

St. Paul's Missionary Journeys

On their return to Antioch Paul and Barnabas bring John Mark with them and are sent on a missionary journey (Paul's **first Journey**, Acts 13 and 14). John leaves them to return to Jerusalem. This journey took place **c.46-49AD**.



After finishing their journey, Paul and Barnabas are despatched from Antioch to Jerusalem (Acts 15, the **Jerusalem Council of 49AD**) to resolve the all-important conflict over whether gentile converts needed to be circumcised and follow Jewish dietary laws.

Soon after, Paul suggest to Barnabas that they revisit the places of their first journey. However, they have a disagreement because Paul does not wish to take John Mark with them, and Paul undertakes his **second missionary journey** with Silas (Acts 15-18) **c.50-52AD**. This was the most significant of the journeys because Paul, influenced by a dream (Acts 16) began to preach in mainland Europe, in Greece.

Paul's **third journey** (Acts 18-20) took place **c.54-58AD**.

St. Paul's Journey to Rome and his Death

Instead of returning to Antioch Paul goes to Jerusalem. There he is rescued from a Jewish mob by the Romans who are concerned that he is a Roman citizen, but they take him before the Sanhedrin. There Paul causes consternation by revealing he is a Pharisee. That night he receives a vision that he is to go to witness at Rome. Following a plot to kill him, Paul is sent to the Roman Governor Felix at Caesarea. After **two years** of indecision by Felix, Paul exercises his right before the new Governor, Festus, for trial at Rome. After an eventful voyage and shipwreck on Malta, Paul finally arrives at Rome **c.61AD**.

Acts 28 states he spent two years in his own lodgings there, but says no more about him. Clement of Rome states Paul made a journey west and he may have visited Spain (as he intended Rm. 12) while 2 Timothy implies another journey to the eastern churches where he may have been re-arrested. According to Eusebius, the early Church historian, Paul was executed by Nero in Rome **c.67AD**

St. Paul

1. A Short Biography of St. Paul



Questions for Reflection

1. Why is St. Paul's Damascus conversion so plausible?
2. What can we learn from St. Paul's and Barnabas' disagreement over John Mark?
3. Why are the Jews so hostile to Paul?

The Early Life of St. Paul

St. Paul himself tells us (Acts 22) that he was born in Tarsus in the south-east part of modern Turkey called Cilicia to a Jewish family of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11) and, important for Paul later in his life, born a Roman citizen (Acts 22). Knowing that he was present as a young man when St. Stephen was killed (Acts 7 and 22), and assuming this was c.34AD, then we may give a tentative date for his birth c.10AD. His Jewish name was Saul although, as was the normal practice for Jews in the Graeco-Roman world, he was also known as Paul. He is known as Saul in Acts until the confrontation with the magician Elymas in Cyprus (Acts 13), after which he is addressed as Paul.



Paul's family seem to have come to Jerusalem when he was a young boy, as he himself describes how he was brought up in the city (Acts 22 and 26) and it is also noted in Acts 23 that he had a sister who lived there. He was educated as a scribe of the Mosaic Law under the tutelage of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22) and became a strict Pharisee (Acts 23 and Philippians 3). Paul was a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18) and he must have learned this profession in parallel with his training in the Law, as was the custom.



Although the account of St. Stephen's stoning gives the impression that Paul (Saul) only had an indirect role 'the witnesses put their clothes at the feet of a young man, called Saul' it is clear that he was, in fact, a driving force behind the subsequent persecution. This is made clear both in Acts (ch.8 & 9) and in the words of St. Paul himself (Galatians 1 & 1 Cor.15). It was in pursuit of this persecution, on his way to Damascus, when he received his famous revelation from Jesus that led to his conversion c.36AD (Acts 9, 22 and 26).

The Damascus Experience

The first two accounts of St. Paul's conversion in Acts are very similar with Jesus telling Paul that his mission will be explained to him in Damascus. There, it is Ananias who tells Paul he has been called to **preach to the gentiles**. However, in the third account (Acts 26) Paul

describes how Jesus himself gives him his mission to different nations, couched in OT terms incorporating elements from Jeremiah and the first Suffering Servant song. Interestingly it also implies subsequent visions that are to be made to Paul, and this is in accord with what Paul has already described (Acts 22) happened to him later on his return to Jerusalem.



It is clear that these visions had a profound effect on Paul. Through them he would claim to be an apostle (1 Cor.9 and 15), one who had been with Jesus, although he also thought of himself as the least of the apostles. Through the visions he could claim (Galatians 1) that he received the Gospel not from any human messenger but through Jesus himself. The subsequent life and teaching of St. Paul can not be understood properly without constantly bearing in mind the Damascus vision and its stupendous effect on Paul.

St. Paul before his Journeys

After his conversion, Acts gives the impression that Paul immediately preached in Damascus about Jesus as the Son of God, earned the wrath of the Jewish leadership, and had to escape from the city by being let down over the walls in a basket. However, in his own account (Galatians 1) Paul makes it clear that after his conversion he spent **several years in 'Arabia'** (the desert region of south Palestine) before returning to Damascus. It is then that the incidents given in Acts occurs. After his escape from Damascus, Paul visits Jerusalem where, with the help of Barnabas, he gains the confidence of the Christians there. However, his preaching again led to threats against him by the Hellenist Jews (those Jews who originated from outside Palestine but had their own synagogues in Jerusalem) and he is forced to flee to Tarsus. In Paul's own account in Galatians, he states that in Jerusalem he met Cephas (Peter) staying with him for 15 days, and James 'the Lord's brother', but no other apostle. Paul is brought back from Tarsus by Barnabas (Acts 11) to help him **preach at Antioch**. He works for a year there before being sent with Barnabas to the Jerusalem Church to bring them financial support during a famine.