

The Story (26) – Paul's Ministry

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I. Introduction

A. Last week we did a flyover of the first 12 chapters of Acts, skipping the conversion of Saul in chapter 9. Saul is, of course, better known as Paul; Saul being his Jewish name and Paul being the Greek equivalent that he would have commonly used in the Greco-Roman world of his day. Luke refers to him only as Saul prior to his conversion in Acts 9 and then *usually* refers to him as Paul, but there are exceptions in Acts 9 through 13. Acts 13:9 states, "But Saul, who was also called Paul." Though many think God changed Saul's name to Paul at his conversion that does not appear to be the case.

B. Paul was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a Roman citizen. He was a Pharisee and a scholar of Judaism, having been a student of the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel. You will recall that he approved of the stoning of Stephen, and in the aftermath of that murder, aggressively threw Christian men and women into jail. Paul was so strongly opposed to the Christian faith that he got permission to go to the synagogues in Damascus to drag back to Jerusalem any who were disciples of Christ. But the Lord had something else in mind.

C. As Paul was on the way to Damascus, the resurrected Lord Jesus appeared to him. Paul was told to go into Damascus where he would be told all that he must do. Having been blinded, Paul was led by the hand into Damascus and there spent three days fasting and praying to God. God gave him a vision that Ananias would come to him, and when Ananias arrived, he told Paul that God had chosen him to be a witness to the world for Jesus Christ. Ananias said to him, "And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name." And Paul did just that. His conversion was probably around A.D. 33.

D. From Damascus, Paul went into Arabia, meaning Nabataea (the area next to Damascus), and then returned to Damascus where he confounded the Jews "by proving that Jesus was the Christ" (Acts 9:22). The Jews plotted to kill him, and around A.D. 36 he escaped from the city by being lowered down the city wall in a basket.

E. Paul went to Jerusalem for fifteen days, during which time he saw Peter and James, the Lord's brother. His stay was so short because he argued with the Greek-speaking Jews, the same crew that was behind Stephen's stoning, and was sent away to Tarsus by the brothers before he was killed.

F. We saw last week that with the stoning of Stephen, which occurred prior to Paul's conversion, a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. As a result, the

disciples moved into Judea and Samaria. Some years later, probably around A.D. 40, God in Acts 10 sent Peter to convert the Gentiles at Cornelius's house. A large number of Gentiles converted in Antioch, and when the church in Jerusalem heard about it they sent Barnabas there. This is probably around A.D. 44, some ten years or eleven after Paul's conversion.

G. The church in Antioch grew, and in the next year or two (45/46), Barnabas found Paul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch. Paul had no doubt been preaching in Tarsus and Cilicia, but we have no details about this 8 to 10 year period of his life.

H. The Christians in Antioch decided to send financial support to the saints in Judea for a prophesied coming famine, and they sent Barnabas and Paul to deliver it to the elders. This was around A.D. 47. Paul brought Titus along, and he took the occasion privately to present the gospel he preached to those who seemed to be pillars, which included James, Peter, and John (Gal. 2:1-10). They added nothing to Paul's message and gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. Titus was not compelled to be circumcised even though he was a Greek convert.

I. Acts 12 ends with Barnabas and Paul returning to Antioch from Jerusalem after having delivered the aid. They brought with them Barnabas's cousin John, who was also named Mark. He will in later years compose the Gospel of Mark.

II. First Missionary Journey

A. At Antioch, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to go on a missionary trip, and the church there sent them off. This is probably in 47/48. John Mark came along to assist them. They first went to the island of Cyprus. They preached the word of God in the synagogues at Salamis and throughout the island, coming finally to the city of Paphos. There they were preaching to the proconsul, a man named Sergius Paulus, and the Jewish magician and false prophet, a man named Elymas, sought to prevent Sergius Paulus from accepting what they were saying. The Lord, as announced by Paul, blinded Elymas for a period of time, and Sergius believed.

B. The team sailed to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem.

C. Paul and Barnabas continued on to Antioch in Pisidia. (The southern part of the Roman province of Galatia included the Phrygian cities of Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and the Lycaonion cities of Lystra and Derbe.) Their message generated a great deal of interest, but the Jewish leaders began arguing against them and speaking abusively. Paul and Barnabas said they were turning to the Gentiles, and many of them believed their message. The Jewish leaders stirred up persecution and drove Paul and Barnabas out of their district, but the two "shook the dust from their feet against them," a symbol of abandoning them to their own hardness of heart, and went to Iconium.

D. Both Jews and Greeks in Iconium believed, but unbelieving Jews stirred up hostility toward all the believers. They stayed there a good while, and God worked many miracles through them, but the city was divided. When Paul and Barnabas learned of a plot to stone them, they fled to Lystra.

E. At Lystra, God through Paul healed a man who had been crippled from birth. The people claimed they were gods and wanted to offer sacrifices to them, but they said they were mere humans and that this was not about them but about the one true God to whom they should turn. Jews came from Antioch and Iconium to oppose the missionaries and succeeded in winning the crowd. Paul was stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead; but God had mercy on him, and the next day he and Barnabas went to Derbe. It was probably during this trip to Lystra that Timothy's mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), and his grandmother Lois (Acts 16:2; 2 Tim. 1:5) became Christians.

F. In Derbe, Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel and made many disciples. They then backtracked through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the saints and encouraging them to continue in the faith. They appointed elders for them in every church and told them "that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." The point being that the road of faith in Christ is not an easy one as we live awaiting his return, the consummation of the kingdom.

G. They went back to Perga, spoke the word, and then went down to Attalia, from where they sailed back to Antioch, arriving there probably in A.D. 48. They reported to the church all that God had done and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles, and they remained in Antioch "no little time."

III. Jerusalem Council

A. It may have been during this time, around 48/49, when Peter came to Antioch and Paul opposed him to his face for pulling back from the Gentiles under the influence of certain men from Jerusalem (Gal. 2:11-16). But it was certainly during this time that certain men came from Judea teaching that one must be circumcised, must become a Jew, to be saved. Paul and Barnabas argued strongly against them. It was also somewhere around this time that Paul wrote Galatians to the churches he had visited on his missionary journey. In that letter he combats the inroads that had been made in those churches by Judaizers, those who taught that Gentiles must become Jews to be saved. Paul is adamant in Galatians that their doctrine is a destructive heresy.

B. Paul, Barnabas, and some others were sent from Antioch to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to address this dispute about God's will regarding Gentile salvation. This is the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. They agreed, *by the Holy Spirit* (15:28), that Gentiles did not need to become Jews but could be saved as Gentiles, and then sent that joyful news in a letter to the church in Antioch delivered by Barsabbas and Silas, two leading Christian men. Having returned to Antioch with Barsabbas and Silas, Paul and Barnabas stayed there teaching and preaching.

IV. Second Missionary Journey

A. At the end of Acts 15, Paul tells Barnabas they should visit the churches they had planted, but they went separate ways because they could not agree on whether John Mark should accompany them. Barnabas and Mark went to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and headed out through Syria and into Cilicia strengthening the churches that had been planted in those regions, during Paul's years in Tarsus and/or as the gospel had spread out from the church in Antioch.

B. They went to Derbe and then to Lystra, Timothy's town. This is around A.D. 49/50. Timothy was a Christian and had a good reputation among the brothers in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-2). He had presumably been taught by his mother and the church elders in Lystra. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him (Acts 16:3), and it was probably at that time that Timothy received a spiritual gift (a gracious endowment) for ministry, the giving of which was accompanied by the laying on of hands (by the elders and Paul) and by prophetic recognition of the gift (1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5). Paul had Timothy circumcised simply as a matter of evangelistic expediency, and then Timothy accompanied Paul and Silas.

C. The Holy Spirit forbid them from preaching in Asia and Bithynia – why we are not told – so they pushed on to Troas. This is when Paul receives the vision of a Macedonian man urging them to come to Macedonia to help them. So they promptly sailed from Troas to Samothrace and then to Neapolis and then traveled over land to the leading city of Philippi.

1. In Philippi, Lydia, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Thyatira, is converted. Paul casts out the spirit in a fortune-telling slave girl, which caused her owners to bring Paul and Silas before the authorities on charges of disturbing the city and practicing unlawful things. They were beaten and thrown into prison with their feet fastened in stocks.

2. That night, as Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns to God, there was a great earthquake and the prison doors flung open and the prisoners' bonds came loose. The jailer was ready to kill himself, but Paul told him not to do it, as all the prisoners were present. This led to this man and his household being baptized into Christ.

3. The next day the authorities sent word that Paul and Silas could leave, but Paul insisted that they come and escort them out personally because, since they were Roman citizens, the beating they had been given was illegal. The officials were afraid and complied. Paul and Silas then visited Lydia and departed.

D. They went through Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica. Paul *reasoned* with the Jews from the Scriptures, *explaining* and *proving* that it was necessary for Christ to suffer and rise from the dead. He declared to them that Jesus is the Christ. Some Jews were persuaded, as were many Greek converts to Judaism and some leading women. The Jews again stirred up hostility against them, and the brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. It is unclear precisely how long they spent in Thessalonica. The fact Paul worked at his trade while there

(1 Thess. 2:7-9) and received aid from the Philippians (Phil. 4:16; perhaps more than once) suggests he probably was there longer than a few weeks, but it was almost certainly not longer than a couple of months.

E. The people in Berea responded favorably to the word of God, but then the Jews from Thessalonica went there stirring up more hostility. Paul left Berea under duress and headed for Athens, but he left Silas and Timothy behind (Acts 17:14-15), presumably to instruct the new converts in their faith. Paul sent word back for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

F. While in Athens, Paul engaged the philosophers and called them to repent in light of the fact the one true God has set a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by the man he has appointed, the assurance of which is in the fact he raised that man from the dead. Some mocked but some were interested; others within the city joined him and believed.

G. It seems that Silas and Timothy (or maybe just Timothy) joined Paul in Athens and then Timothy was dispatched to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the saints in the midst of their persecution (1 Thess. 3:1-3). Silas presumably was sent somewhere else in Macedonia (or remained in Berea), and then Paul left Athens for Corinth (Acts 18:1), where Silas and Timothy later joined him (Acts 18:5). The three of them are said to have preached Christ among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:9).

H. Paul's condition when he arrived in Corinth is reflected in 1 Cor. 2:3 where he says, "I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling." Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, a Jewish-Christian couple that had been expelled from Rome under the edict of Emperor Claudius. He stayed in Corinth over one and a half years (Acts 18:18:11, 18), and it is from there that 1 & 2 Thessalonians were written. The Jews dragged Paul before the proconsul Gallio and charged Paul with persuading people to worship God contrary to the law, but Gallio refused to entertain what he saw as a religious dispute. The Jews then beat Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue who had become a Christian.

I. Paul stayed in Corinth a good while longer and then headed back to Antioch. Priscilla and Aquila accompanied him to Ephesus, where Paul made only a brief stop, promising to return if it is God's will. He did, however, go to the synagogue and reason with the Jews. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and sailed to Caesarea. He then went up and greeted the church in Jerusalem and returned to Antioch. This is now probably A.D. 51/52. It was not long before he headed out again on his third missionary journey, which is where we will pick up in the next class.