

The Life of Paul

Paul was one of the leaders of the first generation of Christians, often considered to be the most important person after Jesus in the history of Christianity.

Paul was from a devout Jewish family. He was a tent maker and leather craftsman. He is described in other texts as "*a man of small stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked*".

He was originally called Saul, and he was a Roman citizen. After being educated in Jerusalem he became a Pharisee, and participated in the persecution of followers of Jesus. He was well known by the Jewish community for this persecution, which was often quite brutal.

In the Book of Acts, we learn that Saul was travelling from Jerusalem to Damascus in order to arrest some followers of Jesus, when the risen Jesus appeared in front of him in a great bright light. He was struck blind.

He was blinded for three days and had to be led into Damascus by hand. During these three days, Saul took no food or water and spent his time in prayer to God.

Saul's conversion happened at about 31–36 AD by his reference to it in one of his letters. In Galatians 1:16, Saul, now taking the name Paul, writes that God "*was pleased to reveal his son to me.*"

Read [Acts 9:1-19](#)

After his sight was restored by Ananias, Paul began to preach that Jesus of Nazareth was the Jewish Messiah and the Son of God. Immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "*He is the Son of God.*" Everyone who heard him was amazed. They wondered if he would continue persecuting believers. But Paul confused the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving by his preaching that Jesus was the Christ.

Paul's authentic letters are roughly dated to the mid-1st century. He became a Christian apostle, although he was not one of the twelve. He founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe, from the mid thirties to the mid fifties AD

Fourteen of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament have traditionally

been attributed to Paul. Paul's influence on Christian thought and practice has been profound. His letters have been characterized as being the most influential books of the New Testament after the Gospels of Matthew and John.

Paul's missionary style was to put people at their ease and to approach them with his message in a language and style to which they could relate.

After his conversion, Paul went to Damascus. Paul says that it was there that he barely escaped death. Paul also says that he then went first to Arabia, and then came back to Damascus. Paul's trip to Arabia is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. He describes in Galatians how three years after his conversion he went to Jerusalem. There he met James, staying with Peter for two weeks.

In Galatians Paul states that fourteen years after his conversion he went again to Jerusalem. It isn't known what happened during this time, although both Acts and Galatians provide a few details. At the end of this time Barnabas went to find Paul and brought him to Antioch.

The Christian community at Antioch had been established by Jews who had been living in Jerusalem. They played an important role in reaching the Gentile, Greek audience. From Antioch Paul's mission to the Gentiles started, which would 'fundamentally change the character of the early Christian movement', eventually turning it into a new, non-Jewish religion.

When a famine occurred in Judea around 45 AD, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to deliver financial support from the Antioch community. According to Acts, Antioch had become another center for Christians following the dispersion of the believers after the [death of Stephen](#). It was in Antioch that the followers of Jesus were first called "Christians".

From Antioch, Paul started to travel more widely. The Book of Acts arranges Paul's travels into three separate journeys.

The first journey took Barnabas and Paul from Antioch to Cyprus, and then into southern Asia Minor, finally returning to Antioch. In Cyprus, Paul rebuked and blinded Elymas the magician who was criticizing their teachings.

Antioch was a major Christian base for Paul's early missionary activities, and he remained there for a long time with the disciples at the conclusion of his first journey.

Paul left on his second missionary journey from Jerusalem in the year 49. Travelling around the Mediterranean Sea, Paul and Barnabas stopped in Antioch where they had an argument about taking John Mark with them on their trips. The book of Acts said that John Mark had left them in a previous trip and gone home. Unable to resolve their dispute, Paul and Barnabas decided to go in different directions; Barnabas took John Mark with him, while Silas joined Paul.

Paul and Silas initially visited Tarsus, which was Paul's birthplace. Derbe and Lystra. They met Timothy and decided to take him with them. Paul and his companions, Silas and Timothy, had plans to journey to the southwest part of Asia Minor to preach the gospel, but during the night, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia standing and begging him to go to Macedonia to help them. After seeing the vision, Paul and his companions left for Macedonia to preach the gospel to them.

The Church kept growing, adding believers, and strengthening in faith.

In Philippi, Paul cast a spirit out of a servant girl, whose masters were 'then unhappy about the loss of income her soothsaying provided'. They seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities and both were put in jail. After a miraculous earthquake, the gates of the prison fell open and Paul and Silas could have escaped, but remained; this led to the conversion of the jailor. They continued traveling, going by Berea and then to Athens in Greece, where Paul preached to the Jews and God-fearing Greeks. Paul continued from Athens to Corinth.

Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth. There he met Priscilla and Aquila, who became faithful believers and helped Paul through his other missionary journeys. The couple followed Paul and his companions to Ephesus, and stayed there to start one of the strongest and most faithful churches at that time.

In the year 52, leaving Corinth, the missionaries sailed to Ephesus and then Paul alone went on to Caesarea to greet the Church there. He then went north to Antioch, where he stayed for some time, perhaps about a year, before leaving again on a third missionary journey.

Paul began his third missionary journey by traveling all around the region of Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen and teach the believers. Paul then went back to Ephesus, which had become an important center of early Christianity, and stayed there for almost three years, probably working as a tentmaker. He is claimed to have performed numerous miracles, healing people and casting out demons, and he apparently also organized missionary activities in other regions.

Paul went through Macedonia into Achaëa and stayed in Greece, probably Corinth, for three months during 56–57 AD. Paul dictated his letter to the Romans during this period. He then got ready to continue on to Syria, but he changed his mind and went back through Macedonia because of some Jews who had threatened him. Eventually he arrived in Jerusalem.

Paul also made a trip to both Rome and Spain, preaching in both places.

Paul got back to Jerusalem for his fifth and final visit with a collection of money for the local Christians. The Book of Acts reports that he initially was warmly received. However, Acts goes on to tell us how Paul was warned by James and the elders that he was getting a reputation for speaking against the laws of Moses, and he was accused of defiling the temple by bringing gentiles into it. He was seized and dragged out of the temple by an angry mob. When the tribune heard of the uproar, he and some centurions and soldiers rushed to the area. Unable to determine his identity and the cause of the uproar, they placed him in chains.

He was about to be taken into the barracks when he asked to speak to the people. He was given permission by the Romans and proceeded to tell his story. After a while, the crowd responded, and shouted that he should not be allowed to live. The tribune ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks and questioned by flogging. Paul asserted his Roman citizenship, which would prevent his flogging. The tribune wanted to find out what Paul was being accused of by the Jews. The next day he released him, but Paul's speaking caused a disagreement between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. When this threatened to turn violent, the tribune ordered his soldiers to take Paul by force and return him to the barracks.

When a plot to kill him was discovered, Paul was taken to Caesarea, where the governor ordered that he be kept under guard in Herod's headquarters. He was held there for two years.

Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to be tried in Rome. Paul and his companions sailed for Rome, where Paul was to stand trial for his alleged crimes. He was shipwrecked in Malta along the way, but eventually made it to Rome in 60 AD.

There he spent two years under house arrest, awaiting trial. He spent the time preaching about Jesus to the Christians there, and others.

Paul's death apparently occurred after the Great Fire of Rome in year 64, but before the last year of Nero's reign in year 68. Peter and Paul may have been killed at the same time. Paul was beheaded like John the Baptist.