come over into Macedonia, and help us” (16:9). Paul immediately departed for Macedonia, convinced “that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (16:10). The inclusion of the first “we” passage in Acts 16:11 suggests that Luke joined Paul, Silas, and Timothy at this point.

From Troas, Paul and his party landed in Neapolis and traveled ten miles to Philippi, one of the most prosperous and important Roman colonies in Macedonia. In Philippi, Paul met and baptized Lydia and her household. Lydia’s occupation as a “seller of purple” meant that she sold cloth or wool that had been dyed with rare and precious purple dye, which was difficult to obtain (purple dye was typically extracted from shellfish). This profession would have granted her a fair amount of financial success and prosperity, and thus it is no surprise that she offered herself as a hostess for Paul and his party. This success with Lydia was quickly tempered by an encounter between Paul and a young slave girl who served as a fortune-teller. Unlike Lydia, who appeared to be quite successful and financially independent, this girl was a slave who was completely dependent upon her masters. Even her body was not her own, as she was possessed to some degree by a spirit. However, the girl obviously recognized something special in Paul and his party and spent many days following them around and shouting, “These men are the servants of the most high God” (Acts 16:17). Paul, seemingly annoyed by this behavior, exorcised the spirit from the girl, freeing the girl but angering her masters, who were now faced with losing the financial benefits the girl had provided them.

What happened next is curious. The girl’s masters complained to the Philippian authorities that Paul and Silas “do exceedingly trouble our city” (Acts 16:20). The response from the authorities was to take Paul and Silas, strip off their clothes, beat them with rods (a standard Roman punishment against those threatening civil order), and finally cast them into prison. Additionally, their feet were held “fast in the stocks” (16:24), a measure that would greatly have increased their discomfort (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:2). Paul and Silas remained in prison throughout the night, patiently singing praises to God, until miraculously the doors of the prison opened up because of an earthquake. The reason this story is so curious is that Paul and Silas were both Roman citizens and therefore should have been exempt from this type of harsh punishment.<sup>29</sup> So why did Paul and Silas identify themselves as Roman citizens only *after* they had spent the night in prison? When the magistrates heard that Paul and Silas were citizens, they were justly fearful, for they could lose their positions as a result of this violation, and their attempt to quietly usher Paul and Silas out of Philippi is certainly understandable. Perhaps Paul felt that his suffering and persecution were part of the disciple-

ship process—just as Jesus suffered, so should those who follow him suffer. Or perhaps Paul hoped that the magistrates would be more sympathetic toward his recent converts (now that he had an advantage over the magistrates), should any future trouble arise. Regardless, Paul and Silas departed from Philippi soon after. Paul's later letter to the Philippians indicates that this congregation was one he felt very close to, and it is clear he valued their friendship throughout his life.

From Philippi (where Paul apparently left Luke), Paul and his companions traveled west to Thessalonica, where again Paul ran afoul of the locals. As was his custom, Paul began by preaching in the synagogue of the Jews, where he preached three times. However, a group of Jews became annoyed at Paul's success, and in order to rid themselves of his presence they attempted to bring him to the city magistrates. Not finding Paul, they instead attacked a man named Jason, possibly because he was providing the house in which Paul was staying. Jason and his associates were forced to pay a bond or fine and were then released. Paul and his associates were quickly ushered out of the city and continued on their way toward Athens.

In Athens, the intellectual capital of the world, Paul continued his teaching and debates. Curious about what "new doctrine" (Acts 17:19) Paul was presenting, "certain philosophers" brought him before the court of the Areopagus, a venerable body located on the Hill of Ares, immediately southwest of the Acropolis. Here Paul was given the chance to explain Christian theology to an intellectual audience that included Stoics and Epicureans, an audience that would appreciate its novelty even if they rejected the message (17:18–32). Paul's subsequent speech is a masterpiece, one contrasting supposed Athenian piety with the truth about humanity, their origins, and their relationship to the true God. Without a knowledge and an understanding of God, Paul argued, even the intellectual elite, such as the Athenians, fall short. The Athenians, Paul argued, had created a God in their own image, rather than seeking to change themselves to match the image of God. While God may have acted with patience in the past, divine judgment is a reality for those who do not repent. However, when Paul brought up the topic of the Resurrection, his Greek audience lost interest and sent him on his way.

From Athens, Paul continued about forty miles west to Corinth, a port city that was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. Unlike previous cities where he spent a short time and then moved on, Paul remained in Corinth for at least eighteen months and possibly even longer. While in Corinth, Paul continued his custom of preaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath and also plied his trade of working with leather. Paul lived for a time with two Jews who had come to Corinth from Rome, a husband and wife named Aquila and Priscilla, who practiced a similar trade (Acts 18:3). It is possible that Paul converted Aquila and Priscilla, although they may have been Christians before their expulsion from Rome because of the edict of the emperor Claudius.<sup>30</sup> It is likely during his time spent in Corinth that Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, helping his Thessalonian congregation navigate through some difficult issues, such as persecution and the timing of Jesus's return. Paul apparently had a fair amount of success in Corinth, including the baptism of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and his family. However, Paul once again incurred the resentment of the Jews living

in Corinth, who brought Paul to Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, on a trumped-up charge of being a lawbreaker.<sup>31</sup> Gallio saw through the charade and responded to the Jews that they should “look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters” (Acts 18:15). In a curious turn of events, Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, was taken and beaten in full view of Gallio, who “cared for none of those things” (18:17). Paul then left Corinth with Aquila and Priscilla, leaving Silas and Timothy behind to continue ministering to the Corinthians. After a brief stay in Ephesus, where Paul left Aquila and Priscilla, he returned to Jerusalem and then Antioch, concluding this second mission.

### Paul’s Third Mission (ca. AD 53–56)

Little time appears to have passed between Paul’s return from his second mission and the beginning of his third mission (Acts 18:22–23). After his visit to Jerusalem, Paul again commenced his evangelization, similarly beginning in Antioch and moving to Galatia before finally arriving in Ephesus. Unlike Luke’s account of Paul’s second mission, which showed Paul traveling extensively throughout the Aegean, Paul’s third mission was largely spent in Ephesus, a city Paul had briefly visited at the end of his second mission. In all, Paul spent approximately three years in Ephesus, by far his lengthiest stay in any one city during his missions (20:31). The abnormal period of time Paul spent in Ephesus could be attributed to the importance the city held in the ancient world. Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, with a population approaching a quarter million. Nearly all communication throughout western Asia went through Ephesus, and Ephesus was also a commercial and cultural center. Of paramount importance was the worship of Diana, whose temple constructed outside the city walls was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. If Paul was searching for a locale where he could spread his religious message far and wide, Ephesus provided the perfect environment.

Luke provides glimpses of what Paul did during those years in Ephesus. In addition to following his regular pattern of preaching in the Jewish synagogues, Paul also spent time in the “school of one Tyrannus,” where presumably he gathered disciples and those interested in the Christian message and held various discussions (Acts 19:9). The result was that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (19:10). Luke goes to great lengths to portray Paul’s ministry as charismatic and inspired during this time. Handkerchiefs and aprons that touched Paul’s body were used to heal various diseases and even to cast out devils. In a rather humorous aside, Luke tells of the seven sons of Sceva who also tried their hand at casting out devils but failed miserably when the evil spirit they were attempting to cast out “leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded” (19:16). This encounter resulted in many more embracing the message of Jesus Christ and bringing their magical texts together and burning them (19:19). Apparently, Paul became so successful at turning people away from their former religious beliefs that resentment began to build among those whose livelihood revolved around the selling of silver statues of Diana. These silversmiths rioted in

protest and were subdued only when the Ephesian town clerk warned the rioters that their actions lacked legal foundation. While Luke portrays Paul's time in Ephesus as largely successful and without incident, it is possible that Paul was imprisoned for some time during his stay at Ephesus, as he mentions to the Corinthians that he "fought with beasts at Ephesus" (1 Corinthians 15:32).<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps concern for affairs in Corinth caused Paul to leave Ephesus. Paul had earlier sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, and Timothy's return to Ephesus likely alerted Paul to the apostasy that had crept into the Corinthian branch. Paul had probably already written two letters to Corinth from Ephesus, one that did not survive (mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9–10) and one that did (1 Corinthians). However, Timothy's report made Paul realize that the situation required his actual presence. Luke reports that Paul traveled back to Greece, with stops in Troas and Macedonia. Once Paul arrived in Corinth, where he stayed for three months (Acts 20:3; likely the winter season), Paul realized just how far things had deteriorated. Mocked for his timid appearance and whiny voice, Paul left Corinth undermined and frustrated. He then likely wrote a letter he described as written "with many tears" (2 Corinthians 2:4), which is now lost. Paul sent this letter with Titus and likely continued traveling back through Macedonia and Troas; it was likely during that stay in Macedonia that Paul wrote part of 2 Corinthians (see 2:13). Fortunately, Titus appears to have been favorably received by the Corinthians, and he was even able to raise money for the collection while at Corinth (see 7:15). Happy to be reconciled, Paul wrote that he planned to visit Corinth a third time (12:14), although it is unknown whether or not he ever made a return visit to Corinth.

One of the reasons Paul may not have returned to Corinth was his eagerness to return to Jerusalem for Pentecost. Paul apparently avoided returning to Ephesus while traveling back from Greece because he worried that a stop in Ephesus would delay him from reaching Jerusalem in time. Pentecost may not have been Paul's only concern. He may have wanted to deliver the collection in conjunction with the festival, or he may have become excited about undertaking a possible voyage to Rome, a trip that had apparently been on his mind since his time in Ephesus (see Acts 19:21). It is likely that Paul began composing his epistle to the Romans during this time as a sort of introductory letter (see Romans 15:25–26) to what he appears to have fully expected to be part of a fourth mission. Paul did allow himself one brief stop at Miletus, a coastal town located about thirty miles from Ephesus. There, Paul gathered the elders of the church and delivered a warning that in the near future "grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29–30). Then, in Caesarea, despite a warning given him by the prophet Agabus that he would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles while in Jerusalem (21:11), Paul insisted on continuing his journey to Jerusalem.

## Jerusalem and Imprisonment (ca. AD 57)

Paul arrived in a Jerusalem full of anxiety and unrest. Felix, the Roman procurator of Judea (ca. AD 52–60), was no friend of the Jews and had on several occasions shown little hesitation in killing those Jews who would not quietly submit to his rule.<sup>33</sup> Nationalistic attitudes ran high among the Jews, and Jewish resentment for Roman rule manifested itself in a general anti-Gentile sentiment. The celebration of Pentecost would have done nothing to diminish these views. About this time Luke records that accusations had been brought against Paul himself, namely that he was teaching Jews living in the diaspora to disregard the law of Moses and to refrain from circumcising their sons (Acts 21:20–21). When Paul met with James (the brother of Jesus), James asked Paul to prove his devotion to Judaism by accompanying a few Jews who were in the process of completing their Nazarite vows: according to the law, Paul would have needed to go through his own period of purification owing to his time spent in gentile territory (Numbers 19:11–13). James must have felt that this act would assuage any concerns about Paul's respect and devotion for Jewish law and tradition while away in the diaspora. To agree to such a proposal was not a guarantee of safety since Paul would have had to make his presence in the temple public and thus alert his enemies to his whereabouts. Paul nonetheless agreed, perhaps realizing that his reputation had put him in a precarious position or perhaps because he feared that the collection he and his colleagues had worked so hard to gather would be rejected if it came from someone who was viewed as anti-Jewish (Romans 15:30–31).

Unfortunately, James's plan did not work out. Luke relates that "the Jews which were of Asia" (Acts 21:27) stirred up the crowd by accusing Paul (falsely) of bringing Gentiles into the temple, a capital offense that would desecrate the temple. Paul was seized by an angry mob, dragged out of the temple, and nearly killed, an appropriate punishment (under the law) if Paul had in fact done what the mob accused him of. Fortunately, the Roman tribune Claudius Lysias, likely already on high alert because of the festival, intervened and rescued Paul with soldiers garrisoned in the nearby Antonia Fortress. Claudius Lysias was apparently under the impression that Paul was a revolutionary zealot, an Egyptian pseudo-Messiah who had led four thousand *sicarii* into the wilderness, and was thus surprised to learn not only that Paul could speak Greek but that he was also a citizen of Tarsus.<sup>34</sup> Paul requested to speak to the crowd and told them of his background, his vision, and his mission. Unsatisfied, the Jewish mob pushed for Paul's execution, and Claudius Lysias ordered Paul to be brutally scourged in order to extract more specific information about his identity and presence in Jerusalem. Recognizing that Roman law forbade the use of scourging, or *verberatio*, on a Roman citizen, Paul asked the centurion in charge of scourging him, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25). Alarmed at this revelation, Claudius Lysias ordered a cessation to Paul's punishment, although he continued to keep Paul in his custody.

Claudius Lysias thereupon ordered Paul to stand before the Sanhedrin. This move should not be understood as an attempt by Claudius Lysias to ignore his responsibilities and allow Jewish law to settle the dispute. Rather, it is more likely that Claudius Lysias needed

further insight into why Paul and his Jewish opponents were engaged in such a heated religious dispute. Before the Sanhedrin, Paul maintained his innocence and successfully won over the Pharisees to his side by highlighting his pharisaic pedigree, although not before insulting Ananias, the high priest (Acts 23:1–9). Worried that the conflict between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over Paul’s testimony might become violent, Claudius Lysias was forced once again to take Paul back into custody. Later that night the Lord appeared to Paul, comforting him: “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (23:11). The following morning, likely frustrated at their inability to see Paul executed, a band of about forty Jews swore an oath that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 12–13). They attempted to enlist the help of the chief priests and elders in contacting Claudius Lysias and asking him to return Paul for another hearing before the Sanhedrin, with the intent of killing Paul before he arrived. Alerted to this plot by a nephew of Paul’s, Claudius Lysias realized that Paul would not be safe in Jerusalem and ordered him to be extradited to Caesarea Maritima to be interrogated by Antonius Felix, the Roman procurator (AD 52–60). The number of men sent to escort Paul, 470 (23:23), is extraordinary, but it may indicate the dedication Claudius Lysias had to ensure Paul’s safe travel.

### Before Felix and Festus (ca. AD 58–60)

Paul’s trial before Felix took the form of a debate. Tertullus, a skilled prosecutor hired by the Jews, attempted to portray Paul as a seditious person intent on stirring up trouble for both the Jews and Rome. Paul responded by refuting Tertullus’s accusations and reemphasizing his own beliefs in the God of Judaism and the law. When the debate was over, Felix declined to declare a verdict, instead stating that he would wait for Claudius Lysias to arrive. Paul was ordered to remain in custody but to have some liberties, such as the companionship of friends. However, Felix continued to delay his decision, ostensibly because he wanted to discuss Christianity and its beliefs with Paul, but Luke includes the more likely cause of the delay, namely that “he hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul” (Acts 24:26). Felix’s holding out for a bribe is not surprising, given what is otherwise known about his character, although the act of taking bribes from prisoners was strictly prohibited according to the Roman *Lex Julia de pecuniis repetundis*. Rather than obtaining the quick release from prison he may have been expecting, Paul instead spent two years in captivity in Caesarea under the watch of Felix.

Likely owing to questionable administrative practices, Felix was removed from office in AD 60 and replaced by Porcius Festus (AD 60–62).<sup>35</sup> By all accounts a decent administrator, Festus initially acted impartially but likely underestimated the hatred Paul’s Jewish opponents had for Paul. Festus rejected the Jewish appeal to transfer Paul to Jerusalem (where he would have been ambushed and killed along the way; see Acts 25:3) but invited Paul’s opponents to travel to Caesarea and accuse Paul in person. However, once everyone gathered in Caesarea and both sides again pled their case, Festus sided with the Jews and asked Paul if he

would be willing to travel to Jerusalem and be judged there. Festus likely had no knowledge of the Jewish plot to ambush Paul; rather, he was trying to please his constituency and thus was “willing to do the Jews a pleasure” (25:9). Well aware that certain death awaited him if he traveled to Jerusalem and sensing that Festus was more sympathetic to the Jews than to him, Paul again relied on his Roman citizenship. According to the Roman *Lex Julia de vi publica et privata*, a Roman citizen could at any time appeal (*provoco*) to the emperor to have his case heard, and that is what Paul did here: “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (25:10–11).

Festus did not immediately send him to Rome. Rather, it was his responsibility to write up a report outlining the charges brought against Paul. Festus, being procurator only a short time, likely struggled with how to describe Paul’s circumstances in a way that looked to be worth the emperor’s time, rather than a silly cultural dispute that (at least in the emperor’s eyes) any competent administrator should have been able to resolve. Thus, it is likely with a certain amount of relief that Festus welcomed Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice, who had arrived in Caesarea to welcome the new procurator. The last of the Hasmonean rulers over Judea, Herod Agrippa II would have been able to help Festus understand the complexities of Paul’s circumstances. Paul again related his vision and offered a brief summary of his travels, including his capture in the temple. Festus was unimpressed with Paul’s presentation and declared Paul to be mad. Herod Agrippa II was more sympathetic, and his famous response, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28), is ambiguous and could be read either respectfully or ironically. The important outcome of the encounter is that Herod Agrippa II declared that Paul “doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds” and lamented that “this man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar” (26:31–32).

## Paul’s Imprisonment in Rome (ca. AD 60–62) and Execution (ca. AD 64)

Following his hearing with Herod Agrippa II, Festus agreed to send Paul to Rome to have his appeal heard. After a series of near-disastrous events that included a shipwreck and a viper’s bite, Paul arrived in Rome. Luke records that he spent two years in Rome under some kind of confinement. Paul’s case was likely not considered a serious offence by the Romans, and he was granted a lightened form of custody. Paul was allowed to dwell in a small, modest residence that he (or more likely his supporters) paid for (Acts 28:16), although he remained in the custody of a Roman soldier (28:16), perhaps even bound to the soldier by a chain (28:20). Unfortunately, Luke’s account ends with Paul under arrest in Rome, leaving many questions unanswered. The likeliest scenario for what happened next is that Paul’s case was dismissed, probably owing to the absence of his accusers. First Clement (5:5–7) mentions

that Paul reached “the limits of the west,” possibly suggesting that Paul achieved his goal of traveling to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28). However, on the way home from the west, Paul found himself once again in a difficult situation, one that he would not escape from. Eusebius wrote that after being released from his initial Roman imprisonment and undertaking an additional ministry, Paul came “a second time to the same city [and] suffered martyrdom under Nero.”<sup>36</sup> Eusebius additionally relays the detail that Paul suffered death by beheading, the proper means of execution for a Roman citizen.<sup>37</sup> If this scenario is accurate, while Paul’s death could have taken place as early as AD 62, it may have extended as late as AD 68 (the year of Nero’s death).<sup>38</sup> Of course, it is also possible that Paul was executed during his first stay at Rome and Luke simply chose not to include that detail, which would likely place Paul’s execution sometime between AD 62 and 64.

It is probable that 2 Timothy (if genuinely Pauline) preserves some of the last thoughts Paul ever recorded. In this revealing epistle, Paul laments that some of his colleagues, such as Demas, have left him, save Luke (4:10–11). His request that Timothy bring him the “cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus” (4:13) may reveal conditions indicative of a harsher imprisonment than his previous one (4:16). Yet Paul’s ever-present optimism does not wane. Using a series of athletic metaphors, Paul confidently declares, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (4:7). In other words, Paul has wrestled a good match, he has run a good race, and he has maintained, through it all, his loyalty to and confidence in Jesus Christ.

With these words, Paul leaves his modern-day readers with a valuable archetype of discipleship. Over two (possibly three) decades of missionary work, Paul made no shortage of enemies, parted ways with friends and colleagues, wrote epistles fiery (Galatians) and contemplative (Philippians), and yet through it all he endured because of his faith. Paul’s experiences tell us that the life of a disciple is not an easy one; it requires sacrifice and patience centered on the conviction that faith in Jesus Christ has not been misplaced or found wanting. As Paul (rather explicitly) writes to the Philippians, “I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). Paul’s legacy comes through to help his readers understand that life is hard and takes its toll, that true commitment can lead to a shortage of earthly satisfaction, and that obtaining a “crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8) is not about perfection, but about perseverance.



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## Further Reading

### Latter-day Saint

Anderson, Richard Lloyd. *Understanding Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983. A work that was written more recently than Sidney Sperry's. It is more useful for engaging Paul's theology and the context of the epistles than as a study of Paul's life, but it is still a valuable resource for Latter-day Saints.

Hoskisson, Paul Y., ed. *The Apostle Paul, His Life and His Testimony: The 23rd Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994. A collection of essays, some scholarly, others devotional, devoted to the life of Paul and the issues that arise surrounding him in Acts and his letters.

Sperry, Sidney B. *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955. A classic Latter-day Saint treatment of Paul. It is heavily Protestant and somewhat outdated, but it is still useful, especially in its treatment of Paul's letters.

Wayment, Thomas A. *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006. A highly readable biography of Paul written by a Latter-day Saint and New Testament scholar. It is the best place to start for readers looking for a one-volume treatment of Paul's life.

### Other

Dunn, James D. G. *Christianity in the Making, vol 2: Beginning from Jerusalem*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. All three volumes in Dunn's Christianity in the Making series are must-reads, but this second volume masterfully navigates the primary and secondary literature on Paul to provide a cogent picture of Paul's role in the early Christian church.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *Paul: A Critical Life*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. An engaging and provocative biography of Paul by an outstanding New Testament scholar. Readers looking for an academic treatment of Paul's life from a non-Latter-day Saint perspective should begin here.

Schnelle, Udo. *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003. A thorough treatment of Paul's life and thought for those who want something similar to Richard Lloyd Anderson's Understanding Paul but from a non-Latter-day Saint perspective.

Witherington III, Ben. *The Paul Quest: The Renewed Search for the Jew of Tarsus*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998. Witherington brings together all the arguments and issues involved in the search for the "historical Paul." A useful resource for those wanting to know more about what can and cannot be said about Paul himself.

## Timeline for the Life of Paul

(Note: Because these dates are based on limited historical evidence and the text of the New Testament, this timeline should be seen as a *speculative* reconstruction of Paul's life.)

AD 1–10 (+/-5)	Paul's birth
30	Crucifixion of Jesus
31–33	Paul persecutes the Hellenists
34	Paul's "conversion"
34–37	Damascus and Arabia (the "missing years")
37	First visit to Jerusalem
37–46	Years spent in Syria and Cilicia
47	Paul and Barnabas preach in Antioch

- 48–49 Paul's first mission: Galatia
- 49 Council of Jerusalem (incident at Antioch either closely preceding or closely following the council)
- 50 Paul returns to Galatia (*Galatians*)
- 50–52 Paul's second mission: Corinth (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*)
- 53–56 Paul's third mission: Ephesus (*1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans*)
- 57 Return to Jerusalem and arrest
- 58–60 Imprisonment in Caesarea (*Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon*)
- 60–64 Imprisonment in Rome and execution (*Pastorals*)

## Notes

1. John G. Gager, *Who Made Early Christianity? The Jewish Lives of the Apostle Paul* (New York: Princeton University Press, 2015), 17.
2. This has been the approach of some biographies of Paul aimed at popular audiences, such as A. N. Wilson, *Paul: The Mind of the Apostle* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997); and Hyam Maccoby, *The Mythmaker: Paul and the Invention of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986). However, the origin of the idea goes back to F. C. Baur, in particular *Paul: The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1845).
3. Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).
4. For Paul's early education, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 46–51.
5. For a discussion of the arguments for and against Paul being a Roman citizen, see Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 60–62. A classic study of Roman law and the New Testament is A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).
6. James D. G. Dunn, *Christianity in the Making, vol 2: Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 335.
7. See Jacob Neusner, *The Rabbinic Tradition about the Pharisees before 70* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1971), 1:341–76.
8. From the Mishnah and Babylonian Talmud, see m. Yebamot 6:6; b. Yebamot 62b–63b; b. Qiddušin 29b; and b. Sanhedrin 36b. For a discussion of exceptions to this understanding, see John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 336–41.
9. Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies* 30.16.9.
10. "It is much more probable, however, that Paul cheerfully bowed to the expectation that young men should marry in their early twenties." Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 63.
11. Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 64–65.

12. Dating events in the life of Paul is a difficult task, and there are as many chronological timelines for the life of Paul as there are biographies. The dates presented here in this chapter represent my best estimation. For a discussion of the issues involved and other Pauline timelines, see Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 497–512.
13. “The fact that the witnesses laid their clothes at Saul’s feet suggests that he was already the acknowledged leader in the opposition to the early church.” David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 268. Compare Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2.
14. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 67.
15. See Galatians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1.
16. See Thomas A. Wayment, *From Persecutor to Apostle: A Biography of Paul* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 41.
17. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.109–115. It is the denouncement of this marriage by John the Baptist that provides the setting for his execution. Compare Matthew 14:3–12.
18. One possible link between Paul and Arabia is his comment in Galatians that Hagar represents “mount Sinai in Arabia” (Galatians 4:25). This opens up the intriguing possibility that Paul went to Arabia to visit Mount Sinai and find answers to his questions in a similar fashion as Moses did.
19. See Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 5–7.
20. “The only point Paul chose to make is that his time in Arabia further underlined his independence from the Jerusalem leadership; in Arabia there was no one whom he could have consulted.” Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 265.
21. Compare 1 Corinthians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 10:13–16.
22. For those who want to argue that Paul was a member of the quorum of the twelve apostles, the best textual evidence is Acts 14:4, 14 and Galatians 2:9.
23. Josephus, *Jewish War* 3.29.
24. It is important to note that at this juncture two possible sequences of events are introduced by Luke in Acts and Paul in Galatians. The first one, which I follow, is that the famine relief mentioned in Acts 11 is the same event discussed by Paul in Galatians 2:1–10. In support of this position is F. F. Bruce, who writes, “The view taken here is that it is to be identified with the visit of Acts 11:30, in the fourteenth year of Paul’s conversion.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 108–9; see also Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 439–43. The other position is that Galatians 2:1–10 refers to the events mentioned in Acts 15. There are good arguments supporting both views. For an even-handed treatment of both positions, see Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 446–70.
25. As recorded by Ovid in his charming collection of tales, *Metamorphoses*, Zeus and Hermes often would travel to earth in the guise of men as a test of hospitality. After several rejections, Zeus and Hermes found an acceptance in the house of the elderly couple Baucis and Philemon, who are rewarded for their hospitality by becoming priests in the temple of Zeus; see *Metamorphoses*, 8.611–724. This story apparently occurred nearby the city of Lystra, and it is likely that the inhabitants’ reaction to Barnabas and Paul stems from their knowledge of this story.
26. Again, we experience questions in regard to the sequence of Paul’s life as described in Galatians 2:11–14. Some scholars, such as F. F. Bruce, argue that the encounter between Peter and Paul in Antioch occurred between the first mission and the Council of Jerusalem, which issued the decree granting full membership to uncircumcised Gentiles. See Bruce, *Galatians*, 128–30; see also Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 149–52. Others, such as Joseph A. Fitzmyer, argue that the encounter between Peter and Paul happened after the Council of Jerusalem (and presumably the decree); see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 541. Again, for a full discussion, see Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 446–70. See also the work of David G. Peterson, who writes: “We cannot be certain when the next incident mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:11–14 took place, though it is most likely to have been before the resolutions of the Jerusalem Council brought public agreement between Peter, James, Paul, and Barnabas on such matters” (Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 420).

27. For more on the Jerusalem conference, including the events that led up to it and the outcomes that followed, see Robert J. Matthews, "The Jerusalem Conference," in *The Apostle Paul: His Life and Testimony*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 96–109.
28. For a useful discussion of the issues surrounding the Epistle to the Galatians, including its dating, occasion, and audience, see Bruce, *Galatians*, 1–56. Bruce himself argues for an early date for Galatians, believing that a date sometime near the events of the Council of Jerusalem "would yield the most satisfactory correlation of the data of Galatians and Acts and the most satisfactory dating of Galatians" (55).
29. The *Lex Porcia de provocatione* specifically forbade the flogging of one who was a *civis romanus*, or a "Roman Citizen" (compare Livy, *Ab. Urb. Cond* 10.9.5). "In a Roman colony it appears that arrest, beating, and imprisonment were normal for aliens, but that it was potentially dangerous to give citizens the same treatment." Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 268.
30. Suetonius records that Claudius expelled Jews from Rome because of uprisings resulting from "impulso Chresto," which could mean that divisions over belief in Jesus Christ had led to these uprisings, or it could simply refer to someone named Chrestus who had no connection with Christianity (see Suetonius, *Divus Claudius* 25.4). Either way, Jews were likely banned from Rome somewhere around AD 49 and likely did not return until after the death of Claudius in AD 54.
31. Gallio's tenure as proconsul of Achaia can be firmly dated from spring AD 51 to spring AD 52. The majority of attempts at establishing a Pauline chronology use Gallio's proconsulship as a primary foundation.
32. For more on the argument for an Ephesian imprisonment, see Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, 777–80.
33. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.12.2; 2.13.4, 7. Compare Tacitus, *Historiae* 5.9; *Annales* 12.54.
34. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.13.5. Felix had been working on quelling the Egyptian's revolt and had largely been successful, although the Egyptian remained at large. Claudius Lysias appears to believe that the man he has apprehended, who had caused such a disturbance in the temple, was this Egyptian.
35. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.182.
36. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.22.2; compare 2 Timothy 4:16.
37. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.25.5; compare 1 Clement 5:7; Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 36.
38. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see H. W. Tajra, *The Martyrdom of St. Paul: Historical and Judicial Context, Traditions, and Legends* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1994).