

PAUL (SAUL) OF TARSUS

(died ca. 68 A.D.)

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . . . But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.¹

--I Corinthians 13:4-8, 13

His Pre-Conversion Life. We know more about the life of Saul of Tarsus than any other person in the New Testament—except perhaps Jesus. Saul hailed from Tarsus,² a city in the region of Cilicia in southeast Asia Minor (Asia Minor is modern Turkey). He was a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin,³ but was also a Roman citizen.⁴ The son of a Pharisee⁵ (that is, a Jewish religious leader), Saul studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel,⁶ a widely-respected Pharisee and teacher of the Jewish Law.⁷ Saul acquired a reputation for being a zealous Jew,⁸ and became a Pharisee himself.⁹ He may have been one of those from Cilicia who argued with Stephen.¹⁰

Most of what we know about Saul begins after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. Saul watched the cloaks of those who stoned Stephen, the new faith's first martyr.¹¹ Acts makes clear that Saul was not neutral about this action, for "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death."¹² The death of Stephen seems to have sparked a severe Jewish persecution of the followers of Jesus in Judea—a persecution led by Saul.¹³

¹ All Biblical quotations are from the *New American Standard* translation.

² Acts 9:11, 21:39, 22:3

³ Romans 11:1; Philippians 3:5

⁴ Acts 22:25-29

⁵ Acts 23:6

⁶ Acts 22:3

⁷ Acts 5:34

⁸ Galatians 1:14

⁹ Acts 23:6, 26:5, Philippians 3:5

¹⁰ Acts 6:9

¹¹ Acts 7:58, 22:20

¹² Acts 8:1

¹³ Acts 8:1, 3

Convinced that the preaching about Christ's resurrection was a diabolical lie and a very real danger to Judaism, and having received authority from the Jewish priests, Saul set out to crush the new movement by searching out its adherents and imprisoning them.¹⁴ Some were even executed, with Saul's concurrence.¹⁵ He describes himself as being "furiously enraged" at them.¹⁶ However, persecution did not silence his quarry, but only forced them to flee Judea and preach elsewhere.¹⁷ Thus, his actions unintentionally helped to spread the teaching of this new Gospel. In response, Saul obtained permission from the Jewish leaders to expand the persecution to Damascus, in Syria, intending to arrest any of the believers he found there and bring them back to Jerusalem.¹⁸ But just outside Damascus, God struck Saul with a vision that would change his life forever.

Saul's Conversion to Christianity. As Saul approached Damascus, at about noon, he suddenly saw a blinding light from heaven.¹⁹ He fell to the ground and heard the voice of Jesus saying, in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"²⁰ Those who were travelling with Saul saw the light and heard the voice, but could not understand what was said.²¹ The voice instructed Saul to continue to Damascus, where he would be told what to do.²² When the vision was over, Saul found that he was blind.²³ His companions led him into the city, to the house of a man named Judas, where Saul stayed 3 days without eating or drinking.²⁴ Meanwhile, one of the believers in Damascus named Ananias saw a vision from the Lord, telling him to go to Saul and lay hands on him.²⁵ When Ananias did so, Saul regained his sight and was baptized.²⁶

Not long after his conversion, Luke begins to refer to Saul by the Greek name of Paul.²⁷ "Saul" means "desired"; "Paul" means "little." Maybe Paul changed his name to enhance his ministry to the Gentiles, or perhaps merely to emphasize the

¹⁴ Acts 8:3, 9:1, 22:5, 26:10; see also I Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13-14, Philippians 3:6, and I Timothy 1:13

¹⁵ Acts 26:10; see also Acts 9:1 and 22:4

¹⁶ Acts 26:11

¹⁷ Acts 8:4

¹⁸ Acts 9:1-2, 22:5, 26:12

¹⁹ Acts 9:3, 22:6, 26:13

²⁰ Acts 9:4-5, 22:7-8, 26:14-15

²¹ Acts 9:7, 22:9

²² Acts 9:6, 22:10

²³ Acts 9:8, 22:11

²⁴ Acts 9:8-9, 11

²⁵ Acts 9:10-12

²⁶ Acts 9:17-18

²⁷ Acts 13:9

tremendous change that had occurred in his own life. To avoid confusion, he is referred to hereafter as “Paul.”

The Early Years After Paul’s Conversion. After his conversion, Paul remained in Damascus for quite awhile, proclaiming in the Jewish synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God.²⁸ He was so successful that the Jews began to plot his murder.²⁹ Paul tells us that an “ethnarch” of Aretas, an Arabian ruler,³⁰ was part of this plot.³¹ Paul learned about the plot and escaped at night by being lowered in a basket through an opening in the city wall.³² This occurred in approximately 39 A.D. After three years in Arabia and Damascus,³³ Paul went to Jerusalem for about two weeks, where he stayed with Peter, and was introduced to James the Just, the brother of Jesus.³⁴ Paul denies that he met any of the other apostles while in Jerusalem,³⁵ which suggests that they had already left to pursue missionary journeys in other parts of the world. Luke tells us that the believers in Jerusalem were still afraid of Paul, due to his reputation for persecuting the Church, so Barnabas befriended him by introducing him to the other disciples.³⁶

Paul preached the Gospel in Jerusalem just as he had in Damascus, and again the Jews began to plot his death.³⁷ While praying in the Temple, Paul was warned in a vision to flee Jerusalem quickly, with the promise that God would send him “far away to the Gentiles.”³⁸ So he hurried to Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast, and from there returned to Tarsus,³⁹ going by way of Syria.⁴⁰

Syrian Antioch. Antioch, with a population of about 800,000, was the largest city in Syria, and the 3rd largest city in the Roman Empire. Antioch had first been evangelized by disciples from Jerusalem who were fleeing the persecutions of Paul, but these early missionaries had gone only to the Jews.⁴¹ Sometime later, men from

²⁸ Acts 9:19-23

²⁹ Acts 9:22-23

³⁰ An ethnarch was a representative of the king—in this case, Aretas IV, ruler of Nabatea, a region of Arabia, from 9 B.C. to 40 A.D. Aretas temporarily brought Damascus into his realm in about 37 A.D. (the year of the death of the Roman Emperor Tiberias), holding it until his death in 40 A.D. This may also explain why Paul went to Arabia for a time after his conversion. See Galatians 1:17.

³¹ II Corinthians 11:32

³² Acts 9:24-25; II Corinthians 11:32-33

³³ Galatians 1:17-18

³⁴ Galatians 1:18-19

³⁵ Galatians 1:19

³⁶ Acts 9:26-27

³⁷ Acts 9:28-29

³⁸ Acts 22:17-21

³⁹ Acts 9:30

⁴⁰ Galatians 1:21

⁴¹ Acts 11:19

Cyprus and Cyrene⁴² evangelized the “Greeks”⁴³ in Antioch, prompting the Jerusalem Church to send Barnabas there to teach and encourage these new disciples.⁴⁴ Perhaps because of the large number of converts,⁴⁵ Barnabas journeyed to Tarsus, found Paul, and brought him to Antioch.⁴⁶ There Paul and Barnabas taught these new believers for a year.⁴⁷ In Antioch the followers of Jesus were first called “Christians.”⁴⁸

After their year in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem with a gift for the Christians in Judea, who were suffering from a widespread famine.⁴⁹ This occurred between 41 and 44 A.D.⁵⁰ When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, John Mark (Mark)⁵¹ went with them.⁵²

Paul’s First Missionary Journey. Following the instructions of the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas—again accompanied by Mark—left Antioch and set out on the first of at least three missionary journeys Paul would make.⁵³ This first missionary journey took them to the island of Cyprus—Barnabas’ home—and then to various cities in southern Asia Minor, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.⁵⁴ All were large cities. Paul’s missionary strategy seems to have been to concentrate on the larger cities, allowing the converts to then spread the Gospel into the smaller towns and the surrounding countryside. But Paul and Barnabas had to carry out much of this work without Mark’s help, because he abandoned them and returned to Jerusalem shortly after they reached Asia Minor.⁵⁵ Mark’s desertion on

⁴² Cyprus is an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, south of Asia Minor and west of Syria. Cyrene was a city in north Africa, in the eastern part of what is now Libya. Jews from Cyrene were among those who heard Peter’s preaching at Pentecost. See Acts 2:10.

⁴³ This term could refer to either Gentiles or Greek Jews.

⁴⁴ Acts 11:20-23

⁴⁵ See Acts 11:21 and 24.

⁴⁶ Acts 11:25-26

⁴⁷ Acts 11:26

⁴⁸ Acts 11:26

⁴⁹ Acts 11:28-30

⁵⁰ We know from Acts 11:28 that this trip occurred during the reign of Claudius, who was the Roman Emperor from 41 to 54 A.D., so the earliest possible date for the famine offering trip would be 41 A.D. On the other hand, Acts 12:1 tells us that King Herod (Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great) was still alive at about this time. Since Herod died in 44 A.D., the trip must have been during or before 44 A.D.

⁵¹ John Mark, also known simply as Mark, was probably the author of the Gospel of Mark.

⁵² Acts 12:25

⁵³ Acts 13:1-5

⁵⁴ See Acts 4:36, 13:5-14, and 13:51 - 14:21. Paul’s letter to the Galatians was probably intended for the Christians in these cities.

⁵⁵ Acts 13:13, 15:38

this occasion would cause a later division between Paul and Barnabas,⁵⁶ as we will see.

Pisidian Antioch may have been the first place in which Paul preached to Gentiles. Paul's practice was to preach to the Jews in a city first.⁵⁷ But, as so often happened thereafter, the Jewish leaders rejected Paul's preaching, so Paul turned instead to the Gentiles—with considerable success.⁵⁸

In Lystra, Paul was hailed as a god when God used him to heal a man who had been lame from birth.⁵⁹ Later, those same crowds stoned Paul almost to death and then dragged him outside the city.⁶⁰ After he regained consciousness, Paul bravely walked back into the city.⁶¹ Paul and Barnabas enjoyed a lot of success in Lystra, as well as in Pisidian Antioch and Iconium, but were eventually driven out by the Jewish leaders.⁶² So the two missionaries traveled on to the city of Derbe, where they encountered no such resistance.⁶³ Then, returning the way they had come—through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch—they arrived at Syrian Antioch, where their journey began.⁶⁴

The Jerusalem Conference. The conversion of the Roman centurion, Cornelius, had taught Peter that the Christian Church must include Gentiles as well as Jews.⁶⁵ Paul's first missionary journey had brought many more Gentiles into the Church. But soon a controversy broke out at Syrian Antioch. Some Judean Christians insisted that Gentile converts must comply with Jewish religious requirements such as circumcision, but Paul and Barnabas opposed these demands.⁶⁶ So Paul and Barnabas travelled to Jerusalem to consult with the Church's leaders.⁶⁷ Peter sided with Paul and Barnabas in the dispute,⁶⁸ which was settled by a compromise suggested by James the Just: the only requirements imposed upon the Gentiles were that they avoid idols, fornication, blood, and animals that had been strangled.⁶⁹ Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with this joyful message.⁷⁰

⁵⁶ See Acts 15:36-40.

⁵⁷ See Acts 13:46. Indeed, when Paul came to a new city, he often preached first at the local Jewish synagogue. See, for example, Acts 13:14, 14:1, 17:1-2, 17:10, 17:16-17, 18:1-6, 19:8-9.

⁵⁸ Acts 13:45-50

⁵⁹ Acts 14:8-13

⁶⁰ Acts 14:19; see also II Corinthians 11:25

⁶¹ Acts 14:20

⁶² Acts 13:49-51, 14:1-6, 14:18-20; and see 2 Timothy 3:11

⁶³ Acts 14:20-21

⁶⁴ Acts 14:21-28

⁶⁵ Acts 10:1-48

⁶⁶ Acts 15:1-2

⁶⁷ Acts 15:2-4

⁶⁸ Acts 15:7-11

⁶⁹ See Acts 15:13-29. Many scholars believe that Galatians 2:1-10 is Paul's account of the

Sometime later, the problem resurfaced in a subtler way. Jewish law forbids the eating of “unclean” foods, such as pork. The Jerusalem Conference allowed Gentiles to eat these foods. When Peter visited Antioch, he ate with the Gentiles—and, presumably, ate their “unclean” food.⁷¹ But he stopped doing so when some Jewish Christians from Jerusalem objected.⁷² Paul publicly denounced Peter’s conduct as hypocritical, and apparently won the day.⁷³

Paul’s Second Missionary Journey. Paul’s 2nd missionary journey began with a disagreement. Paul and Barnabas decided to visit the churches they had founded during their first journey.⁷⁴ However, Barnabas wanted to take Mark again, while Paul refused, pointing out that Mark had deserted them during the first trip.⁷⁵ The argument became so heated that Paul and Barnabas eventually split the team and the task: Barnabas and Mark returned to Cyprus, while Paul went back to Asia Minor, taking along Silas.⁷⁶ The disagreement was undoubtedly made more acute because of Barnabas’ familial relationship with Mark, who was his cousin.⁷⁷ Paul’s friendship with Barnabas may have been further strained by them being on opposite sides in Paul’s confrontation of Peter at Antioch.⁷⁸

Jerusalem Conference, although some believe Galatians describes Paul’s earlier trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas, carrying the famine offering from the Antioch Christians (see Acts 11:27-30). Those who accept the latter view generally believe that Paul’s Letter to the Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem Conference, which is why the letter does not mention James’ compromise. However, these scholars have a difficult time with the statement of Galatians 2:1, that this trip to Jerusalem came **14 years after Paul’s initial trip**. Since the famine-offering trip occurred no later than 44 A.D., this would place Paul’s initial trip in about 30 A.D.—which is far too early (Jesus’ crucifixion did not occur until 30-33 A.D.). However, the contrary view is not without problems of its own, the most apparent being that Paul, in Galatians, mentions only two trips to Jerusalem, rather than three: (1) the initial trip, in Galatians 1:18-19, and (2) the 2nd trip, in Galatians 2:1-10. A possible explanation is that Paul did not enter the city during the famine-offering trip, due to the earlier hostility he had encountered in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29-30), and instead waited outside the city while Barnabas took the offering to the elders.

⁷⁰ Acts 15:30-31

⁷¹ Galatians 2:12

⁷² Galatians 2:12

⁷³ Galatians 2:11, 14

⁷⁴ Acts 15:36

⁷⁵ Acts 15:36-38

⁷⁶ Acts 15:39-41

⁷⁷ Colossians 4:10

⁷⁸ Galatians 2:13 makes clear that Barnabas joined Peter in snubbing the Gentile Christians in Antioch: “The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”

Paul and Silas took the land route to Asia Minor, through Syria and Paul's home province of Cilicia.⁷⁹ From there, they traveled on to Derbe, Lystra, and other cities in Asia Minor, encouraging the believers and giving them the message of the Jerusalem Conference.⁸⁰ Timothy enrolled in Paul's group in Lystra,⁸¹ and Luke probably joined in Troas.⁸² But the Holy Spirit severely limited their preaching in Asia Minor, and a vision led Paul to Macedonia (northern Greece).⁸³ In Greece, Paul would visit the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

Paul's indomitable faith and spirit are evident in Philippi. After being arrested, beaten, and jailed by the Romans, Paul and Silas responded by praying and singing hymns of praise to God.⁸⁴ The behavior of Paul and Silas while imprisoned beautifully illustrates what Paul must have meant when he said: "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am."⁸⁵ The Christians in Philippi became Paul's most devoted supporters.⁸⁶

In Thessalonica and again in Berea, Paul made many new converts, but each time he was driven away by the opposition of some of the Jews.⁸⁷ Paul went on to Athens alone, while Silas and Timothy remained in Berea.⁸⁸ Naturally, Paul preached about Christ while waiting for Silas and Timothy.⁸⁹ Paul cleverly noticed that the Athenians had an altar "to an unknown god," and informed them that this was the very God he was telling them about.⁹⁰

Silas and Timothy probably joined Paul briefly in Athens, bringing word that it would not be safe for him to return to Macedonia.⁹¹ Paul then sent them back to

⁷⁹ Acts 15:41

⁸⁰ Acts 16:1-5

⁸¹ Acts 16:1-3

⁸² Troas was a city on the western coast of Asia Minor, near the site of ancient Troy. Luke is believed to have joined Paul in Troas, based on Acts 16:10, which suddenly changes from third person plural ("they") to first person plural ("we"), implying that Luke is now part of the group. The use of the third person resumes in Acts 17:1, and continues until Acts 20:5, which may indicate that Luke remained for a time in Philippi after Paul left. (Acts 16:19-40 is also in the third person, but this describes an incident in which Luke was clearly not a participant—the arrest and imprisonment of Paul and Silas.)

⁸³ Acts 16:6-10

⁸⁴ Acts 16:19-25; and see 1 Thessalonians 2:2

⁸⁵ Philippians 4:11

⁸⁶ Philippians 1:3-5, 4:14-16

⁸⁷ Acts 17:1-14; and see 1 Thessalonians 1:7-9

⁸⁸ Acts 17:14-15

⁸⁹ Acts 17:16-34

⁹⁰ Acts 17:23

⁹¹ That Timothy met Paul in Athens is clear from 1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, which states that Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica while Paul remained in Athens. Since Silas and Timothy were

Macedonia to check on the new converts there,⁹² while Paul went on to Corinth, where he would remain for a year and a half.⁹³ Silas and Timothy rejoined him there.⁹⁴ Because Acts 18:12-17⁹⁵ mentions Gallio, who was proconsul of Achaia (southern Greece) from 51 to 52 A.D., we are able to date Paul's stay in Corinth as about 50 to 51 A.D. While in Corinth, Paul stayed with Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who had recently fled Rome when the Emperor Claudius drove out the Jews in 49 A.D.⁹⁶

During this extended residence in Corinth, Paul probably wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians, which are believed to be the earliest of his letters. He encouraged the young church to be obedient to God,⁹⁷ and to "pray without ceasing,"⁹⁸ while they await Jesus' second coming.⁹⁹ Paul wrote his 2nd letter to the Thessalonians a short time later, in part to dispel a rumor that Jesus' second coming had already occurred,¹⁰⁰ and also to chastise certain lazy Thessalonian Christians who had stopped working and were living off of the charity of others.¹⁰¹

At the end of his 18-month sojourn in Corinth, Paul sailed to Ephesus (a city along the southwest coast of Asia Minor), where he left Priscilla and Aquila.¹⁰² Although Paul's reception in Ephesus was favorable, he did not stay long, returning to Syrian Antioch by way of Caesarea.¹⁰³

travelling together (see Acts 17:15), Silas probably accompanied Timothy to Athens. Timothy and Silas later joined Paul in Corinth, and reported that the Thessalonians were doing well (1 Thessalonians 3:6; Acts 18:5).

⁹² See footnote 91.

⁹³ Acts 18:1, 11

⁹⁴ Acts 18:5

⁹⁵ Acts 18:12-17 says:

But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, "This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law." But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters." And he drove them away from the judgment seat. And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and *began* beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things.

⁹⁶ Acts 18:2-3

⁹⁷ See 1 Thessalonians 2:12, 3:12-4:12, 5:4-22.

⁹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

⁹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:6

¹⁰⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

¹⁰¹ 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

¹⁰² Acts 18:18-19

¹⁰³ Acts 18:19-22

Paul's Third Missionary Journey. When Paul left Antioch on his third missionary journey, he traveled through Asia Minor to Ephesus, where he remained for more than 2 years,¹⁰⁴ about 53-56 A.D. He probably stayed with Priscilla and Aquila during part of this time.¹⁰⁵ While Paul was there, the Gospel spread extensively in the region, and God worked amazing miracles for Paul's ministry.¹⁰⁶ However, Paul's letters indicate that he also suffered greatly while in Ephesus.¹⁰⁷ Paul's preaching eventually provoked hostility among the Ephesian idol makers, and he departed for Macedonia.¹⁰⁸

Paul wrote his First Letter to the Corinthians from Ephesus, so the letter was probably written during this extended visit. This letter was actually the second letter Paul wrote to the Corinthians;¹⁰⁹ the first letter has apparently been lost to history. The Corinthian church was deeply divided by pride, boasting, and jealousy. In addition, they were tolerating evil within the church, and some refused to accept the resurrection of the dead. Paul writes to scold them, and to urge them to unity and righteousness—through humility, devotion to Christ, and, most of all, Christian love.¹¹⁰ He also writes to answer some questions they had written about, including marriage, food sacrificed to idols, and the roles of men and women in the church.

Paul planned to return to Macedonia and Achaia, in order to collect money for the poor Christians in Judea.¹¹¹ Paul sent Timothy and another Christian, Erastus, ahead to Greece, probably to talk to the churches about Paul's mission, so that all would be ready when he arrived.¹¹² However, Timothy also had another mission—to go to Corinth, to address that church's many problems.¹¹³ Paul may have made a short trip to Corinth himself during this stay in Ephesus, perhaps prompted by a bad

¹⁰⁴ Acts 18:23, 19:8-10

¹⁰⁵ See I Corinthians 16:19, in which Paul sends greetings from Priscilla, Aquila, and "the church that is in their house." Paul's first letter to the Corinthians was almost certainly written from Ephesus. See I Corinthians 16:8-9 and 16:19. The letter must have been written during this third missionary journey, since the content of I Corinthians reveals that Paul has already been to Corinth, and he first went to Corinth near the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-18). Acts does not mention another visit by Paul to Ephesus after the visit discussed in Acts 19. For example, see Acts 20:16-17.

¹⁰⁶ Acts 19:10-12

¹⁰⁷ I Corinthians 15:32; II Corinthians 1:8-9; see also Acts 20:17-19

¹⁰⁸ Acts 19:23-20:1

¹⁰⁹ See I Corinthians 5:9, in which Paul refers to an earlier letter he had written to the Corinthians: "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. . . ."

¹¹⁰ See chapter 13 of I Corinthians, part of which is quoted on page 1.

¹¹¹ Acts 19:21; I Corinthians 16:1-4; II Corinthians 8:1-15; and Romans 15:25-26.

¹¹² Acts 19:22

¹¹³ I Corinthians 4:17, 16:10-11

report from Timothy.¹¹⁴ Upon Paul's return to Ephesus, he dispatched Titus to Corinth with a stern letter.¹¹⁵ That letter may have been I Corinthians, or perhaps another letter which is now lost. When Paul finally left Ephesus for good, he expected to meet Titus in Troas; but Titus was not there, and Paul quickly left for Macedonia, where he encountered more difficulties.¹¹⁶ Fortunately, he also met Titus there, and this time received a good report about the Corinthians.¹¹⁷

While in Macedonia, Paul probably wrote the Second Letter to the Corinthians, sending it to Corinth with Titus and two Christian companions.¹¹⁸ When Paul left Macedonia, he went south to "Greece"—likely referring to Corinth—where he remained for three months.¹¹⁹ Paul is believed to have written the Letter to the Romans during this three-month stop in Corinth.¹²⁰

Of Paul's letters, Romans contains the most complete statement of his theology. Deeply conscious of his own sin¹²¹—Paul once called himself the foremost of all sinners¹²²—he emphasizes in Romans that "all have sinned and fall short of the

¹¹⁴ Acts mentions only two trips by Paul to Corinth: Acts 18:1-18 and Acts 20:2-6 ("Greece"). But II Corinthians tells us there was another. Paul states in that letter that his trip to Corinth to pick up the promised gift for the poor in Judea will be his *third* visit. (See II Corinthians 12:14, and 13:1-2; and regarding the gift to the poor, see II Corinthians 8:1-9:5.) Paul also strongly implies that the second visit was unpleasant (II Corinthians 1:23-2:1, 13:2-3), apparently because the Corinthians were still suspicious of Paul and were allowing themselves to be misled into sin by others (see II Corinthians 11:1-4, 11:19-21, 12:21, 13:2-3).

¹¹⁵ See II Corinthians 2:3-4, 7:8, 7:12.

¹¹⁶ II Corinthians 2:12-13, 7:5

¹¹⁷ II Corinthians 7:6-9, 13-15

¹¹⁸ See Chapters 8 and 9 of II Corinthians. Paul's purpose in writing these chapters is to exhort the Corinthians to follow through on their promise to collect money for the relief of poor Christians in Jerusalem. Paul had already received the Macedonians' contribution for the Judean Christians by this time. See II Corinthians 8:1-5. In II Corinthians 8:6 and 8:16-24, Paul explains that he is sending Titus and two others to oversee the collection of this gift. It makes sense that Paul would have sent the II Corinthians letter with them, since it was intended to explain and facilitate the purpose of their visit.

¹¹⁹ Acts 20:1-3

¹²⁰ Romans 16:23 indicates that Paul was staying with Gaius when he wrote Romans, and I Corinthians 1:14 mentions a Gaius whom Paul baptized in Corinth. Also, Romans 16:23 sends greetings from "Erastus, the city treasurer." In 1929 a 1st century pavement found in Corinth contained this inscription: "Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense." Finally, 2 Timothy 4:20 says "Erastus remained in Corinth."

¹²¹ Ultimately, "sin" means to "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)—in other words, to fall short of what God intended and wants us to be. Of course, we sin when we do what is evil, but we also sin when we simply live our lives the way we want to, doing what we want to do, instead of living unselfishly, as God wants us to.

¹²² 1 Timothy 1:15

glory of God,”¹²³ and that we deserve to be condemned for our sins.¹²⁴ But God loves us too much to let that happen: “But God demonstrates His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹²⁵ Christ’s death in our place satisfied the demands of justice, and reconciled us to God.¹²⁶ Thus, we find salvation and peace with God through His grace, which He gives us as a free gift because of our faith in Christ—and not because of anything we have done to earn it.¹²⁷ We are no longer condemned because of our sins: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”¹²⁸ But this does not mean that we go on sinning as before, for God’s Holy Spirit has freed us from our slavery to sin and now leads us in another direction—away from sin and toward obedience to God through love.¹²⁹

When Paul left Corinth, he went north through Macedonia (due to a Jewish plot against him), boarded a ship in Philippi, and eventually sailed to Caesarea.¹³⁰ While in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus warned Paul that he would be arrested if he returned to Jerusalem.¹³¹ Paul bravely responded, “I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”¹³²

Paul’s Journey to Rome. Of course, in Jerusalem the prophecy came true. After about a week, the Jews seized Paul, beat him, and tried to kill him, but he was rescued and taken into custody by the Romans.¹³³ A Jewish murder plot forced the Roman commander to move Paul to Caesarea—to Felix, the governor.¹³⁴ Paul remained in custody for two years (approximately 56-58 A.D.), awaiting a decision, until Felix was replaced as governor by Portius Festus.¹³⁵

¹²³ Romans 3:23

¹²⁴ Romans 6:21 and 6:23

¹²⁵ Romans 5:8

¹²⁶ In Romans 5:6, Paul says: “For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.” And in Romans 5:10-11, he says: “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.” See also Romans 4:25, in which Paul refers to Jesus as “*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.”

¹²⁷ See, for example, Romans 3:24, 4:1-5, 4:16, 4:22-5:2, 5:9-11.

¹²⁸ Romans 8:1-2

¹²⁹ Romans 8:2-17

¹³⁰ Acts 20:3-21:8

¹³¹ Acts 21:10-11

¹³² Acts 21:13

¹³³ Acts 21:27-36

¹³⁴ Acts 23:12-35; Antonius Felix ruled Palestine from about 52-58 A.D.

¹³⁵ Acts 24:1-27

While Paul was in Roman custody, he had repeated opportunities to tell people about Christ: when he spoke to the people shortly after his arrest;¹³⁶ before the Sanhedrin (the council of Jewish leaders);¹³⁷ to Felix;¹³⁸ and in the presence of Festus and King Agrippa.¹³⁹ Paul always witnessed bravely, boldly, and faithfully. Yet all the while Paul knew that he must go to Rome, for Jesus had told him so in a vision.¹⁴⁰ This journey to Rome finally occurred shortly after Festus arrived. Within about two weeks, Festus heard the case against Paul.¹⁴¹ When Festus asked Paul if he would agree to be tried in Jerusalem, Paul refused and appealed to Caesar.¹⁴² So Festus sent Paul to Rome.¹⁴³

Paul was accompanied on the trip by Luke and a Thessalonian named Aristarchus.¹⁴⁴ They sailed by the islands of Cyprus and Crete, but were blown off course by violent winds and ended up shipwrecked on the island of Malta.¹⁴⁵ God gave Paul a vision that all on board would be saved, though the ship would be lost.¹⁴⁶ And that is exactly what happened.¹⁴⁷

Paul and the other survivors spent about three months on Malta, during which time God performed many miracles of healing through Paul.¹⁴⁸ Then they proceeded on to Rome, where Paul was held in a kind of house arrest for about two years, sharing the Gospel.¹⁴⁹ Paul probably wrote the “prison epistles” (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon) during this imprisonment, although he may have written one or more of them during an earlier imprisonment, such as in Ephesus. Strangely, Acts abruptly ends at this point in Paul’s life—perhaps Luke wrote the book at about this time, or maybe Luke and Paul parted company. However, Paul’s letters provide clues that Paul was eventually freed.

¹³⁶ Acts 21:40-22:21

¹³⁷ Acts 22:30-23:9

¹³⁸ Acts 24:10-21

¹³⁹ Acts 26:1-29. This is Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I and great-grandson of Herod the Great. The Romans allowed him to rule a small area north of Palestine beginning in 53 A.D.

¹⁴⁰ Acts 23:11

¹⁴¹ Acts 25:1-11

¹⁴² Acts 25:9-11

¹⁴³ Acts 25:12

¹⁴⁴ Acts 27:1-2. Aristarchus was a traveling companion of Paul (see Acts 19:29 and 20:4), and is mentioned in Colossians 4:10 as a fellow prisoner with Paul (probably in Rome, or possibly Ephesus). Philemon 24 also mentions Aristarchus.

¹⁴⁵ Acts 27:1-28:1

¹⁴⁶ Acts 27:21-26

¹⁴⁷ Acts 27:41-44

¹⁴⁸ Acts 28:7-11

¹⁴⁹ Acts 28:16-31

After Paul's First Roman Imprisonment. The “pastoral letters” (Titus, 1 Timothy, and 2 Timothy) show that Paul traveled extensively in the eastern Mediterranean sometime after the events described in Acts.¹⁵⁰ He went to Ephesus, leaving Timothy in charge, and then journeyed on to Macedonia, where he probably wrote 1 Timothy. Paul also returned to Crete, and left Titus in charge there,¹⁵¹ before heading to Nicopolis,¹⁵² where he wrote the Letter to Titus.¹⁵³ Near the end of his journeys, Paul went to Troas, where he may have been arrested¹⁵⁴ and again sent to Rome. During this second Roman imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy,¹⁵⁵ which is believed to be the last of Paul's letters. By this time most of Paul's companions had either deserted him or had been sent on missions of their own; only Luke remained with him.¹⁵⁶ Paul saw the time of his own death approaching quickly,¹⁵⁷ although he did not yet believe death was imminent.¹⁵⁸ Paul summed up his life of faithfulness in these words: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.”¹⁵⁹

In his letter to the Romans, Paul expressed a desire to go to Spain,¹⁶⁰ and a strong and unanimous tradition¹⁶¹ says that he did so between his first and second

¹⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 1:3 says that Paul traveled to Macedonia and left Timothy in charge in Ephesus, but Acts never places Timothy in Ephesus while Paul is in Macedonia. Similarly, from Titus 1:5 and 3:12 we know that Paul wrote to Titus from Nicopolis (in Greece), after leaving Titus in charge in Crete. However, Acts does not record a journey of Paul to Crete after his first missionary journey there with Barnabas. Thus, the pastoral letters seem to describe events which occurred after those in Acts.

¹⁵¹ Titus 1:5

¹⁵² In Roman times, Nicopolis was a city in northwest Greece, located near the modern-day Greek town of Preveza.

¹⁵³ Titus 3:12

¹⁵⁴ Paul's arrest in Troas is suggested by 2 Timothy 4:13, in which Paul requests Timothy to bring the cloak and books Paul left in Troas. An unexpected arrest in Troas would explain why Paul was forced to leave these important articles there. Perhaps he was turned in or betrayed by “Alexander the coppersmith,” who “did me much harm.” See 2 Timothy 4:14.

¹⁵⁵ See 2 Timothy 1:8, 1:16-17, 2:9.

¹⁵⁶ 2 Timothy 4:9-14

¹⁵⁷ 2 Timothy 4:6-7

¹⁵⁸ See 2 Timothy 4:9 and 4:21.

¹⁵⁹ 2 Timothy 4:7

¹⁶⁰ Romans 15:22-24

¹⁶¹ The word “tradition” is used to refer to information that comes from sources which were written more than a lifetime after the people and events described, such that the author could not have witnessed the events himself nor had access to the actual witnesses of the events described. In this context, I am referring to writings—primarily Christian writings—of the second and later centuries A.D., such as the anonymous *Acts of St. Thomas* and *The Acts of St. Andrew and St. Bartholomew*, as well as the writings of the early church “fathers,” such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus,

Roman imprisonments. Clement, a disciple of Paul¹⁶² and a 1st century A.D. bishop of Rome, tells us, in his letter to the Church in Corinth (about 97 A.D.), that Paul “had gone to the extremity of the west” before being martyred.¹⁶³ This expression was often used by the Romans to refer to Spain. Jerome¹⁶⁴ says that Paul “was dismissed by Nero,¹⁶⁵ that the Gospel of Christ might be preached also in the West.”¹⁶⁶ John Chrysostom¹⁶⁷ is more explicit: “Paul after his residence in Rome departed to Spain.”¹⁶⁸ Paul’s trip to Spain is also corroborated by this passage from the Muratorian Fragment:¹⁶⁹

The Acts of all the apostles, however, are compiled in only one Book. Luke collected them for the excellent Theophilus because these different events took place in his own presence. These are all he wants to report, as is clearly borne out by his omission of the martyrdom of Peter and by the fact that he does not report anything about the journey of Paul from the City to Spain.¹⁷⁰

Unanimous Christian tradition—and one 1st century source—says that Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome. Clement’s letter to the Corinthians (which is mentioned above) says this: “And after he had been in the extremity of the West, he suffered martyrdom before the sovereigns of mankind; and thus delivered from this

Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Tertullian, and others.

While these individuals had no personal knowledge of first century A.D. events, they lived much closer in time to those events than us, and had access to sources, both written and verbal, which are now unavailable to us. Thus, while a “tradition” is not always reliable, it is not the same as legend or fantasy.

¹⁶² See Philippians 4:3.

¹⁶³ Clement’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*, as quoted in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 282.

¹⁶⁴ Jerome was a scholar, monk, and Bible translator, who lived 342 - 420 A.D.

¹⁶⁵ Nero was the Roman Emperor from 54 to 68 A.D.

¹⁶⁶ From *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, Conybeare and Howson, pp. 679-680, quoting Jerome’s *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, as quoted in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 283.

¹⁶⁷ John Chrysostom was the Bishop of Constantinople, and lived about 345-407 A.D.

¹⁶⁸ From *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, Conybeare and Howson, pp. 679-680, as quoted in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 283.

¹⁶⁹ A Latin fragment, written in about 180 A.D., was found by an Italian archaeologist, Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750), in 1740 A.D. and was named after him. The fragment discusses the then-accepted books of New Testament scriptures, describing who wrote them and, in some cases, how they came to be written.

¹⁷⁰ *Muratorian Canon*, ca. 180 A.D., as quoted in *The Early Christians*, by Eberhard Arnold, p. 166.

world, he went to his holy place, the most brilliant example of steadfastness that we possess.”¹⁷¹ Similarly, Origen,¹⁷² writing in about 220 A.D., says: “Paul suffered martyrdom in Rome under Nero.”¹⁷³ Tertullian¹⁷⁴ wrote in about 200 A.D. that Paul was beheaded at Rome.¹⁷⁵ Eusebius, the church historian,¹⁷⁶ gives this account:

Thus Nero publicly announcing himself as the chief enemy of God, was led on in his fury to slaughter the apostles. Paul is therefore said to have been beheaded in Rome, and Peter to have been crucified under him. And this account is confirmed by the fact that the names of Peter and Paul still remain in the cemeteries of that city even to this day.¹⁷⁷

Jerome says that Paul was beheaded in Nero’s 14th year (67 or 68 A.D.), on the same day that Peter was crucified.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the available evidence strongly indicates that Paul was martyred in Rome, possibly in about 67 or 68 A.D., and probably by beheading.

Sources: (1) *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, by William Steuart McBirnie, Ph.D. (Living Books, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois, 1973)

¹⁷¹ *The Drama of the Lost Disciples*, by George F. Jowett, p. 196, quoting Clement’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*, as quoted in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, pp. 289-290. Here is another translation of this passage (from 1 Clement 5:5-6) from an English translation by J. B. Lightfoot (found at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-lightfoot.html>, part of the web site entitled, “Early Christian Writings,” or *earlychristianwritings.com*):

. . . he [Paul] won the noble renown which was the reward of his faith, having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West; and when he had borne his testimony before the rulers, so he departed from the world and went unto the holy place, having been found a notable pattern of patient endurance.

¹⁷² Origen was a Christian scholar and writer, who lived from about 185 A.D. to about 255 A.D.

¹⁷³ See Durant’s *Caesar and Christ*, p. 591.

¹⁷⁴ Tertullian, a Christian writer, lived about 160 - 230 A.D.

¹⁷⁵ See Durant’s *Caesar and Christ*, p. 591.

¹⁷⁶ Eusebius lived about 260 - 340 A.D.

¹⁷⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, by Eusebius, as quoted in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 69.

¹⁷⁸ From *Life and Epistles of the Apostle Paul*, Conybeare and Howson, pp. 679-680, quoting Jerome’s *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, as quoted in *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 283.

- (2) *The Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Translation*, with annotations, etc. by Charles Caldwell Ryrie, Th.D., Ph.D. (1978).
- (3) *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (1962).
- (4) *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Casarea, in Palestine*, translated from the original by Isaac Boyle (1970, 1972, 1979).
- (5) *The Story of Civilization, Volume III: Caesar and Christ*, by Will Durant (1944).
- (6) *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, contained in *Bible Explorer 3* software.
- (7) “Herod,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (found at www.newadvent.org/cathen/07289c.htm).
- (8) “Biblical Chronology” (found at www.bibarch.com/Chronology/BiblicalChronology.htm)
- (9) 1 Clement, from an English translation by J. B. Lightfoot (found at <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/1clement-lightfoot.html>, at the web site, [earlychristianwritings.com](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com)).