

The Apostle Paul

The apostle Paul was one of the most famous citizens of the Roman Empire and without question one of the most influential individuals in history. He was used by the Lord in his missionary and evangelistic activities to set in motion a great deal of the organization known as the Christian Church, the Body of Christ on earth, to the extent that billions of human beings have been directly or indirectly affected by his ministry. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the foundation documents for the Christian way of life, the Word of God which has changed the lives of millions.

Paul's Education

Paul was educated by his mother until the age of five. From age five to ten he studied with his father in the Hebrew scriptures and traditional writings. At the same time, being a Roman citizen and living in a Greek and Roman environment, he received a thorough education in the Greek language, history, and culture.

He was sent to Jerusalem at about the age of ten to attend the rabbinical school of Gamaliel, who was the son of Simeon the son of Hillel. Gamaliel was a most eminent rabbi who was mentioned both in the Talmud and in the New Testament (ACTS 5:24-40; 22:3). Gamaliel was called Rabban - one of only seven teachers so called. He was a Pharisee, but he rose above party prejudice. He composed a prayer against the Christian "heretics". He lived and died a Jew.

At this time, Herod was dead, and the Romans had complete control of Judea, hence, there was Roman money, language, and culture. The Jews, therefore, were inclined to cling more closely to their religion as the center of unity. [Refer to the topic: JUDEAN HISTORY]

There were two great rabbinical schools, those of Hillel and Schammai. Hillel, the grandfather of Gamaliel, held that tradition was superior to the Law. The school of Schammai despised traditionalists, especially when their teachings clashed with the writings of Moses.

The religious school of Gamaliel (Hillel) was chiefly oral and usually had a prejudice against any book but Scripture. They used a system of

Scriptural exegesis, and Josephus in his writings expressed the wish to have such a power of exegesis. When school was in session, learned men met and discussed scriptures, gave various interpretations, suggested illustrations, and quoted precedents. The students were encouraged to question, doubt, even contradict.

When Paul became a Christian, his very thorough education was enormously helpful. He was able to assimilate Christian doctrines rapidly and relate them accurately to the Scripture teaching he had received. From his education, both from Gamaliel and in the desert from the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul developed a divine viewpoint attitude toward human history.

Paul knew that the existence of God can easily be perceived by anyone, that man can become aware of God, but that many men's deliberate halted this good beginning by immoral activities which accompanied their idolatry. Therefore, Paul had an intense hatred of idolatry of any kind.

Paul's teaching shows that the only reality is God. Idolatry distorts man's conception of the world and external nature. Idolatry is the enemy of mankind.

Paul knew the law of growth of human nature. As a Roman, Tarsian, Hebrew, and culturally Greek, he knew of the many distortions of the life of his society. As a nation becomes unhealthy, development is halted. Societies errors as to the nature of God and the true relation of God to man prevented nations from getting rid of their besetting evil.

The books of Acts is the chief authoritative record for the ministries of Paul and the other apostles. For a brief outline of Paul's ministry, see the CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY. The most thorough, accurate, and interesting secular work on Paul is *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, by Conybeare and Howson.

Paul, The Prisoner for the Gentiles

The Lord made Paul a missionary to the Gentiles, even revealing to him during the period of his arrest in Palestine, and during his subsequent trials before Jewish and Roman authorities, that he

should "be of good cheer, for you must bear witness of Jesus at Rome."

After a considerable stay at Antioch after his second missionary journey, Paul departed and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order to strengthen the disciples (ACTS 18:23). During this time, he also gave directions for the collection for the poor in Jerusalem.

He came to Ephesus, probably in about 53 A.D. He found there twelve disciples of Apollos who had only received John's baptism and were not aware of the Holy Spirit and Church Age mysteries.

He taught three months in the synagogue in Ephesus. In the face of opposition, he took his classes to the school of one, Tyrannus, where he taught daily for two years. Exorcists were converted and books of magic were burned by the new converts. He paid a visit to Corinth, then returned to Ephesus where he wrote 1 Corinthians.

Paul left for Troas and Macedonia because of the danger in Ephesus from the silversmiths and craftsmen who made articles for the worship of Diana. (See Topic: EPHESUS) He sailed to Macedonia to meet Titus, landed at Neapolis and went to Philippi where he was "comforted by Titus." He sent Titus to Corinth with the second Corinthian letter and instructions for completing the collection there for needy Christians.

Paul traveled through Macedonia and finally arrived at Corinth himself, staying there about three months and writing Romans. He took ship for Miletus where he met for a few days with Ephesian elders. He then sailed (island hopping to Coos, Rhodes, and Patara) to Tyre. From Tyre he sailed to Ptolemais and reached Caesarea.

Paul was warned not to visit Jerusalem. He went anyway and was warmly received by the brethren. He had an interview with James and the elders. A charge was brought against him by the Sanhedrin that "he taught all the Jews among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their sons, neither to walk after their customs." [For a discussion of the Sanhedrin, see topic: JEWISH RELIGIOUS SYSTEM]

The Sanhedrin asked Paul to do a public act of the Law in order to prove his faith. There were four men who were to undergo the ritual associated with the Nazarite vow, and Paul was requested to

put himself under that vow and to pay the costs of the other four men. He did so.

After this some Jews from Asia stirred up the people against him, charging him with bringing Greeks into the Temple. A Gentile man from Ephesus named Trophimus was with Paul, and the Jews supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple, which would have been a sacrilege. The mob took Paul to kill him, but soldiers of the Roman garrison appeared. Paul spoke to the mob in his own defense, telling of his mission to the Gentiles. They shouted "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for it is not fit that he should live." (ACTS 22:1-23).

The Roman soldiers took Paul to the governor's castle for interrogation by scourging, at which time Paul claimed his Roman citizenship. The next morning he was taken before the Sanhedrin, but there was no conclusion because of the dissension between the Sadducees and Pharisees. Paul was taken back to the castle for protection, and it was that night that the Lord appeared to Paul telling him to "be of good cheer." (ACTS 23:6-10)

There arose a conspiracy among forty Jews to assassinate Paul, but Paul's nephew brought him a warning of the plot. The Romans decided to send him to Caesarea to Felix, the procurator (governor) of Judea (ACTS 22:21ff). Before Felix, Paul was merely asked from province he had come. Five days later, the high priest Ananias and some of the Sanhedrin appeared, with Tertullus as their advocate (ACTS 24:1-9). They made charges, which Paul denied. Felix delayed the proceeding further until Claudias Lysias, the captain of the Roman troops in Jerusalem, could come to give evidence.

After a few days, Felix' wife, Drusilla, a Jewess, wanted to see and hear Paul. Paul appeared and gave the gospel to Felix and Drusilla. Felix trembled but was unrepentant. He wanted a bribe from Paul so did not acquit him. (Drusilla died in the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, AD 79.)

Felix kept Paul a prisoner in Caesarea (under loose house arrest) for two years until the arrival of Festus, the new governor. Festus wanted Paul taken back to Jerusalem, but Paul was aware of the danger there and uttered the Latin word *Caesarem apello!* -- "I appeal to Caesar!" Festus was thus obliged to make arrangements for Paul to travel to Rome under escort.

About this time, King Agrippa II, with his sister, Berenice, came to visit Festus, the new governor. Festus pleaded ignorance of Jewish law, so Paul made his testimony before Agrippa, with the greatest of pomp and ceremony. This episode was one of the greatest defenses of the gospel ever recorded. Agrippa said, "Almost you persuade me ..."

Festus decided then that Paul was innocent or wrongdoing, and he would have let him go free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

Paul's Voyage to Rome

Paul's escort on the trip to Rome was a platoon of Roman soldiers under Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Cohort. They sailed in a coasting vessel to Adramyttium and Sidon. Paul was given liberty. The next port was Myra, from which they took ship to Italy.

They sailed to Crete, stayed at the port of Fair Havens for one month, sailed for Phoenix, and were driven on the rocks at Malta where they stayed for three months. From Malta they sailed in the vessel "Castor and Pollux" to Syracuse (Sicily) and Rhegium, the port city of the Italian province of Puteoli. From there they went to Rome on the Appian Way.

In Rome Paul dwelled in his own hired house under the supervision of a Prefect of the Praetorian Guard. He was permitted to hold meetings, and he met with Jewish elders, winning some of them to Christ. This period lasted two years, during which he wrote Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians.

He was acquitted by Nero, so he was free to travel and did so. His visits were to Crete and to Asia Minor; and it is widely thought that he traveled in Spain on a missionary journey. He is thought to have been arrested again in Ephesus and taken again to Rome from there, but this time treated as a malefactor, with his friends deserting him (except for Luke and Onesiphorus). There was persecution in Rome at this time, and a campaign of terror by Nero against the Christians. Paul was condemned and executed in Rome.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day."

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