

SAUL
OF
TARSUS
THE TWELFTH APOSTLE

Dr. David Newton

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*“For I am the least of the Apostles, and
not fit to be called an Apostle,
because I persecuted the church.”*

1st Corinthians 15:9

*“For this I was appointed a preacher
and Apostle, as a teacher of the Gentiles
in faith and truth.”*

1st Timothy 2:7

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Many thanks always to my family - whom I appreciate so much for all the love and support they give as I continue to research, write, and teach on important topics directly from God's Word.

PREFACE

The life of the Apostle Paul is one of the most fascinating biographies in the world. A devout Pharisee in the cosmopolitan Roman city of Tarsus takes his son Saul to Jerusalem where he studies to also become a Pharisee through the mentoring of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. Saul excels onto a fast-track to become a prominent leader of Judaism, as [by his own admission] he was raised in the *strictest* manner of Jewish Law in the Torah. He was so zealous for religious traditions that he actively persecuted believers in Jesus, whom he regarded as a threat to everything he held dear. But the Lord personally intervened, as He called and equipped Saul to be His chosen twelfth Apostle [replacing Judas Iscariot] alongside Simon-Peter, Andrew, James and John, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, James bar-Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the zealot [Canaanite], and Bartholomew. This book draws on Luke's *Acts Of The Apostles*, the Gospels, Saul's epistles, many early church historians who wrote about his ministry, and several Biblical archaeology/world history resources and commentaries. The timeline presented all through the book incorporates a range of historical bases for Rome's 1st Century events, as well as the broader context of the timing for the birth, ministry, and crucifixion-resurrection of Jesus in this same window of ancient history. The conclusion of all this research-content is that Paul is clearly the twelfth Apostle - chosen directly by Jesus, just like the other eleven. The impact of Saul's ministry continues to be one of the most important contributions to Christianity worldwide, as his life and legacy inspire others to hear God's calling and respond in faith.

INTRODUCTION

This book has been a long time coming, and definitely one of my top three “favorite topics” over the last 25 years. The life of Saul of Tarsus, who then became known as *Paulos* [his Greek name] throughout the early church, is absolutely fascinating. I have taught on each of his New Testament letters, and remain thoroughly convinced that includes his anonymous treatise to his beloved nation of Israel, alongside letters to the churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica – as well as to people like Titus, Philemon, and the young Pastor Timothy. These are replete with an incredibly wide range of Christian doctrine for both individuals and church life. In addition, Luke [the beloved physician] has multiple accounts of Paul’s travels and experiences throughout his *Acts Of The Apostles*, penned for his Greek colleague Theophilus. Together these provide quite a rich and exciting database from which to formulate the timeline and events for Paul’s truly exceptional life and legacy as the twelfth Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps most important of all the topics covered in this book, the sequence of my narrative will show that Paul was clearly chosen directly by Jesus the Christ as His twelfth Apostle, in the same way that Jesus personally chose and called the other eleven Apostles: Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee, Philip, Thomas, the gospel writer Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon, and Bartholomew. Right from the start, I want my readers to be aware that there are only twelve Apostles [with a capital “A”] noted in the

biblical record, and these are confirmed specifically in the Revelation [21:12-14] given by Jesus to John bar-Zebedee on the Mediterranean island of Patmos, as he saw: *"The New Jerusalem had a great and high wall with twelve gates - at each gate was an angel with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel written on them - with three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three gates on the west, and the wall of the New Jerusalem had **twelve foundation stones**, and on them were the names of the **twelve Apostles of the Lamb**".* The doctrine and impacts of this are covered in detail in the Epilogue.

However, to start us off, Chapter One will examine the early years in the life of Saul from Tarsus, including his family's move to Jerusalem so he could complete a very formal education in Pharisaical studies under the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel. It will also present a Biblically-based hypothesis about the thinking of a young zealot for all things Judaic, even as he would later in life fully recognize and come to grips with the predicament concerning the Lord Jesus, that he was *"one born out of due season"* [1st Corinthians 15:8]. This will then segue directly into Chapter Two and draw inferences from the Biblical record about Saul's interests and passionate pursuits in the months and years directly after the resurrection of Jesus on the Feast of First Fruits in 32 AD.

Chapter Three will delve deeply into the incredibly provocative details of Saul's experiences heading into [and during his stay in] Damascus, as God supernaturally called and disciplined him to be His twelfth Apostle. The prospects and evidence for his *"Damascus Download"* are quite intriguing and provocative to explore as he perhaps reflects back on them in his second letter to the Corinthians. Chapter Four examines his years immediately after Jesus personally called him, during which he was in Arabia, Tarsus, and then finally Jerusalem - all part of God's

preparing Paul for an extraordinary ministry to Gentiles in the Roman Empire. Chapter Five traces the timeline and events of his first mission trip. Chapter Six does the same for a second mission trip, while Chapter Seven chronicles his third mission outreach. Chapter Eight follows the activities and timing leading up to his arrest in Jerusalem in 57 AD - and the attempted trial before he exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case directly to Caesar, so he could be heard and judged in Rome by the Emperor himself.

Chapter Nine reviews how Paul ultimately got to Rome – both the spiritual circumstances and events that led to him being put on that initial ship, and the journey itself past Cyprus, to Asia Minor, to Crete, then being shipwrecked onto Malta, and the final legs to Sicily, the tip of the Italian boot, and then to Rome. Chapter Ten provides a detailed examination of Paul's letters and their incredible alignment as the foundations of sound Christian doctrine that continues through today. But even as the Lord greatly used Paul to help expand His 1st Century church, the matter of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" [2nd Corinthians 12:7] will also be looked at in very specific detail in Chapter Eleven.

Chapter Twelve provides a detailed overview of the evidence that Paul is in fact the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews – and that this incredibly deep apologetic treatise about how Jesus the Mashiach literally fulfilled every key aspect of the Law of Moses in God's initial covenant with Israel – has Paul's fingerprints all over it. So while he was called by Yahweh to preach to the Gentiles as his primary ministry, Paul had an opportunity to pen an exquisite and elegant theological review covering God's plan of salvation, while drawing on all the wisdom and knowledge of being a "Hebrew among Hebrews" [Philippians 3:5].

The Epilogue wraps up the book's premise that he is in fact the twelfth Apostle of the New Testament church, called personally by Jesus [just like the other eleven Apostles], and then supernaturally gifted and equipped by the Holy Spirit for ministry to the Gentiles.

The final page includes good Resources to learn more about the Apostle Paul and his incredible place in the life of the Christian church. So while this twelfth Apostle was in fact one born "out of due season", and was not present with Jesus for nearly three years of ministry, his lasting contribution to the growth of the early church, and his Spirit-led ability to profoundly articulate Christian doctrine throughout his letters positions him as one of the most [if not *the most*] important Apostle to be called and used mightily by God to bring the Gospel to the world.

My intention is not to venerate the man as some kind of super-human worthy of man's adoration. Instead, reviewing Paul's life is similar to any biography of one who inspires greater faith in God and a commitment to actions that live out faith with vision and intention to impact others. Several sections will show him to be a very typical [regular] person like we all are, who struggled with circumstances, people, and spiritual issues. My intention was to check everything within the full counsel of God's Word, while examining interesting insights to encourage my readers in their faith and service to the Lord. May God richly bless your time reading this book, and hopefully you will come to a greater understanding of Saul of Tarsus, the twelfth Apostle of Jesus Christ.

- Dr. Dave Newton
November 2021
Santa Barbara, California

CHAPTER ONE

Saul of Tarsus: The Early Years

Saul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, on the Mediterranean seacoast of Asia Minor - modern day Turkey.

Britannica.com

Studying the life of Saul from Tarsus, born in the south-facing seaport on the coast of Asia Minor [modern day Turkey], is both humbling and inspiring. The Bible does not have an entire book or dozens of chapters devoted to a timeline for Saul's early years – but there are several places in the Biblical accounts with insights to his life up through the time of the resurrection of Jesus, and the launch of the church after Jesus ascended back to God the Father. Several extra-Biblical sources also provide perspective and commentary on what life was like for any young Jewish teenager who embarked on a formal education studying the Torah with a master-teacher rabbi in the same manner as Saul. The upside opportunities in Judaism were great, but God had another plan.

SAUL'S HOMETOWN OF TARSUS

The Bible is clear that Saul was born in the city of Tarsus, which is in the Cilicia region [meaning “flat coastal plain”] of southeast Asia Minor. It was a major seaport for trade throughout the Mediterranean Sea, with easy shipping access to west-facing ports along the coast of Judea. The range of Tarsus Mountains rose west of the city. Saul was born free as a Roman citizen [Acts 22:28 says he did not purchase his citizenship].



Notice above how the Romans had several provinces in Asia Minor in the 1st Century AD, including Galatia, Cappadocia, and Pamphylia. Tarsus had the reputation as “the little Athens for learning”, considered only second to the Greek capital for attracting scholars and all types of philosophers and thinkers. Before Paul departed for Jerusalem and his graduate education with Gamaliel, he would have been well-versed in Greek poetry and philosophy, which he alludes to [Acts 17:28-29] when he sits on the Areopagus interacting with Stoics and Epicureans, and

comments, "For in God we live and move and exist - even as the Greek poets have written: 'Yes *we also are divine children*' and so being the children of God we should not think of the Divine Nature as gold, silver, or stone in images formed by the art and thought of man". He was differentiating Greco-worldly philosophy that all men are children of God [or the gods], or that all men have a divine nature within that needs to be awakened [notice that not much has changed from that day up to today]. It is very likely that Saul learned his skilled-trade as a tentmaker [Acts 18:3] sometime prior to the age of 13 or 14 when he left to study in Jerusalem. This professional craftsmanship served him well when he had to support himself financially, while teaching the Word of God on a part-time basis in places like Corinth. It was in that city where he met a Jewish man, Aquila, and his Italian wife Priscilla [Acts 18:1-3] who had recently emigrated from Rome when Emperor Claudius purged the city of all Jews [he ruled from 41-54 AD]. They too were tentmakers by trade, so Paul stayed and worked with them.

BORN OUT OF DUE SEASON

The Bible does not have a specific passage that states when Saul was born or how old he was when he came to Jerusalem to begin his studies with Gamaliel. There are no exact details about his age in his letters to the various church congregations. However he does write this about his own birth in his first letter to the Christians in Corinth [15:8], that he was *the last* among the Apostles to personally see Jesus. The New Living Translation uses the phrase "one born at the wrong time", while the King James version says, "one born out of due time [or due season]". The Greek verb *ektromatai* [in NASB version] literally means being "untimely born" relative to some other benchmark in time, in this case relative to Jesus' birth. Paul is compelled to mention that when

Jesus was risen from the dead, He *first* showed Himself to the original disciples, but then “*last of all*” showed Himself to Paul [on the road entering Damascus]. It is within this context that Paul notes how his *birth was untimely* and did not allow him to be one of those original disciples who were chosen and called by Jesus. This will become a difficult personal issue for him and those in the early churches, because it strikes at the matter of Paul’s Apostolic credibility. It would be common for people to be skeptical of whether Paul had true spiritual authority from the Lord, after all, he was not with Jesus during those nearly three years of ministry. Paul did not see the Lord raise Lazarus, debate the religious leaders, teach on the Mount, or feed the 5,000 with just five loaves of bread and two fish. He was not at the Last Supper eating unleavened bread at the start of Passover prior to Jesus being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was not at the ascension of the Lord back to the Father, and Paul was not present on the attendance roster [Acts 1:13] of Jesus’ other Apostles who were waiting in the upper room [Luke records Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James bar-Alphaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and the other Judas]. In addition, Paul’s credibility [Apostolic authority] was challenged because he specifically mentions [1st Corinthians 15:9] that he, among the other eleven, was the ***least among the Apostles*** because he persecuted the Church and believers in Jesus whom they were called to serve. These will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Ten when we examine Paul’s *thorn in the flesh*.

Paul knows full well that he was not among the other eleven Apostles during the nearly three years of Jesus’ earthly ministry. He did not meet Jesus in person during the time between the Fall of 29 AD [when Jesus began His own ministry at age 30] and April of 32 AD [as Jesus was crucified and resurrected during Passover week]. If Jesus was the

prescribed 30 years of age [see Numbers 4:3 and Luke 3:23] as He started ministry in Judea and Samaria, it is reasonable to assume the men He called to follow Him were of similar ages, as He was preparing them for ministry. Perhaps some were 27 or 28 years old when they were called, so they would be 30 or older when it came their time for them to preach the Gospel after Jesus had left the earth.

Scholars cannot agree on a specific year when Saul was born. Online sources state 4 BCE up to 5 AD, and even 10 AD. The *Wiki* on the subject says, "sometime between 5 BC and 5 AD". He was born a free Roman citizen and did not purchase his citizenship as many did in that era [Acts 22:28]. If Paul was an overly-zealous, recently-graduated Pharisee during Jesus' ministry years, it is reasonable to assume he was around 23 years of age at the time of the crucifixion and resurrection in 32 AD. That would put his birth in Tarsus in 9 AD, so he is perhaps ten years younger than Jesus. If Saul started his studies in Jerusalem when he was 14 years old, that would be in 23 AD. During the nearly three years that Jesus is ministering with His disciples [from 29 to 32 AD] Saul was still enrolled in Pharisaical studies with Gamaliel and was between 20 and 23 years of age. As a Pharisee-in-training, Saul would have to wait until he turned 30 until he could fully function within the Sanhedrin [based on Numbers 4:3 that prescribes the age of 30 for a man to enter full-time service-ministry to the Lord]. It is provocative to examine a likely timeline for Saul/Paul [see next page]. Studying under Gamaliel, he no doubt was originally looking to his 30th birthday so he could become a full-fledged member of the Sanhedrin. But Jesus Christ intercepts him heading into Damascus in 36 AD at age 27, personally chooses him to become an Apostle, then supernaturally equips Saul during those provocative three days sitting motionless in the house on

Straight Street. The Lord sequesters him for an additional **three years** of further training that gets Paul to the prescribed age of 30 – when he is fully disciplined and empowered by God to start preaching the Gospel.

SAUL'S TIMELINE

- 9 AD Born in Tarsus of Cilicia in southeast Asia Minor.
- 23 AD Arrives in Jerusalem probably at age 14, to study with Gamaliel and become a Pharisee just like his father.
- 29 AD Saul is six years into his studies at age 20 when Jesus turns 30 and begins His ministry in September.
- 32 AD The zealous Pharisee is age 23 as Jesus is crucified during Passover week in April. He is no doubt in Jerusalem seven weeks later during the Feast of Pentecost when 3,000 new believers were baptized.
- 32-34 During the first few years after the resurrection, Saul is age 23-to-25 and actively hostile toward this new religious movement that believes Jesus is Messiah. This is very likely the window of time within which Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen.
- 34-36 Having watched and approved of the death sentence enacted upon Stephen, these next few years when he is 25-to-27 are likely the years during which he builds his reputation in rounding up, arresting, and putting to death those who believed in the Gospel of Jesus.
- 36 AD Is a very reasonable time for the 27-year old Saul to be heading to Damascus with letters from the Council in Jerusalem authorizing him to arrest "Christians" and bring them back for trial, prison, and execution.
- 36-39 He does not immediately go into full-time ministry for the Gospel, but spends three years in Arabia, Tarsus, and Damascus until he turns 30 years old in 39 AD - that being the prescribed age to begin ministry.
- 39-67 Paul is blessed with 28 years to minister throughout the Mediterranean Basin. The details of these years will be specifically examined in the other chapters.

It was not until Paul had spent his three years in Arabia, Tarsus, and Damascus that he then headed to Jerusalem to have his first meeting with Peter, James, and John – when they extend to him the “right hand of fellowship” and formally recognized Paul as a **fellow Apostle** who was specifically called to bring the Gospel message to the Gentiles.

SON OF A PHARISEE

That Saul’s father was also a Pharisee [Acts 23:6] speaks to the family’s passion and commitment to historical traditional Judaism. Paul alludes to his father and mother in Galatians 1:15 and 2nd Corinthians 11:22, noting he comes from an Israelite-Hebrew family that is descended from Abraham. He was named after the first king in the nation of Israel. Saul means “to ask for, inquire, question” in Hebrew. Remember how King Saul was chosen by men because of his physical stature [outward appearance], standing head and shoulders above all [1st Samuel 9:2]. He apparently looked just like the people thought a king should look. The reign of King Saul could certainly be described as one who asked a lot from God and often questioned God about the way things were going in his life and reign over Israel. That makes it somewhat ironic that Saul from Tarsus would later change his name to Paul, which means “little”. This is first recorded in Acts 13:9 when he is on the island of Cyprus – around four-to-seven years after he came to faith in Jesus in Damascus. Luke’s reference on this is, “but Saul, who is also known as Paul” – so it seems others called him by either name as he began his ministry in preaching the Gospel. Consider Saul’s parents. His father is a self-righteous Pharisee who named his son after the king of Israel - and not David, the man described as being after the Lord’s own heart [1st Samuel 13:14] - but Saul, whose legacy was one of rebellion and disobedience [1st Samuel 28:6, 10, 16, 19]. God had

become the adversary of King Saul, allowing the enemies of Israel to prevail. Remember his wanting to please men rather than God, and the prophet Samuel reminded him [1st Samuel 15:22] "Behold, to obey the Lord is better than sacrifice". It is always worth noting that when Samuel anointed David, the youngest son of Jesse, to be king, Saul was still ruling as king on the throne in Jerusalem. The young teenager David was a lowly shepherd boy, but Samuel explained very clearly how "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" [1st Samuel 16:7].

It must have been quite the rigid and regulated home life for young Saul growing up with a father who was a well-learned rabbi and a Pharisee. Keeping the Law of Moses in every aspect would have been paramount in all facets of Saul's family life in Tarsus. Philippians 3:5 includes Paul's own statement that he was circumcised when he was eight days old, in keeping with the Law of Moses [Leviticus 12:3]. Paul's parents no doubt would have kept the weekly Shabbat that began each Friday at sunset [Exodus 16:26]. They most likely observed each year the three Spring feasts in the month of Nisan [Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits], then Pentecost seven weeks later, and finally the three Fall feasts in the month of Tishri [Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot]. It also states in Philippians 3:5 that his thoroughly Hebrew pedigree included his family lineage being from the kingly tribe of Benjamin [remember in Genesis 35:18 how Benjamin was the favorite son of his mother Rachel]. Saul no doubt was raised in a very strict and regimented family, focused on closely adhering to all of the religious rituals and traditions set forth in the Torah. Judaism was not just some form of religion in his upbringing and education – but was the very core of how he lived his life in strict observance of the Law of Moses.

RABBINICAL STUDIES WITH GAMALIEL

When Paul made a strong oral defense for his faith standing before the religious leaders in Jerusalem [see Acts 22], he states [verse 3], "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but I was brought up here in Jerusalem, educated under Gamaliel strictly according to the Law of our fathers, and zealous even as you are here today". Paul's early resumé is quite clear. Although he was born in Tarsus, he considers Jerusalem the city where he was raised and educated, and he very specifically notes that his education was STRICT and in full accordance with the Hebrew Law, such that he was very zealous in defense of traditional Judaism. Rabbi Gamaliel, a Pharisee of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, was a well-versed and famous expert on every aspect of the Law of Moses. Luke records how after Peter was supernaturally released from prison [Acts 5:17-20] and began preaching the Gospel again in the Temple, Peter stood before the religious Council and the chief priest questioned him [verses 26-32], after which Gamaliel provided his perspective on Jesus of Nazareth and the message of the Gospel [verses 33-40]. "A Pharisee named Gamaliel who was a teacher of the Law and respected by all the people, said to the Council, *'Take care men of Israel what you intend to do with these men, for some time ago Theudas rose up claiming to be somebody, and about 400 men joined with him, but he was killed and all who followed him were dispersed and it all came to nothing'. 'After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census and drew away some followers after him, but he also died and all those who followed after him were scattered.'* 'Now in this present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or actions are from men then it will be overthrown – but if it is truly of God you will not be able to overthrow them, or you may be found fighting against God.' "

It says the Council took Gamaliel's advice and ordered the Apostles to

not speak any more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. They did have the Apostles flogged [probably from their hatred and driven by their intense zeal to defend Judaism and the Law of Moses]. It is worth noting that Gamaliel is described as both a “teacher” and one “respected by the people”. This is consistent with young Saul of Tarsus coming to Jerusalem in order to study under the tutelage of such a renowned senior rabbi and Pharisee. And while there is no direct Bible passage chronicling Saul’s Pharisaical studies, later in this chapter we will examine the characteristics of Pharisees as exposed by Jesus.

FAMILY MEMBERS IN JERUSALEM

The Bible provides additional insights that some of Paul’s family seems to have moved with him from Tarsus to Jerusalem, as Acts 23:16 notes that Paul had a sister [she is unnamed] and she had a son who was then Paul’s nephew. This close relative warned his Uncle Paul about a plot by more than 40 Jews [who had the full backing of the chief priests and elders], and they had taken an oath to not eat or drink until they would ambush and kill Paul on the route, as the Romans transported him to Caesarea [Acts 23:12-23]. There may also have been other close family members whom he visited [or who visited him] because he greets his *kinsmen* Andronicus and Junias who came to faith in the Lord Jesus before Paul [Romans 16:7]. He also calls Herodian [Romans 16:11] along with Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater his *kinsmen*. Using this term *could* simply mean they were such close friends that he considered them like kinsmen-brothers, but it can also be interpreted that they were in fact his family members [brothers, cousins or uncles]. Paul used the Greek word *syn-genes* which can be used in either of these cases. In Romans 9:2-3 he uses this Greek word in the direct context of those ‘of his own flesh’ - so perhaps he was speaking about literal family.

The first clue about Paul's thorn was the awkward fact that he had not been present with the other eleven Apostles for the thirty-one months of Jesus' ministry. While they could always say things like, "Remember what it was like being with Jesus and hearing Him speak, and seeing His works in person", Paul could not say that. Wouldn't that bug you, and get under your skin [even tug at your "flesh"] to claim Apostleship among the other eleven guys who DID have discipleship with Jesus, from September of 29 AD to April of 32. Now you're supposedly the new twelfth Apostle, but you have no actual personal history with Jesus or that original group of disciples, because you were not there with them for nearly three years of ministry. Paul says in 1st Corinthians 15:8 he was one **"born out of due season"**. People knew Paul had not been personally discipled by Jesus during the nearly three years of His earthly ministry. The other eleven had, but not Saul of Tarsus. So let's now review in what season Saul of Tarsus was born.

Much evidence suggests that this letter to Corinth was written between 50 and 57 AD [probably 54] - 18-to-25 years after Jesus' resurrection and ascension in 32 AD. His letter to the Corinthian church comes around four years into his public missionary ministry. If the letter was written around 54 AD [split the difference] he would then have begun his ministry in 50 AD, 18 years after Jesus went to be with the Father. Saul of Tarsus the Pharisee had studied under Senior Rabbi Gamali-El, when he came down to Jerusalem from Tarsus in Asia Minor. He was most likely around 14 years of age – sometime in 23 AD during Gamali-El's tenure [Saul himself notes in Acts 22:3 that he was *"brought up"* in Jerusalem]. Saul's nephew [Acts 22:16] lived in Jerusalem also [with his mother - Saul's sister], lending additional evidence that the entire family probably made Jerusalem its new home. That would put his birth in

Tarsus in the range of 9 AD, which means he was somewhere right around 23 years old when Jesus was crucified. That's consistent with why he says of himself, "*I was born out of due time*", and Luke notes that the "*young*" Pharisee Saul was present at the stoning of Stephen [Acts 7:58]. Peter and John and the other Apostles were in their mid-to late 20s [perhaps early 30s] when they joined Jesus' ministry starting in the Fall of 29 AD. So at the time Saul writes this letter, the eleven are all around 50 years of age. Jesus had four brothers [James, Jonas, Simon, and Jude] and at least two sisters. If he was born in September of 2 BC, James was probably born around 1-to-2 AD, and was Jesus' contemporary. We know James became a leading elder in the Jewish church at Jerusalem and wrote his own epistle around 55 or 60 AD, and probably died in 67 [refer online to a limestone ossuary inscribed with: "*James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus*"]. James was also a close contemporary of the other eleven Apostles. In the mid-50s AD, these men were all 50-to-55 years old [those still alive and not yet martyred]. But in the mid-50's, Paul is still in his early 40s.

It is also worth examining whether Paul was married or was single. My position is that **he was both**: once previously married, but later an unmarried widower after his wife had died. The most insightful Biblical evidence comes from 1st Corinthians 7:8 where Paul says to unmarried *and widows* that they remain unmarried, even as he is. Many quickly conclude this means Paul was never married. But it could very well mean that Paul is saying that widows who have lost their husbands should then stay single, *even as I have stayed single after the loss of my wife*. The language in Greek allows for this interpretation, that Paul was a widower who then *remained single*, in the same way he noted for the widows he wrote about. This is entirely consistent with how he uses the term "unmarried" again in 1st Corinthians 7:11, referring to someone

not marrying again after a divorce. And later on in verse 34 it is clear that Paul distinguishes a virgin [one who has *never been married*] from an “unmarried” woman, which infers she was married once before but is now either divorced or a widow. That Paul was a widower seems to fit 1st Corinthians 9:5 where he asks rhetorically whether he had the right to take along a believing wife, ***even as the other Apostles*** [who were the disciples of the Lord], and he notes specifically Peter.

Another matter involves Saul studying under Gamaliel on a direct path to becoming a member of the heralded Jewish Sanhedrin – the most learned and best educated rabbis. It was a ***requirement*** for all members of the Sanhedrin to be married, so he probably did have a wife sometime prior his Damascus encounter with the Lord Jesus. Paul himself says [Galatians 1:14] he was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries [of similar age] - among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for ancestral traditions.

HEBREW AMONG HEBREWS

The intensive upbringing in Judaism caused Saul to describe himself as “a Hebrew among Hebrews” [Philippians 3:5]. This form of speech is a contranym, used as a means of emphasizing an exceptional labeling of an individual, relative to an exact opposite description implied at the other end of the continuum. For example, someone may describe a big burly guy as “a man among men”. The idea is that there are of course men out there in the world, and a man is distinguished from teenagers or young boys because of his physical stature, strength, and maturity [in that case “a man among boys”]. Such is not an exceptional distinction. However, if a particular guy embodies a stereotype of qualities defining a *real man*, he would be a “man among men”. If you lined up twenty men who each exhibited characteristics of what it truly meant to be a

Hebrew, Paul is the one among all of them who so thoroughly meets the definitional requirements to be called a Hebrew, that compared to all others who are also Hebrews - he is "a Hebrew among Hebrews". Paul took that moniker one step further stating his understanding of the Law of Moses being summed up in that he was also a Pharisee. Part of being a Pharisee included memorizing the entire Torah. Try and grasp this fact. Paul could recite Genesis-to-Deuteronomy in its entirety. It is one thing to be thoroughly Hebrew, in terms of Jewish parents, father a rabbi, lineage in the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day – but on top of all that, he studied to become a Pharisee, and would eventually become a member of the revered Sanhedrin.

SAUL'S PHARISAICAL PERSPECTIVE

While there is no scriptural passage that describes Saul functioning as a Pharisee, it is actually quite profound that the Bible does present several excellent descriptions of what a typical Pharisee was like at the time of Jesus. It is very compelling to do a comprehensive study of every time the word "Pharisee" shows up in the New Testament. The evidence about these exhibits several great insights into what kind of rabbi Saul was studying to become - namely a Pharisee and member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. Some insights are from Paul's own commentary about himself in his letters to different churches, while a greater portion comes from Jesus' perspectives and evaluations of the Pharisees he encountered during His numerous debates and discussions regarding the Law of Moses and these religious elite [leaders].

Paul testifies [Acts 26:5] that he lived *as a Pharisee according to the STRICTEST sect of the Jewish religion*. Think about that comment for a moment. By his very own admission, Paul states he was one of those Pharisees living out the most stringent forms of conformity to the Law

of Moses. There are numerous Scripture passages that comment on this type of rigidity among Pharisees. These Biblical accounts provide insight into what kind of rabbi Saul became as a result of his Pharisaical studies with Gamaliel. For example, in Galatians 6:12-14 Paul states how the circumcised may not even keep the Law themselves [Jews who had a very tacit, cultural-only interest in Judaism], but they want to keep up a good appearance in the flesh by compelling others to be circumcised so they can boast about having persuaded them to do so. This shows that their religious zeal is all about keeping up with outward requirements, and has nothing to do with the condition of the heart.

Jesus exposed the strict religious practices of the Pharisees [Mark 7:1-8] saying, *"They worship God in vain, teaching as doctrine what are nothing more than the precepts of men's own ideas"*. Jesus was saying this in response to the Pharisees who were disturbed that the disciples did not ceremonially wash their hands before eating [verse 2]. Because the Pharisees CAREFULLY wash before eating, observing the traditions of their elders [verse 3]. When the Pharisees came into the market they did not eat unless they cleansed themselves, and there are many other things in their traditions they were required to observe, including exactly HOW to wash a cup or pitcher or copper pot, to ensure that nothing impure ever enters their bodies [verse 4]. Remember how Jesus challenged them [Matthew 15:11] *"It is not what enters a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out"*. Jesus was probably referring to the Jewish *Halakah* that included not only the Law of Moses in the Torah, but also the oral traditions and other precepts that rabbis had interpreted and passed along to each generation. Essentially, the Pharisees substituted their own ideas and perspectives about the Torah for detailed specifics about how the Jewish people should live.

Jesus really took the Pharisees to task by telling a parable aimed directly at them, where one of the two main characters was a *Pharisee* [Luke 18:9-14]. A publican tax-collector [who was despised because he was a Jewish sell-out who collaborated with Rome] was compared to a Pharisee as these two went into the Temple to pray. The Pharisee boastfully thanked God he was not like “other people” – swindlers, unjust, adulterers, and even like this publican praying next to him. The self-assured Pharisee thought to himself that he fasted two times each week and tithed from everything he received. The publican, on the other hand, simply asked God to be merciful to him for he was a sinner. Jesus summed this up by saying that the publican went home justified that day - **but not the Pharisee**, *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted”*.

Jesus further exposed the fasting of these Pharisees [Matthew 6:16] by calling them hypocrites, because they neglected their outward hygiene so their disheveled appearance while fasting would get them attention from the people, who then admired how devout these Pharisees were. Jesus said they got noticed by men so **that alone** was their reward for fasting. It counted for nothing with God because the heart was not humble. Jesus also exposed their tithing [Luke 21:1-4] as the wealthy made a public show of bringing their tithe into the Temple, again, to be noticed by men, and they were giving out of their surplus, not their first fruits. Jesus further uncovered their true intentions [Matthew 6:5] about prayer, as He cited how Pharisees are hypocrites who love to pray standing up in the synagogues for all to see, or out on the street corners in their robes to be seen by men [Matthew 6:5].

Jesus also unveiled further hypocrisy by explaining that a Pharisee will tithe his cooking spices of mint, dill, and cumin [literally separating out

ten percent of these used for cooking a meal], but they do not show justice, mercy, or faithfulness – the things that they *should* be very willing to parse out [Matthew 23:23]. They would even go so far as to strain a gnat that accidentally flew into their mouth on a windy day, just to be sure they did not violate the Law of Moses and eat meat on a day when it was not allowed [Matthew 23:24]. The Pharisees also regarded their own offering on the Temple altar as being far more important than the actual altar itself [Matthew 23:18-19].

Jesus specifically warned the Pharisees to not be so concerned about getting dirty dishes ceremonially clean for the next meal, because the outward appearance is not what is important, when they themselves *inside* remain full of robbery and self-indulgence [Matthew 23:25-26]. And Jesus made it clear [Matthew 23:27] to those hypocritical Pharisees that their religious zeal defines them as whitewashed tombs, which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. They loved walking out in public among the "ordinary people" wearing their elaborate long robes, while being greeted with reverence. They got the choice seats of honor up in front when they arrived at the synagogue [Luke 20:46]. But how shameful to consider that Pharisees were also known [verse 46] for devouring the homes of widows [also Matthew 23:14 and Mark 12:40]. The Pharisees used their standing and supposed lofty reputation to take advantage of widows whom they "helped", and then feigned that they expected any financial compensation for their efforts - when in fact they would use the widow's situation [no husband supporting her] as an opportunity to manipulate her finances or home ownership to benefit themselves.

Consider again the widow who gave that mite as her offering to the Temple treasury [Matthew 12:42-44] - that perhaps she was overly

burdened with expectations from the religious leaders that she HAD to give an offering, even though she literally had nothing to give, as she tried to exist on charity from others. If the Pharisees truly had a humble heart and loved God, they would know they were supposed to provide protection and care for the widows and orphans [Deuteronomy 26:12], even as Jesus' brother James wrote that care for these at the lowest end of societal standing was in fact ***the true definition of pure and undefiled religion*** [James 1:27]. It is interesting that the Pharisees did not have respect for direct warning from God [Isaiah 10:1-2] regarding those who would take advantage of, or rob from, widows.

In summary, Jesus commented [John 5:39] that although the Pharisees and religious elite knew the Hebrew Scriptures [having memorized the entire Torah], they believed that in these alone they had life. However, they actually had no life, because those very same passages they committed to memory from the Torah, Psalms, and prophets were entirely about Jesus the Messiah, who would literally fulfill all Scripture. This provides excellent context about how a Pharisee thought, acted, and lived life: resolute, self-satisfied, and proud in his own actions. This also provides some comparative insights into who Saul probably was as a STRICT Pharisee. It is very interesting to note that another of Jesus' disciples was singled out as being **zealous**. Simon the Canaanite was referred to with the moniker "the zealot" [Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15, and Acts 1:13], but it is not clear whether his zeal was all about his religious commitment to Judaism, or his love for the national identity of Israel to be out from under Rome. He may have been a zealot just like the prisoner Barabbas, released by Pontius Pilate during the Passover when Jesus was crucified. Luke says Barabbas was in prison for committing murder during an insurrection that was probably in opposition to Roman rule [Luke 23:19]. It remains a very interesting

point that Bar-Abbas means “son of the father”, and he was the one likely charged with treason against the state [which carried the death penalty by Roman crucifixion]. Yet he was released, and Jesus is the one who died on a Roman cross, being charged by the Jews with blasphemy as if it were treason against the Law of Moses and Judaism.

SAUL DURING JESUS’ MINISTRY

Assuming Paul’s personal testimony is reliable, that he was one born “as one out of due season” [1st Corinthians 15:8], so that he was not a direct contemporary in time [and age] with the other Apostles chosen personally by Jesus, he was probably born around ten years after Jesus. If Jesus was born on Yom Teruah [September 29] in 2 BC, Saul would have been born in 9 AD. When Jesus started His ministry at age 30 [Luke 3:23, Numbers 4:3] in the Fall of 29 AD, Saul would have only been 20 years old and probably still a student of Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Saul probably heard about the new teacher, Jehoshua from Nazareth, doing many amazing things in and around Jerusalem where Saul was based. And he may have even been present at one of the times when Jesus taught in the Temple. It also seems very plausible that as a young up-and-coming Pharisee, Saul would have been well aware of the events happening during Passover week in 32 AD – when Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey’s foal, and ended up standing before the Sanhedrin during an illegal overnight trial. Saul had his sights set on one day becoming a member of that same religious ruling body. But being only 23 years of age at that time, he was probably not present when Jesus was questioned and ridiculed prior to being sent over to Pontius Pilate who sentenced Him to death by crucifixion. There is no indication Saul was present on Golgotha as Jesus hung on the cross. But it is very likely he heard all the buzz about the empty tomb and the

various claims that Jesus had reportedly been seen by hundreds of people during those nearly six weeks after the Feast of First Fruits. That time period is the precursor to how Saul of Tarsus began his active persecution of believers in Jesus [coming up in the next chapter].

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Saul of Tarsus was clearly on track toward a prominent position among the Jews, studying in Jerusalem under the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel within a window of time [23 to 36 AD] that overlapped with the period of Jesus' nearly three years of public ministry in and around Jerusalem [from September of 29 AD up through May of 32 AD]. It is intriguing to see Saul alive and living-studying in Jerusalem during the same years that Jesus ministered in and around that city. He no doubt heard about this teacher from Nazareth, as he was active in the circles of the Jewish religious leaders. While none of the four Gospels or Luke's Acts record Saul being present when Jesus spoke, did miracles, hung on the cross, or was seen by hundreds after the resurrection, he was specifically named as he stood and watched Stephen stoned to death by those religious elite he aspired to be part of. He was, in his own words, a *very strict Pharisee* whose zeal for the Law of Moses was the same as the Pharisees whom Jesus exposed as hypocrites. That zeal drove Saul to openly attack the followers of Jesus, as Luke records [Acts 22:3-4] he was *"zealous for God and persecuted The Way to the death, putting both men and women into prison"*. But God had another plan for Saul. The next chapter examines the events in Saul's life during the time after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWO

Saul After Jesus' Resurrection

They dragged Stephen outside
Jerusalem and stoned him to death,
leaving their robes *at the feet of*
a young man named Saul.

Acts 7:58

It is very likely that Saul was in Jerusalem during the Passover week of 32 AD when Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on Golgotha. The basic timeline of Saul's life [shown in the previous chapter] has him coming down to Judea from Tarsus in 23 AD when he was perhaps 14 years of age to study under Gamaliel. He would then be 20 years of age at the time Jesus started His ministry in September of 29 AD. When Jesus was crucified on Passover in April of 32 AD, Saul would then be 23 and well aware of the stories all throughout Jerusalem that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. It is also very probable that Saul was in the city seven weeks later for the Feast of Pentecost – when thousands of

Jews living throughout the Roman Empire traveled to Jerusalem for this harvest celebration. He must have heard all about the supernatural events that took place in and around the house where Jesus' Apostles were staying. Maybe he heard accounts of Peter's dynamic sermon that said Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law and Messianic prophecies of Judaism. Certainly it would be big news that 3,000 individuals were baptized after the massive gathering when Peter did his presentation of this new "Gospel of Jesus". Saul probably was aware that the same Galilean fisherman [Peter] gave another major sermon in the Temple at Solomon's Portico [Acts 3] – and the reports of people being healed by these followers of Jesus. I imagine Saul felt satisfied to hear that Peter and his colleague John were arrested and jailed [Acts 4].

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

As 32 AD became 33 and into 34, this new movement of Jesus being the long-awaited 'Christ' was growing, as chronicled by Luke in Acts chapters two-through-seven. Formal leaders are in place [Acts 6:1-7] as these believers in Jesus organize relief efforts for widows and orphans, and are sharing material wealth with those who have needs. Saul is age 23-to-25 during this early stage of growth in the Jewish church in and around Jerusalem. He is no doubt a rising up-and-coming star among the Pharisees when the Jews from the north African regions of Cyrene and Alexandria, as well as Cilicia and Asia [Acts 6:9-15] – members of the so called "Freed Synagogue" movement, stir up false witnesses and charges against Stephen. Luke notes Saul is present when these men dragged Stephen outside of the city and stoned him to death [Acts 7:57-60]. Luke twice records that Saul gave full approval of killing Stephen [Acts 8:1 "*Saul was in **hearty agreement** with putting him to death*" and in Acts 22:20 quoting Saul, "*And when the blood of your*

witness Stephen was being shed, I also **was standing by approving**"]. It was the stoning of Stephen that Luke notes as the event that galvanized men like Saul [Acts 8:1] *"And on that day a **great persecution began** against the church in Jerusalem, and they [believers] were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, all except the Apostles"*.

PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

During the ensuing two-to-three years - from 34 to 36 AD - Saul is now between 25 and 27 years of age and actively building his reputation as a strong defender of the Law of Moses and traditional Judaism. As an active Pharisee, he has direct access to chief priests and the High Priest of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, who empower this zealous guardian of Jewish liturgy to actively round up, arrest, and put to death followers of *The Way* who had *"scattered throughout the regions"*. Luke records [Acts 8:3] *"So Saul began **ravaging the church**, entering house after house, dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison"*. It was a very difficult time for the new church and its believers. Following Jesus could land a person in jail, charged as being in direct opposition to the longstanding Law of Moses among the Jews..

Paul explains firsthand to the believers in Galatia that, *"You have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God **beyond measure and tried to destroy it** – and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries, among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions"* [Galatians 1:13-14]. This is powerful and frightening personal testimony from Saul's own mouth. Consider the things he says of himself during this time of active hostility toward Christians. First, his persecution was BEYOND MEASURE. The Greek word for persecution is διώκω [dioko] meaning 'to make others flee or run for their lives from you'. The word

for an extent to which Saul did this is κατά ὑπερβολή [kata-huper-bole] which means 'according to an exceeding extent'. We get our English word *hyperbole* from this adverb that carries the connotation of being overly exaggerated in order to make the point of just how extreme the situation is. When we say things such as: "Last night I slept like a rock", or "These shoes are killing me", or "I have a million errands to run this morning", these are each obvious exaggerations intended to convey a huge impact or effect that is far beyond what is normal. In this ancient Greek, *hyperbole* was not Paul using it as we do in modern English, but rather he was saying the level or degree of his persecution was literally so exaggerated, that one could very well say he was fanatical about it. Saul "overly-exaggerated" his persecution of Christians, such that it was far beyond what would be considered typical hostility. The picture of Saul storming into a person's home and then "dragging" men and women to prison is a frightful image to consider.

His second statement from Galatians chapter-1 is that he not only attacked men and women who followed Jesus, but he **tried to destroy** this new movement. The Greek term *portheo* [πορθέω] conveys the *overthrowing* of something to the end that it *then ceases to exist*. This was used in military language regarding *overthrowing* the enemy, such that they were completely annihilated. When this was enacted on an adversary, the final result was the problem was gone for good – and it was no longer any threat or concern. Saul viewed this Gospel of Jesus to be a threat to his traditional Judaism that needed to be eradicated, so he would not have to deal with it ever again. Add that motivation to his self-described κατά ὑπερβολή [kata-huper-bole] and the picture is quite clear as to how intense the *strict* Pharisee Saul was in his mission to put an end to Christians and their church movement.

The third description of Saul's zeal from Galatians chapter-1 is how he was a Pharisee actively advancing in Judaism beyond any other men who were at the same stage in their religious education. The phrase he uses is "*more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions*". It is one thing to be extremely zealous, but it's another thing to be even **MORE extremely zealous**. The Greek in this phrase is *perisoteros* and *zelotes*. The latter ζηλωτής clearly means that one has a burning zeal deep inside to vindicate. This alone would be enough to qualify the extent of Saul's persecution, but he adds the adverb *περισσότερο* - meaning to *an exceedingly greater degree*. It is literally Saul saying his colleagues among the up-and-coming Pharisees were also zealous for the Law and Jewish traditions, but he was that way to an exceedingly greater degree. Consider this is not just "to a greater degree" beyond my contemporaries. Saul's zeal **far exceeds** even theirs. Taken together, these three descriptions: 1] making believers run for their lives due to his exceeding intentions, 2] he planned to completely annihilate the believers and their movement, and 3] this is all driven by his zeal for traditional Judaism that goes beyond anything else other Pharisees had for the Law of Moses, provide a clear picture of Saul in his mid-to-late 20s in full opposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

WARRANTS FROM JERUSALEM

Luke's next description of Saul [Acts 9:1-2] most likely came from Saul himself as he spoke with the beloved physician about what he was like before he went to Damascus. The three descriptors from the previous section now segue into, "Saul was still **breathing threats and murder** against the disciples of the Lord". It is now 36 AD, four years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the birth of the church during the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Saul is 27 years of age and "went to

the High Priest [at the Jerusalem Temple] and asked for letters from him [addressed] to the synagogue in Damascus, so that if Paul found anyone belonging to 'The Way', both men and women, he could bring them bound [in chains] to Jerusalem". Saul's *more exceeding* zeal has him proactively going after believers IN OTHER CITIES outside of just the local Jerusalem area. Consider that in the 1st Century AD Damascus was 135 miles away - about a 25-hour ride on horseback over the course of three or four full days. These "letters" were essentially an arrest warrant issued by the Jewish Sanhedrin court deputizing Saul to act on behalf of the High Priest in regards to Jewish Law and the Torah.

Seizing followers of Jesus in another city was much like a modern day bounty-hunter, or like federal marshals serving arrest warrants from a recognized court to bring someone back by force to stand trial. It is worth noting that there is no civil authority in play here, as this is not about breaking Roman laws. This was entirely an internal matter of the Jewish Sanhedrin dealing with their concerns about those breaking Jewish laws. It reminds us how Pontius Pilate [Luke 23] had no interest in a trial for Jesus, because he had not broken any Roman law, certainly nothing that merited death by crucifixion. Pilate was hoping that because Jesus was from Galilee, he could pass him off to Herod to handle this matter of Jewish religious law. A similar thing happened in Corinth [Acts 18] when the Roman Proconsul Gallio expressed no interest in hearing about trivial Jewish religious law and customs brought to him before the city's Bema [court], "If this were a matter of a vicious crime it would be reasonable for me to put up with you Jews, but if it is a question of words and names in your own law, take care of it yourselves". Saul's trip to Damascus was about such Jewish tradition and their own laws. Perhaps he was targeting the church leadership in

Damascus. Maybe Saul was prepared to bind anyone and everyone he found to be involved with 'The Way' of the Gospel of Jesus. Luke's language could also be interpreted that it was simply Saul acting on an intelligence report received from the Jewish leaders of the synagogue in Damascus that this new religious movement had arrived in their city, and their traditional place of worship – so they wanted to see someone show up with Jerusalem/High Priest credentials to purge these people from their congregation. Who better than a 27-year old emerging Pharisee who studied with Gamaliel, and is zealous for Jewish traditions in the same manner as the Damascus synagogue leadership.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The early church in and around Jerusalem was in direct conflict with the traditions of Judaism and customs-rituals of the Law of Moses, as well as the daily sacrifices at the Temple. It was certainly a crossroads for the new movement that had been dubbed "The Way". Perhaps this name was linked to Jesus' testimony [John 14:6] the He is the WAY, the truth, and the life. Or it may have been a derogatory-sarcastic term, because these people believed they were the only ones with the true WAY to Jehovah - departing from everything the Law of Moses held dear. Whatever the underlying reason, Saul was in a position of delegated religious authority to rein in the early church. It is so incredible to realize that this is the man God will choose to preach the Gospel to Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire, and author letters that will ultimately become the majority of the New Testament – the very foundations of Christian doctrine for the following two millennia. The next chapter takes a closer look at the events that happened in Damascus when Saul encountered the risen Jesus of Nazareth.

CHAPTER THREE

The Damascus Download

Saul could not see and was led into Damascus, to a house on Straight Street, and there he sat three days without any sight, and he did not eat or drink.

Acts 9:8-11

SAUL TO DAMASCUS

The young Pharisee Saul exhibited tremendous zeal for maintaining the core tenets of Judaism. For him, keeping the Law of Moses was the most important aspect of this earthly life. The new religious sect called “The Way” had sprung up in Jerusalem during Pentecost in 32 AD, just a month or so after the man Jesus [from the insignificant village of Nazareth] had been crucified by the Romans on Golgotha. He taught that He was in fact the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, and that He and Yahweh were One and the same. There were all kinds of stories and rumors that Jesus had healed cripples, made blind men see, and even raised from the dead a man named Lazarus who lived in Bethany. Jesus

had a close inner circle of twelve followers, as well as a few hundred others who had believed His teachings. One of those twelve had betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin and apparently hung himself after trying to return the bribe to the chief priest. Saul was 23 years of age and in Jerusalem during the Feast of Passover in 32 AD. He had seen firsthand the commotion surrounding the trial and execution of Jesus. It was shameful that the followers of Jesus somehow stole away the dead body from the tomb so they could claim He was resurrected. The city was turned inside out by the Roman soldiers as well as the Temple guards, all intent on finding the dead body and exposing the lie about Jesus being alive, but it was never recovered. When the time came for Pentecost, there were tens of thousands of Jews and proselytes in the city from all across the Roman Empire. One former follower of Jesus named Petros continued to stir up the crowds, saying that Jesus was in fact the Messiah, and apparently some 3,000 people agreed with him, so the city is now filled with many groups of Jews who meet every first day of the week to read the Torah and sing songs of worship to a dead man. They even blasphemed the breaking of bread and drinking wine as being symbols of the death of Jesus on the Roman cross.

Because of all the Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem for Pentecost who then returned to their home cities and regions, this movement that followed Jesus had spread to places like Crete, Cyprus, Parthia the kingdom of the Medes, Asia Minor, Assyria, Elam, Mesopotamia, and even over to the north African coast in Egypt, Cyrene, and Libya. It had even taken hold in the Roman capital in Italy. Saul of Tarsus would have nothing to do with a movement that follows a Nazareth carpenter who supposedly is the resurrected Messiah of Israel. Luke wrote in Acts 9:1-2 that young Saul continued to *breathe threats* and was intent on murdering any of

these followers of Jesus, so he went directly to the Temple high priest and was given letters [search and arrest warrants] for the leaders in the synagogue of Damascus, instructing them that if Saul came and found any men or women who were part of “*The Way*” [this new religion that worshipped Jesus from Nazareth as Messiah], Saul would then bring them to Jerusalem to stand trial before the high priest and Sanhedrin.

It seems to infer that the local Roman officials decided to not interfere with this practice. The history records show that Pontius Pilate ruled as Prefect over the Syrian Province [which included Judea and Samaria] from 26-to-36 AD, so he was in power for four additional years after Jesus was crucified on Passover in 32 AD. John 18:31 says that Pilate told the Jewish leaders to “take Jesus yourselves and judge Him according to your own Law”. In Matthew 27:24 Pilate publicly washed his hands of the matter of Jesus, as it had nothing to do with Roman law. Mark 15:1 confirms that “binding” a person accused of violating the Law of Moses was the way people were brought before the high priest and Sanhedrin. The Pharisee Saul of Tarsus wanted to do the same with any and all followers of Jesus. Consider how intent Saul was with regard to his legal training under Gamaliel as a rabbi of the Law. He wanted this to be deemed entirely a *legal action*, not simply a man going after those he disagreed with. No, Saul was very proud that he had successfully argued his *legal case* against “*The Way*” to his fellow Pharisees and the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He now had a formal writ from the High Priest to legally take women and men into custody – being authorized by the Sanhedrin court to find and capture believers in Jesus, bind them, and bring them back to the presiding jurisdiction to stand trial for their crimes against the Jewish Law. He must have felt emboldened and quite confident heading off to Damascus, probably dispatched with an armed escort of Temple guards.

JESUS CALLS SAUL

The trip from Jerusalem up to Damascus was 135 miles, so it would take about four or five days in the saddle on horseback. And Saul is not going alone to pick up one person. Consider that he planned for many people to be bound and brought back forcibly to Jerusalem, so there had to be a large entourage of Jewish Temple guards accompanying Saul for this journey. This would give him the manpower - the formal clout – to arrive with what would appear to be legal precedent for the arrests, along with armed soldiers to take people into custody.

The other eleven Apostles were each called personally by Christ Jesus. The brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, two additional brothers James and John bar-Zebedee, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, James bar-Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the [zealot] Canaanite, and Bartholomew each had a specific instance with Jesus of Nazareth when He said, "Come and follow me". Judas Iscariot was also called by Jesus, but his betrayal and ultimate suicide demonstrated that even those in close proximity to the Son of God still had the inherent capacity to not truly believe, and a propensity to pursue a selfish endeavor of personal riches in exchange for a heartless betrayal. Luke records [Acts 1:23-26] how the remaining eleven Apostles were waiting in Jerusalem in the days leading up to the Feast of Pentecost just as Jesus had instructed them. Jesus was seen for forty days after His resurrection [Acts 1:3]. If he was raised on the Feast of First Fruits [Sunday, April 13th in 32 AD], Jesus would have ascended on May 23rd – five and a half weeks later. Pentecost happens fifty days after Passover, or forty-seven days after Jesus left the empty tomb. The eleven only needed to wait seven days for Pentecost to begin, but their restlessness caused them to take it upon themselves to draw straws and select a replacement for Judas Iscariot [Acts 1:23-26].

The two finalists were Joseph called "Son-of-the-Sabbath" [also known by the Greek name Justus] and Matthias. The drawn lots fell to Matthias so *they decided* he was the twelfth Apostle. He was probably a godly man who loved the Lord, but he was not ***the Lord's personal choice*** to be the twelfth Apostle. Instead, Jesus would personally make that selection when he intercepts Saul of Tarsus on the road heading into the city of Damascus. The selection of Matthias is incorrect on many fronts. First, Jesus *never* told the eleven, "You will find a replacement for Judas". Second, the office of Apostle was *never* chosen by having two finalists, who were then differentiated by casting lots [drawing a short-straw]. Third, Jesus Himself, in person, is *the only One* who can call a man to be one of His twelve Apostles. And fourth, Jesus does in fact personally call Saul of Tarsus to be His twelfth Apostle – this being confirmed by Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: "*I am the least of the Apostles and not fit to be called an Apostle because I persecuted the church*" [1st Corinthians 15:9], and "*I was appointed a preacher and **Apostle** as a teacher of the Gentiles*" [1st Timothy 2:7]. Matthias was not chosen by Jesus – men appointed him through their own contrived process. Paul's credibility and authority as the twelfth Apostle is covered with further details in Chapter-11 of this book.

THE DAMASCUS ROAD

Saul is on the tail end of a four-to-five day journey from Jerusalem and is set to enter the city of Damascus [Acts 9:3-6] when he sees a bright light from heaven flash around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He then asked who it was speaking to him, and the reply was, "I AM – Jesus". Saul was told to go into the city and it will be told what he must do. Those in the Temple guard armed-escort heard the same voice but did not see Jesus, and then guided Saul [who could not see] to a particular

house of a man named Judas who lived on Straight Street. Saul stayed in that house for three days and three overnights, during which he did not eat or drink. The Lord gave a vision to a man named Ananias to come to Judas' home, where he would find Saul praying, and then lay hands on him to restore his sight. Ananias had reluctance in this task because he knew the **dreadful reputation of Saul**. However, the Lord assured him that Saul was CHOSEN by Him to bear the Lord's name to the Gentiles, and kings, and the sons of Israel. Ananias went and did as the Lord instructed, and said to Saul, "The Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road sent me to restore your vision and to be filled with the Holy Spirit". Just then, what appeared to be crusty scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see, and then he was baptized. After that, he ate some food, was strengthened, and stayed several days with Ananias, Judas, and the other Damascus believers.

DISCIPLING SAUL

Chapter Nine of Luke's Acts of *the Apostles* describes Saul's conversion heading to Damascus, and the days immediately after. A careful review of the New Testament provides provocative evidence that perhaps he received some form of miraculous discipleship directly from the Lord Jesus, one-on-one within an extra-temporal spiritual realm during those three days he was inside the house of Judas on Straight Street. In that ***three-day supernatural download***, Paul may very well have experienced the exact same teachings, wisdom, knowledge, and interaction with the Lord that the other eleven Apostles had experienced in their nearly ***three years*** with Jesus [from the Fall of 29 to May of 32 AD]. My position is that what the disciples experienced with Jesus in three years, Paul received in just three days! In 2nd Corinthians 12:7, Saul says he was given *surpassing greatness of revelations*, about which he could

easily exalt himself relative to other Apostles of Jesus. But he will not. He clearly understands that he could easily boast in all the Lord showed him [1st Corinthians 12:1], but such boasting is not profitable for the purpose of the Gospel. He continues speaking [in the third person], about a man [he is referring to himself], who fourteen years earlier had been caught up in the spirit to the “third heaven”, and this could have been in his body or outside of his body. He is not sure which it was, but God knows. He says this man was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words which *a man is not permitted to speak*. He reserves his boast about this experience to be from that anonymous man – but with the caveat that “he will not boast about himself”. He finishes up by saying [verse-6], “If I wanted to boast, the things I would say would not be foolishness, but would be the truth, yet I will refrain from boasting so that no one will credit me with anything more than what he sees and hears from me”.

It is worth noting Saul’s own time context, that this lofty experience was ***fourteen years earlier***. His first letter to the Corinthians was probably written from Ephesus [with the help of Sosthenes] around 52 AD – in the early life of the Corinthian church. His second letter to Corinth was most likely penned a year or two later in either 53 or 54 AD [these dates are of course widely debated among scholars and theologians]. ***Fourteen years earlier*** than 53 AD would be 39 AD on our calendar-timeline. This would be about when Saul turned 30 – the prescribed age in Numbers 4:3 for a Jewish man to begin full-time service to the Lord. In writing 2nd Corinthians, he would no doubt be reflecting back on the time he encountered Jesus at Damascus [in 36 AD when he was 27 years old], and the following three-year period of discipleship he had with the Lord [from 36-to-39 AD] in Arabia and his hometown of Tarsus. It seems that from Saul’s perspective, he remembered back to

BOTH his *three days in* Damascus, and his *three years after* Damascus, as the window of time "**fourteen years earlier**" he was supernaturally disciplined before beginning his official ministry as an Apostle. This started in 36 AD with the Damascus Download [Saul was 27]. Saul then went to Arabia, returned to Damascus [Galatians 1:17], and then went to Tarsus until 38 AD [when Saul was 29]. Barnabas traveled to Tarsus to bring Saul down to the church in Syrian-Antioch, where he stayed for one year [Acts 11:25-26] - teaching the Word and making new disciples [*and they were first called "Christians" in Antioch*]. After that year, Saul turned 30 [in 39 AD] and was now the prescribed age [Numbers 4:3] for a Jewish man to enter into full-time ministry, so he went down to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, John bar-Zebedee, and Jesus' brother James, who extended to him their right hand of fellowship, recognizing Saul as a *fellow Apostle* [Galatians 2:9]. That period from 36 to 39 AD is that **fourteen years earlier** as he penned 2nd Corinthians in 53 AD.

Paul is clearing saying that the Lord Jesus gave him amazing, incredible revelations during those three days in Judas' home on Straight Street in Damascus. That he was taken in the spirit to lofty heights to see and hear first-hand all kinds of things in the 'third heaven'. Can you picture how this occurred? Saul, blinded by the bright light is led to Judas' house where he sits motionless with no food or water for three days. There appears to be some kind of crusty residue [like scales] sealing his eyes shut. I like to think a few people stopped by that house to check out the rumor that Saul, the notorious Pharisee from Jerusalem, was sitting in a back room - quiet, motionless, eyes shut, taking no food. And perhaps Judas might crack the door open a bit to give curious visitors a quick peek at this infamous persecutor of the church. There

must have been quite a buzz among the local Damascus believers as word spread that Rabbi Saul from Jerusalem was at the home of Judas.

If Saul was in fact being supernaturally disciplined by Jesus within an extra-temporal spiritual dimension through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, his experience could have felt like weeks, months, or even years, when in fact it was just three days in regular "Earth time". The 1999 blockbuster movie "The Matrix" depicted a future technology where an individual was able to click into a peripheral access-port on the back of one's neck to allow a rapid computer-download of information. In the film, Keanu Reeves [his character is Mr. Anderson, or Neo] has expert proficiencies in martial arts loaded into his brain in just a fraction of the time it would take to learn these in typical training. In the same way, Carrie Ann Moss [her character is Trinity] is instantly downloaded with skills-expertise to pilot an attack helicopter. Normal training time was circumvented. Paul's 3-day motionless with scales sealing his eyes may have been a similar manner for Jesus to impart spiritual wisdom and specific gifting and experiences to prepare Saul for ministry. C.S. Lewis portrayed the extra-temporal world in *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe* - as Lucy and her siblings stepped back into the room after they experienced decades in Narnia growing into adults - but they could not fathom that only a few seconds of Earth-time had elapsed during incredible adventure. In the same way, Jodie Foster's character [Dr. Arroway] in the 1997 film *Contact*, was incredulous about the nearly 14 hours she experienced in travelling through an Einstein-Rosen Bridge - even though it appeared to everyone observing the "machine" that her transport pod simply dropped for a few seconds.

I like to consider that when the Lord finished His supernatural work with Saul, He may have also charged him with the same commission He

gave to the other eleven Apostles: *"Go into the world and preach the gospel, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and I AM with you always, even to the end of the age"*. And perhaps when Saul returned to his conscious state as Ananias laid hands on him and the scales dissolved from his eyes, he may have immediately asked, **"What day is it? or How long was I gone?"** This also gets my mind thinking about the movie *Inception*, where seven minutes in the first dream-experience, equates to six months at the second level, and ten years within the third-tier of the dream within a dream within a dream. The ramification being that Paul could have certainly had the personal experiential perspective that what elapsed with the Lord for that private discipleship in the "third heaven" [outside Earth's physical time-space] during this Damascus Download felt like weeks, months, or perhaps even the exact equivalent of the nearly three years the other eleven Apostles had during Jesus' earthly ministry. Yet it all took place one-on-one with the Lord within an Earthly time-parameter of just 72 hours.

THE THIRD HEAVEN

What did the Lord impart to Saul during that three-day time period? Saul's own description is that he was ***caught up*** to the "third heaven". The Jews understood there is a "first heaven" – the space above the Earth, our atmosphere [Deuteronomy 11:11, Psalm 104:12]. There is a "second heaven" - stars, planets, constellations, and galaxies visible to in the night sky [Psalm 8:3, Isaiah 13:10]. Beyond these is this "third heaven" where The Almighty is enthroned [Psalm 33:13-14, Isaiah 66:1, Revelation 11:19, Hebrews 7:26, Matthew 6:9, Ezekiel 1 and Isaiah 6]. Saul uses the Greek term *harpazo* ["caught up"] which is the same word used for Jesus' catching up [the rapture] of the Church. It was certainly a miraculous and spectacular discipleship experience that

solidified Saul's assurance that he truly was called to be by Jesus to be the twelfth Apostle. Consider his view about trials [2nd Corinthians 4:17] being "*light momentary affliction that produced an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*". It was in that third-heavenly realm that Jesus mentored and merged Saul's high-level Pharisaical graduate degree from Gamaliel with experiences that prepared him to go to cities throughout the Roman Empire and preach the Gospel. In addition, Saul, the self-described "Hebrew among Hebrews", was by all accounts the most gifted, best-educated, well-prepared Pharisee, with the most logical background to be sent to preach Jesus as Mashiach to his beloved Jewish nation. But the Lord's plan had Peter, John, and Jesus' brother James head up the ministry in Jerusalem, Samaria, and Judea, while Saul was sent to Gentiles across the Hellenist, Roman-controlled Mediterranean basin. He did meet with Peter, John, and James [Galatians 2:9] who extended to him a right hand of confirming fellowship regarding his Apostleship to the Gentles. But his first trip to Jerusalem after Damascus was met with fear and skepticism [Acts 9:26] as Saul tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all still afraid of him, not believing he also was a disciple.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Jesus personally intercepted Saul before he reached Damascus, and supernaturally equipped him with the Damascus Download - preparing this zealous Pharisee to spread the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire – while also writing a huge portion of the New Testament. Saul reflects back on this three-year ministry preparation, while he was age 27, 28, 29 - after which he was ready [at age 30] to be recognized and welcomed as a *true Apostle, alongside the other eleven*. The following chapter reviews what Saul was doing during those three years after his conversion and the initial discipleship of the Damascus Download.

CHAPTER FOUR

After Damascus: Mount Sinai - Moses and Saul

Saul did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor go to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before him, but went away to Arabia.

Galatians 1:16-17

Saul's supernatural experiences, first at his arrival into Damascus, and second, during those the three days sequestered in the home of Judas on Straight Street, started a three year period of discipleship to prepare him for ministry to which Jesus had called him - and would equip him. It is quite provocative that, by his own account, Saul did not immediately jump right into the ministry alongside the other Apostles in Jerusalem. Instead, the Bible explains that Saul remained in Damascus for a short time, then he went into Arabia for almost two years, before returning to Damascus, after which he journeyed back to his hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia, where he remained until Barnabas came to bring him down to

Syrian-Antioch, where he stayed for one year. These three years total [from 36 to 39 AD] have interesting parallels with Moses tending herds in Midian before beginning his ministry-calling to confront Pharaoh.

POST-DAMASCUS TIMELINE

While there remains [of course] robust debate between pastors, Bible scholars, and theologians about dates and timelines for the life of Saul, there is a sound basis and logic to the years developing in this book for Saul's likely birth, when he studied under Gamaliel, the time he went to Damascus, and the three years that followed before he was recognized in Jerusalem as a *fellow Apostle of Peter and John bar-Zebedee*. In the first Chapter of this book a timeline is proposed for the life of Saul. Born in 9 AD [makes him ten years younger than Jesus], starts his studies under Gamaliel in 23 AD at age 14, being age 20 at the time Jesus begins His ministry in 29 AD, and then 23 years old during the Passover of 32 AD when Jesus dies on the cross and is raised from the dead. The previous chapter looked at the four years from 32-to-36 AD when Saul built his notorious reputation as an intense persecutor of the church. This brings us to the three years from 36-to-39 AD *after* his call by Jesus as he entered Damascus for the first time. The Bible provides the following information about that time three-year time period:

Acts 9:22	<i>In Damascus right after his conversion</i>
Acts 9:26	<i>Initial short trip to Jerusalem</i>
Galatians 1:17	<i>Into Arabia [2 years] then back to Damascus</i>
Acts 9:30	<i>Sailed from Caesarea-to-Tarsus</i>
Acts 11:25	<i>Barnabas goes to Tarsus to find Saul</i>
Acts 11:26	<i>Returns to Syrian-Antioch [stays 1 year]</i>
Galatians 1:18	<i>After three years he went to Jerusalem</i>

Coordinating these seven accounts seems to provide this logical flow for those three years. Saul stayed in Damascus a few days after Ananias laid hands on him to restore his sight. He went briefly to Jerusalem but was not initially embraced as a follower of Jesus. Went into Arabia for perhaps about two years, then returned to Damascus before sailing to Tarsus. Barnabas was dispatched from Syrian-Antioch to Tarsus to bring him back to Antioch, and stayed for a year. Then in 39 AD, at age 30, he heads to Jerusalem where Peter and John extend to Saul *the right hand of Apostolic fellowship*. There are many questions that students of the Bible ask at this juncture: "Why did he not go right into full-time preaching of the Gospel?" "Why was he not welcomed in Jerusalem just after Damascus?" "Where in Arabia was he and what happened there?" "Why did he return to Damascus?" "Why did Saul sail back to his birthplace in Cilicia, Asia Minor?" "Why did he stay with Barnabas in Antioch for a year?" "Did he have something to do with believers first being called 'Christians' in that city?" "What prompted him to return to Jerusalem to formally meet with Peter, John, and James?"

The next three chapters review Saul's three mission trips: from 46-to-47 AD, then 51-to-54 and 54-to-57, when he had a very dynamic ministry preaching to the Gentiles - as well as expatriate Jews living throughout Asia Minor, Cyprus, Crete, and across modern-day Greece [Macedonia and Achaia]. However, before Saul ventured out on these three journeys totaling seven years, he had a three-year period of time that is not as well-known by the typical student of the Bible. While there is no extensive Scripture-narrative detailing each of the years 36-to-39 AD, there is enough to develop context for how the Lord may have used that time in the same way he did with Moses in Midian before God sent him to Pharaoh's palace. Consider the following comparisons.

MOSES AND SAUL

Planned Hiatus

Saul's three-year hiatus brings to mind how Moses also had a hiatus [for forty years] before his ministry – during which time he was married to Zipporah and worked for his father-in-law father Jethro. In both men, God apparently wanted to do a preparatory work in advance of very specific full-time ministries of His calling. God's plan was to accomplish something in Moses and Saul that would have a positive impact on their readiness to be used as God directed them. There are several obvious parallels between them regarding their *interim time period* in advance of moving into a major work of God's leading. The first is that each man had a period of time out of the spotlight, in what might be termed "the quiet years" before he was ready to go and fully-equipped for a powerful ministry that would impact millions of people.

Biblical Writers

Before looking at Saul's hiatus, consider that both men wrote significant portions of the Christian Bible. Moses wrote the Torah [Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy] - the primary authority of God's Word to mankind up to the time of King David and the prophet Samuel. Saul wrote fourteen books [the majority of the New Testament] including: Romans, first and second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, two letters to Timothy and the Thessalonians, as well as letters to Philemon, Titus, and his beloved nation of Hebrews. That is 14 of the 27 books from the Gospels to Revelation.

Chosen By God

Moses was set apart as a child for God's plan [Exodus 2:5], even as Saul was set apart while still in his mother's womb [Galatians 1:15]. Moses was saved from death in a basket [Exodus 2:3], and Saul also escaped

death in a basket [2nd Corinthians 11]. Both Moses and Saul were given the very best education [Exodus 2:10, Acts 7:22, Acts 22:3]. Moses was called by God at Mount Sinai [Acts :38], as was Saul [Galatians 1:17]. In each case, they saw a very bright light [Moses in Exodus 3:2-3, Saul in Acts 9:3] – and when they asked who it was speaking to them, the reply in each case was “I AM” [Moses in Exodus 3:13-14, Saul in Acts 22:8].

Opposed And Rejected

Moses was opposed by his Hebrew brethren [Acts 7:25, Exodus 11:14] as was Saul [Acts 9:23-24, Acts 22:18]. The Hebrews that Moses was sent to deliver, rejected his message [Acts 7:32], in the same way the Jews rejected Saul’s message of deliverance. [Acts 18:4-6]. Moses expected to be stoned by his own brethren [Exodus 17:4], while Saul was almost stoned by his brethren [Acts 14:5], and later he was stoned by them - almost to the point of death [Acts 14:19]. The false prophets of Egypt [Exodus 7:11, 2nd Timothy 3:8] openly opposed Moses, as did false teachers against Saul [1st Timothy 6:3-5]. Moses asked the Lord for a request [Deuteronomy 3:25-26] and the Lord said, “No”. This also happened to Saul [2nd Corinthians 12:8-9] three times.

Arabian Desert

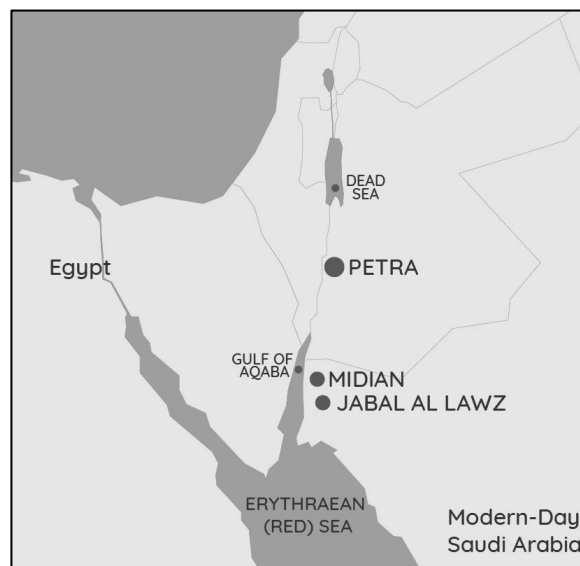
Perhaps the most intriguing comparison involves the Arabian desert. Saul comments [Galatians 1:15-17] that after his Damascus conversion he did not immediately consult with flesh and blood [the men Peter and John who were Apostles before him], ***but went away to Arabia***. It is insightful that when he writes to the Galatians [4:24-26] he says that Hagar and Jerusalem are allegories of two different Covenants – one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who were to become slaves, she is Hagar [the Egyptian] and she is ***Mount Sinai in Arabia*** and corresponds to the present Jerusalem - in slavery with her children. This

has led scholars to ascertain that Saul went to Mount Sinai so that he could fulfill the role of the "anti-type" of the Law of Moses that was given at that mountain - as Saul's message would be that salvation has now come to everyone, including the Gentiles, apart from that Law.

Some have argued Damascus was already within Nabatean Arabia so Saul was already there. But why then would he say he "went away" to Arabia? Why not just say "I remained in Damascus"? So did Saul travel to the Sinai Peninsula to the traditional location of Mount Sinai? Having read many archeological and historical commentaries about Saul saying '**Mount Sinai in Arabia**', I am persuaded that Mount Sinai is [according to Saul] on the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, in the region of the "Nabataean Arabs" - described by the Greek historian Agatharchides of Cnidus [169 BC] as, "*Much of the coast and adjacent country which extends into the interior and contains a population that is unspeakably great with herds of animals that are unbelievably numerous*". These Arabs could be Jethro's Midianites [Exodus 2:16]. Josephus aligned the **Nabataeans** with Ishmael's firstborn - **Nabaioth** [Genesis 25:13], who occupied Petra in the Hellenist/Roman era [also known as Edom, as the Bible calls Petra 'Sela in the salt valley' - 2nd Kings 14:7]. In Paul's time, Arabia extended across the Sinai Peninsula and north along the Dead Sea and Jordan River [not to be confused with the Kingdom of the Saud family that defines the modern Arabian peninsula since 1930].

Remember also that Esau married his cousin [Uncle Ishmael's daughter] a **sister of Nabaioth** [Genesis 28:8-9]. In Genesis 37:25-28 Midianites and Ishmaelites are both used to describe the caravans who purchased Joseph from his brothers. Midian [the son of Moses and Keturah] is also an uncle to Esau, and was sent away with Ishmael by Moses into the **east country** [Genesis 25]. It is on this **eastern** shore above the Aqaba

Gulf that the mountain Jabal al-Lawz [mount of almonds] rises nearly 8,500 feet – and is the most logical match with Saul’s description of the **‘Mount Sinai in Arabia’** from Galatians 4. The first map below shows the traditional site for Mount Sinai, toward the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, west of the Aqaba Gulf. The second map locates the Mount



on the eastern shore of the Aqaba Gulf – within the land of Midian. There remains [of course] great debate between these two locations. It is very interesting that Saul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaks of **Mount Sinai in Arabia** – and that there is strong evidence to support this alternate physical location. Acts 9:23-25 has Luke recount how the Jews in that city plotted to kill Saul, but his disciples helped him escape by lowering him in a large basket through an opening in the city's outer wall. Saul provides further details about this in 2nd Corinthians 11:32-33, noting, *"The ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window and escaped his hands"*. Saul needed to get far away. In the wilderness of Kadesh-Barnea was the royal city of King Aretas IV - located in the northern Sinai peninsula. Saul would have avoided that, which is why he went to **Mount Sinai in Arabia**. Consider another comparison of Moses and Saul. After an attempt on Moses' life [Exodus 2:15] he ran away from Egypt to the wilderness of Midian – *"By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king"* [Hebrews 11:27]. In the same way, Saul also ran from a king [Aretas IV] to the wilderness of Midian, which is the exact same region of **Mount Sinai in Arabia** [Galatians 1:17].

While Moses went to Sinai to receive God's Law, Saul was directed by God to Mount Sinai [Galatians 1:16] for an opposite reason - *"To reveal His Son to me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles"*. It reads as though Jesus appeared again to Saul to continue to disciple him in preparation for his calling. The Lord used Saul's time in Arabia to compare and contrast the Law given to Moses with the message that Saul would preach – that men and women are saved NOT through keeping the Law, but by grace through faith. It is a compelling argument to consider the work the Lord had to do in this Pharisee's heart and mind so his thinking would be entirely changed and he would

be re-oriented to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. Saul the zealous Pharisee was not ready to begin preaching to the Gentiles right after his conversion. The Lord had much work to do in Saul to place in him a new perspective on the Law and how men and women are saved from their sin. God had to personally instruct and disciple this Pharisee to un-learn virtually all he originally learned under the tutelage of Rabbi Gamaliel. When the Lord completed His work within him, Saul returned briefly to Damascus [Galatians 1:17], and then the brethren took him to the port of Caesarea and Saul sailed up to Tarsus in Cilicia [Acts 9:30]. Barnabas then came to Tarsus to bring Saul back to Syrian-Antioch [Acts 11:25] and he spent the final year [of those three years after his conversion] in Antioch [Acts 11:26] - teaching in the church and making many disciples. He had been personally called by Jesus and equipped [gifted] by Jesus to be the twelfth Apostle, alongside Peter, Andrew, James and John bar-Zebedee, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, James bar-Alphaeus, Simon the [zealot] Canaanite, Thaddeus, and Bartholomew.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

It must have been a challenging time for Saul, first to have Jesus ask why he was persecuting Him, then to have a three-day "quiet time" at the house, followed by his first attempt to preach about Jesus - that required him to escape the city because the ethnarch of Damascus wanted to kill him. Saul's time in **Arabia at Mount Sinai** must have been profound, as Jesus further disciplined him about salvation apart from the Law at the very site where, in 1446 BC, Moses received the Law from YHWH - almost 1,500 years before Saul. Those three years after his conversion [36-to-39 AD] in Arabia, back to Damascus, and then Tarsus, formed a new basis in Saul's heart to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. The next chapter covers the details of Saul's first mission trip.

CHAPTER FIVE

The First Mission Trip

Saul was in Antioch and the Holy Spirit said, "Set aside Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them, so they laid hands on them and sent them away."

Acts 13:1-3

Paul's calling to bring the Gospel message to the Gentiles led him to embark on three main mission trips, with arguably a fourth trip related to his journey to Rome. Each of these excursions must be recognized as the epitome of *adventures in faith*, as Paul is a devout Jewish Pharisee traveling to cities in the Roman Empire that are outside of Judea and Samaria, so he will be preaching and teaching to audiences comprised of either expatriate Jews or Roman-Hellenist Gentiles. The former group will have background in the Torah, Psalms, and writings of the prophets pertaining to Messiah, while the latter group essentially has no knowledge of Yahweh and His plan of salvation for the world. Both groups will demonstrate hostility and receptivity to the message of the

Gospel. In some cases Gentiles will quickly receive and embrace Paul's teaching, while the local ex-pat Jews in the community threaten Paul with bodily harm or death. In other cases the ex-pat Jews connected to a local synagogue will readily accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, while the Gentiles will show great anger toward these new teachings about "the one true God". Paul's itinerary will focus on Asia Minor [modern day Turkey] and include the cities and regions of Salamis on the island of Cyprus, then he will head to Paphos, Pamphylia, and Phrygia, before continuing into Lycaonia, Derbe, and Lystra. He finishes up his tour of Asia ministering at Iconium, Perga, Attalia, and then back to Antioch.

BEGINS IN ANTIOCH

The initial trip was launched from the Syrian Province city of Antioch, probably around 46 AD when he was 35 years of age. Luke records the trip in his *Acts of the Apostles*, chapters 13-and-14. While there were more than fifteen separate cities in the 1st Century Roman Empire called "Antioch", this was known as Syrian Antioch [Acts 11:19-30] and



was the third largest city of the Mediterranean basin behind only Alexandria in Egypt's Nile River Delta, and of course the capital, Rome, on the Italian peninsula. Named after Antiochus Seleucid I, king of the Hellenist Seleucid Empire from 292-261 BC, it is located just 15 miles inland from its Mediterranean port of Seleucia where the River Crontes empties into the sea. This is also just across the bay from Paul's hometown of Tarsus, a port city on the southeast coast of Asia Minor [modern day Turkey]. The city was renowned for pagan immorality and the worship of the goddess Daphne. In Acts 11:19 Luke notes Syrian Antioch as the city to which many believers in Jerusalem fled due to intense persecution, and in verse-26 he notes this is where believers in Jesus Christ were first referred to as "Christians". There is another city named Antioch referenced in Acts on Saul's missionary trips. Pisidian-Antioch is situated on a 3,600-foot plateau in the north-central lakes region of Pisidia in Asia Minor about 150 miles inland from the sea. This was founded in the early 3rd Century BC by Seleucius Nicator and named after his father, Antiochus. This city will be noted later in this chapter [Acts 13:14-16] when Paul and Bar-Nabas [his name means "Son-of-Encouragement"] hike the mountainous journey up from the port city of Perga. The Syrian-Antioch church was home to Barnabas, along with Simeon [who was also called Niger], Lucius of Cyrene [you will remember Simon who was from Cyrene as the one the Romans forced to carry Jesus' cross on the way to Golgotha], and Manean who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. It had been the capital of the Seleucid kingdom until 64 BC when Rome annexed this land. It then served simply as the capital city for the Syrian Province - of which Judea was a sector. It had temples, aqueducts, baths, and outdoor amphitheaters. Acts 13:2 records that while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas

and Saul for the work to which I have called them". And so the missionary trips to the Gentiles started, as these two went down to the port city of Seleucia and caught a ship heading west - over to the island of Cyprus [refer to the prior map].

SALAMIS, CYPRUS

Upon arriving in the east coast Cyprian city of Salamis, Luke notes they went straight to the local synagogue to proclaim Jesus to the ex-pat Jews. As a side note, it also says that John [also known as John Mark in Acts 12:12, 12:25, 15:37] was along as a helper. The overwhelming consensus over the millennia is that he is the author of the Gospel of Mark and was called "John the Evangelist" by his local contemporaries in the early church. John Mark was a close friend of Peter and penned his Gospel through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and from Peter's recounting of the nearly three years Peter followed the Lord during His earthly ministry [from September of 29 to May of 32 AD]. His mother was named Mary, and she had a fairly large gated house in Jerusalem where Peter and the church used to meet [Acts 12:12]. In writing to the church in Colossae [4:10], Paul notes a man named Mark who is the cousin of Barnabas, so this all seems to concur that John Mark would be traveling along with his cousin who was sent out from Antioch with Saul. Acts 13 states that Paul, along with these his two companions, canvassed the entire island of Cyprus, going from village to village preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This probably took a few months to complete until they arrived at Paphos on the west coast.

PAPHOS, CYPRUS

The island of Cyprus is 140 miles from east to west, and 50 miles across from the south shore to the north shore. For perspective, they covered a distance equal to going from Santa Barbara, south through the valley

into Los Angeles, and then down to the south Orange County city of San Clemente. This would then be a period of several months to walk and minister from one end of Cyprus to the other. In the westside city of Paphos there was an ex-pat Jewish false prophet using the name "Son-of-Jesus" [*Bar-Jehoshua*], doing various divination-magic to try and demonstrate his *supposed* spiritual powers. His name translated to Elymas in the local Cyprian language. He was a close associate of the Roman Proconsul named Sergius Paulus, who is specifically noted as being quite intelligent, and who calls for Paul and Barnabas to come and tell him about the Word of God. However, this false prophet is in open opposition to Paul's teaching, so Paul stares him down and states, "You are full of deceit and fraud" and gets everyone's attention by saying his name is not "Son-of-Jesus" but rather "Son-of-the-Devil", as he does not cease to twist and contort God's Word [Acts 13:10]. Paul declares the hand of the Lord will come down on him and blind him for a designated time – and so it happened. As Elymas was led away by the hand, God used this miraculous confrontation to demonstrate His great power through Paul. The Proconsul then believed in Jesus, and was amazed at Paul's teaching about the Lord. When their preaching was finished in Paphos, Paul and Barnabas boarded a ship to sail north to the seaport of Perga in the Pamphylia Province on the south coast of Asia. John Mark bids them farewell and heads back to Jerusalem. They were probably in Paphos a few months before sailing to Perga.

PAMPHYLIA PROVINCE

When their boat arrived in Perga, they did not stay in that city but traveled over 150 miles north up to Pisidian-Antioch and went right to the local synagogue and sat down to listen to the readings from both the Torah and the prophets [Acts 13:14]. The synagogue official noted

they were visitors and asked Paul for any *word of exhortation* to share with everyone - so Paul stands up and addressed the assembly. My position is that his comments were tied to those scripture passages read from the Law of Moses and the prophets [perhaps Jeremiah or Isaiah?] as he went right into Yahweh leading His people Israel out of Egypt, guiding them into Canaan, and giving them various judges up through Samuel. But Israel wanted a king like the other nations, so they got Saul, even though Samuel would anoint David as God's choice for king. Paul notes through this heritage and lineage, Yahweh brought to Israel a Savior who is Jesus, which was confirmed by John the Baptist. Paul concludes that salvation had now come to the Jews, as Jesus was crucified on a Roman cross, laid in a tomb, and rose from the dead. He then compared Jesus to King David who died and underwent decay, while Jesus did not [quoting from Psalm 16:10]. It is provocative that he states [Acts 13:39-40] they cannot be freed through the Law of Moses, and should take heed about the things spoken of by the Prophet -so they do not happen to them. I believe Paul points them directly to the readings they all heard from the Law and the Prophets as he makes a strong case for Israel's long-awaited salvation through Jesus. When he finishes his teaching, the people were literally begging him to stay for a week so Paul could teach them again on the following Sabbath. So Paul encouraged both the ex-pat Jews and the proselytes [Gentiles who had converted to Judaism] to "*continue in the grace of God*" [Acts 13:43].

Paul and Barnabas did stay that extra week and returned to that same synagogue for Shabbat, but this time Luke records that "*the entire city showed up to hear Paul teach the Word of the Lord*". Many Jews were angered that Gentiles were also listening alongside them, so in their jealousy they contradicted what Paul taught and blasphemed against

his preaching. It is incredibly profound that Paul tells these Jews that they had the Gospel proclaimed to them first, but they rejected it, so now eternal life was freely being offered to the Gentiles. Paul openly quotes Isaiah 42:6 that God has placed a light to the Gentiles in order to bring *salvation to the ends of the earth*. As you might imagine, the Gentiles rejoiced to hear this, however the Jews purposefully incited the devout prominent women of Pisidian Antioch and the leading men to rise up against Paul and Barnabas, forcibly driving them out of that region. This is where the now famous act of “shaking off the dust” from their sandals was a symbol of openly acknowledging those Jews who rejected the Gospel – fully in accordance with Jesus’ own teaching to His disciples in Matthew 10:14. I see this as more direct evidence that Saul of Tarsus was in fact personally disciplined by Jesus during those three days Saul sat motionless on Straight Street in Damascus [refer again back to Chapter Three and *The Damascus Download*]. And yet in spite of that difficulty with the ex-pat Jews, it is very encouraging to see how Acts 13:52 concludes their time in Pisidian Antioch with: *“And the disciples were continually filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.”*

ICONIUM of PHRYGIA

The next city to visit was Iconium, just southeast of Pisidian Antioch. It is nice to read [Acts 14:1] that they had a very positive initial response to their teaching the Gospel - that “a large number of people believed, both Jews and Greeks”. However, once again the devout followers of traditional Judaism who rejected the Gospel message were quick to stir up the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas. Luke records they stayed in the city for “a long time” with the results being that the Gentiles were divided, as some sided with the ex-pat Jews and did not believe Paul’s teachings, while others *did believe*. There eventually was a plot by the

Jews to stone Paul and Barnabas, but they were alerted to it and left Iconium, heading south to the Lycaonia region and the cities of Lystra and Derbe, and continued to boldly preach the Gospel of Jesus.

LYSTRA of LYCAONIA

When they entered Lystra they saw a crippled man sitting by the side of the street who had been lame since his birth, so he had never walked in his entire life. Acts 14:9 records that while Paul was preaching to those gathered around, the Holy Spirit prompted Paul to fix his eyes on this man and revealed that the man had a deep faith inside that he could be made well. So Paul was obedient to that prompting from God and boldly said with a loud voice, "Stand up on your feet" - and the man did, and walked around and leaped for joy on his newly restored legs. The crowds who witnessed this shouted out in their Lycaonia language, *"The gods have become like men and come down to us"*. It would be easy for a preacher to readily accept such adulation and positive praise bestowed on him from men and women. However, unlike so many false teachers who crave the adoration of their audiences, Paul and Silas are quick to turn the attention off of themselves and direct it onto the Lord. The crowds went so far as to say that Barnabas was actually the Greek god Zeus, and Paul was the god Hermes because he was the main one who spoke to the people. Then the priest from the temple of Zeus just outside the city showed up with beautiful garlands of flowers and an ox to sacrifice, because he was told that Zeus had come down to the city.

PAUL IS STONED

Paul and Barnabas literally tore their robes when they heard what was said and saw the priests ready to sacrifice to them [Acts 14:14]. They rushed into the crowd publicly declaring they were just ordinary men like anyone else in the city, but they had a message that the people

should turn away from the idol worship of statues, and instead worship the living God who actually did create the heaven and the earth and the seas and all that is in them [verse-15]. Paul's message then focused on how in prior generations God had allowed people to go after their own ways, and yet He did not leave them without a solid witness in the general revelation of rains and fruitful crops that satisfied them and made them happy. But the crowd was still leaning toward exalting Paul and Barnabas until the ex-pat Jews from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium showed up to contest all that was being taught - and they actually won over the people that these two preachers should be stoned. The crowd then grabbed Paul and stoned him to the point that he appeared to be dead as they dragged him outside the city gates and left him there. This beating must have been intense and resulted in severe wounds as Paul seemed a dead man. There must have been quite a lot of blood. When Barnabas and some of the local believers came and stood over him, Paul was able to get to his feet. The Biblical account is not clear on the exact details of Paul's physical restoration, but it was clearly a true miracle from the Lord for him to be able to stand up and be so quickly restored physically - to the point that he could depart the city the very next day [Acts 14:20] and was able to make the overland walk of 62 miles to the city of Derbe, which probably took seven days.

DERBE

The time in Derbe seems to have been relatively short. Luke writes that they went into the city, preached the Gospel to the local people, and many new disciples were made. This much more positive response to Paul's teaching must have been a nice change of pace immediately after having been stoned in Lystra for preaching the same message. It is most interesting that [Acts 14:21] when they left Derbe, they returned

back through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. It would have been quite the sight for the local ex-pat Jews and previously angry Gentiles in Lystra to see Paul and Barnabas come back through the city perhaps just two or three weeks after they stoned him and thought him dead. Luke notes [Acts 14:22-23] that they strengthened the souls of the new disciples and encouraged them to continue in their faith, reminding them that it is through **many trials and tribulation** that believers enter into the kingdom of God. They also appointed elders in each of the new churches, having prayed and fasted together for the Lord to show His choice in these men. These are “epi-skopas” [over-seers] in the Greek – men to have spiritual authority within that local church body, and these were commended to the Lord in whom they had believed. It is a common theme to see Paul prayerfully appointing elders in each of the new churches he develops during his missionary trips.

RETURN TO SYRIAN ANTIOCH

This inaugural missionary endeavor to take the Gospel message out to the Gentiles had Paul and Silas go through Pisidia and the Pamphylia province to the sister seaport cities of Perga and Attalia. There are no details about what occurred in each location, but it is reasonable that they preached the Gospel and taught the Scriptures to Gentiles, and to ex-pat Jews in the local synagogues. Based upon details from prior cities, there were no doubt many who believed, and those who openly opposed their message. They boarded a ship in the port of Attalia and sailed for the west coast of the Syrian province, so they could then return to Antioch, from which they were originally sent out on this initial missionary journey. It is perhaps just a subtle commentary that Luke says [Acts 14: 26-27] that they had **accomplished their work by the grace of God**, and when they arrived back to Antioch and gathered the

church together, they told all that God had done with them and how He had opened up a door of faith to the Gentiles. This was no doubt a major new development in the launch of the “Christian” church.

FOUR-YEAR INTERIM

When Acts chapter-14 concludes the first missionary trip, there is a period of four years [47 until 51 AD] alluded to between Acts 15:1 and verse 15 – as Paul is only mentioned going to Jerusalem with Barnabas for the council of the Apostles [the famous Jerusalem Council of 50 AD] and many church elders, to take up the matter of whether Gentiles who become believers in Jesus should then adopt all the Jewish rituals and customs from the Law of Moses - most notably that the men needed to be circumcised. Paul would make an excellent resource in this matter because the dispute started with the Pharisees in Jerusalem who had become Christians. Paul was a widely-known and learned Pharisee and could readily reason with these religious leaders regarding the correct interpretation and application of the beloved Mosaic Law relative to the Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus.

Peter makes his famous rationale [Acts 15:7-10] that they [the Jews] should not place on the Gentile believers a burdensome yoke that the Jewish Christians themselves have not been able to fully abide by for centuries – namely, adhering to all aspects of the Mosaic Law. When he finishes up by declaring everyone is saved by faith and not by the works of trying to keep the Law, Luke records that the assembly was quite engaged in hearing Paul and Barnabas tell how their first mission trip through Asia resulted in the Lord doing many amazing signs and wonders among the people, and that Gentiles were also being saved, as well as receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

This immediately brings my mind to Paul later writing to the church in Rome [9:23-25] as he quotes from the prophet Hosea, referring to the Gentiles as those “vessels of mercy” which He prepared beforehand for glory, not us the Jews, but the Gentiles, that I will call those who were not my people, “My People”, and she who was not beloved I will call “Beloved”. Paul knew from direct firsthand experiences that Gentiles readily received the message of the Gospel and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were truly saved, were baptized, and also filled with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

It seems reasonable that Paul, telling those at the Jerusalem Council about how the Lord worked among the Gentiles in places like Salamis, Paphos, Pisidian-Antioch, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Attalia, must have had a positive influence among the Apostles Peter and John, and also James – for he declares the final ruling on the matter of Gentiles and the law [Acts 15:13-21]. They decide to send Paul and Barnabas up to Antioch, along with two leading men in the Jerusalem church – Judas Barsabbas and Silas [each gifted in the Holy Spirit with prophecy] - with a formal letter direct from the Apostles and local church elders regarding their discernment of the matter of Gentiles and the Law. The four men arrive in Syrian-Antioch, read the Council letter aloud, and all were greatly encouraged. Judas Barsabbas returned to Jerusalem, but Silas stayed in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. [Look ahead to page 130 to read the full details of Saul at the Jerusalem Council in 50 AD.]

CHAPTER SUMMARY

It remains a truly remarkable event in the life of the Christian church, that Paul, accompanied by Barnabas [and initially with John Mark], were able to travel to several cities and regions in Cyprus and Asia Minor to preach the Gospel message to both ex-pat Jews living abroad, as well

as many Gentiles who were primarily Hellenists and Romans. Paul and Barnabas provided a detailed report of everything that had happened since departing Syrian-Antioch about fourteen months earlier. Barnabas and Silas are then tasked with going down to Jerusalem to meet with Peter, James [the brother of Jesus], and John bar-Zebedee who are the lead elders in that Jewish church. Only Barnabas goes to Jerusalem, because Silas decides to stay in Antioch, and will accompany Paul on the upcoming second missionary trip coming up in less than a year. The next chapter covers the nearly three years of that second trip.

TIME	LOCATION
Mid-46 AD	Starts in Syrian-Antioch
6 months	Salamis on Cyprus
2 months	Paphos on Cyprus
1 week	Sailed to Perga
1 month	Walked thru Pamphylia Province
2 weeks	Pisidian-Antioch
2 weeks	Iconium of Phrygia
1 month	Lystra of Lycaonia
1 week	Derbe
2 months	Return via Lystra-Iconium-Antioch
1 month	Walked to Perga and Attalia
2 weeks	Sail to Syrian Province
1 week	Return to Antioch
Late-47 AD	Approx. 14 Months Total

CHAPTER SIX

The Second Mission Trip

Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, "Come over and help us" so he reasoned God called him to preach the Gospel to them.

Acts 16:9-10

There were approximately some four years between the completion of the first mission trip sometime in late 47 AD and the start of the second venture to the Gentiles, which most likely took place between 51 and 54 AD. The second extended missionary journey is found beginning in Acts 15:35 continuing up through Acts 18:22 and lasts around three years. The main focus of this second mission trip is to go back and visit the churches that were launched on the initial itinerary, and probably deliver copies of a letter that contained a summary of the Jerusalem Council regarding Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus, and whether they must observe the Mosaic Law. Remember that Paul's own

testimony of God's work among the Gentiles seemed to contribute to Peter's position on the matter of the Law of Moses, after which James delivered the final summation for the Council's decisions.

Paul and Barnabas are now back in Syrian-Antioch with their colleague Silas, who decided to stay with them rather than go back to Jerusalem with Judas Barsabbas. Luke records [Acts 15:36] how Paul told Barnabas they should return to the churches from their first missionary trip and visit all the brethren to "see how they are doing". As the two discuss plans for their upcoming journey, Barnabas makes it clear that he wants John Mark to come along again, just as he did on their first trip. Perhaps this was because they were cousins [Colossians 4:10], but Paul continued to insist they not take him because he did not finish the first trip with them, having left them on Cyprus when he returned to Jerusalem [refer to Chapter Five]. This "sharp disagreement" between them [Acts 15:39] became such a concern for Paul and Barnabas they decided to separate because of it. Barnabas took his cousin John Mark and they sailed back to the island of Cyprus, just as the first journey had started out, probably planning to return to the believers in Salamis, and then visit all the churches across the island over to Paphos on the west coast. Paul instead decided to take Silas with him and travel overland north through the remainder of the Syrian Province, before heading over to Paul's hometown Province of Cilicia in south Asia Minor. They most likely stopped at Tarsus [but the Bible does not expressly state they did], and these two were strengthening the churches [Acts 15:41].

RETURN TO DERBE AND LYSTRA

Paul and Silas returned to Derbe and Lystra [Acts 16:1]. While in Lystra, they picked up young Timothy [his mother was a Jew and his father was Greek – a microcosm of the audiences Paul typically encountered

on his mission trips]. The believers in both Lystra and nearby Iconium spoke favorably about this young man [we will use the English version of name Timothy from now on]. It is interesting that Paul took Timothy and circumcised him as per the Law of Moses [Acts 16:3] *"because of the Jews who were in those parts who all knew his father was Greek"*. It is very intriguing that while Paul agreed with the Jerusalem Council and its summary letter regarding the matter of circumcision for Gentiles, he nonetheless has Timothy comply with the Law because even though his father is a Gentile, his mother and grandmother are Jews. In Paul's second letter to pastor Timothy [1:5] he specifically mentions that Timothy's Jewish mother is Eunice, and his Jewish grandmother is Lois, and these two women had a strong faith which they passed along to their son, and grandson. Paul further notes [2 Timothy 3:15] how Timothy had been instructed in the sacred writings [Torah, Psalms, prophets] since his childhood, which was no doubt referring once again to his mother Eunice and grandma Lois guiding him. There are no further comments on this matter, but it is curious to think that Paul was so concerned the Jews would not accept Timothy - because he was raised in a Greek household and had not been circumcised as an infant.

Cilicia is on the south central coast of Asia Minor. It is from there the three of them traveled due north into the central regions of Phrygia and Galatia [Acts 16:6], but were instructed by the Holy Spirit to not speak the Word in the region of Asia, which is a region on the far west coast [includes the city of Ephesus]. They did make it over into the northwest coast city of Mysia, from which they planned to move further north into the region of Bithynia [Acts 16:7], but once again the Holy Spirit told them to not go into that region. Many theologians speculate about the rationale behind the Holy Spirit forbidding them from going into the

regions of "Asia" and "Bithynia". The western areas of Asia Minor include the cities whose churches were the focus of those seven letters found within Jesus' Revelation given to the Apostle John: Laodicea, Ephesus, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamum, Smyrna, and Troas [below].



The next, more detailed, map also shows the region of Troas on the far north coast, which included the famous Mount Ida and the city of Troy.



"COME OVER" TO GREECE

It is in Troas [Acts 16:9] that Paul is given a vision during the night of a man standing on the shores of Macedonia across the Aegean Sea with a specific appeal: "Come over here to Macedonia and help us". So they concluded that God was calling them to preach the Gospel over there [Acts 16:10-11] and boarded a ship sailing northwest to the Greek island of Samothrace. From there they changed ships and sailed over to the coastal city of Neapolis, and then to Philippi - the leading city in Macedonia [northern Greece], which was a Roman colony [Acts 16:12] and named for Philipp II of Macedon around 350 BC. Paul and Silas were now in a thoroughly Gentile environment of pagan temples, statues, altars, and commerce dedicated to various Greek gods. When the Sabbath came around, Paul went outside the city to either the river Strymon or Nestos [the Bible does not name which it was]. This was a place of prayer for the locals. He began speaking to the women who had assembled. It is fascinating to notice that Luke begins to use the personal pronouns "we" and "us" starting in verses 10-11 of Acts 16, so this infers that this is where he first joins up with Paul and Silas. It is reasonable to propose that perhaps Luke was that man of Macedonia that Paul saw in his night vision asking Paul to come over to Greece.

FIRST EUROPEAN BELIEVERS

Among those women who heard Paul's teaching at the river was Lydia, who was from Thyatira in Asia Minor. Luke writes [Acts 16:14-15] that Lydia had a business selling purple-dyed fabrics and was a worshipper of God. But then the Gospel message of Jesus was presented and the Lord opened up her heart to accept the gift of salvation. She and her household all came to faith in Christ that day and were baptized right there in the river. The city of Thyatira is one of the seven churches from

the book of Revelation to whom Jesus asks John to write a very specific letter. When the Apostle John was exiled on Patmos in the latter half of the 1st Century, the church in Thyatira was noted [Revelation 2:19] for growing in love and faith with service and perseverance. But this church got called out [verse-20] for allowing a woman who was a self-declared prophetess with her own followers to come in and coexist among the congregation. She is referred to by Jesus with an Old Testament connotation label of "Jezebel". This historical woman was the wife of King Ahab. He was the one who made the Asherah [high places of idol worship], while she persecuted God's true prophets, even as she promoted the sexually immoral pagan worship of Ba'al. She also had a temple built in Samaria to this idol [1st Kings 16 and 18]. How sad that the church in Thyatira, that may have started in the early-to-mid 50s AD when Lydia returned from Macedonia, had digressed over the next four decades to the place of this warning from Jesus. This is a reminder to us today that no matter how good things may appear in a church for a given season, there is always the propensity for false teachers and false doctrine to make their way into the congregation if there is not strong leadership in place providing spiritual oversight and covering.

This conversion of Lydia and others at the Strymon or Nestos river is then the official record of the very first believers in all of Europe coming to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is very exciting to think of Luke being part of that initial missionary work in Europe, in Macedonia, northern Greece, and he is also the one who later writes down the full account as part of his *Acts of the Apostles* penned as a second volume to his friend and colleague Theophilus [following his Gospel]. Stop for a moment and pause to consider how many Christians ultimately followed all throughout the European continent over the ensuing twenty centuries. Paul was faithful to his calling and went over across

the Aegean Sea in response to the Lord showing him a man standing on the shoreline saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us". Truly God had an amazing plan in mind to spread the message of the Gospel throughout the Mediterranean basin during the 1st Century AD Roman Empire. What started in Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost in 32 AD, had moved north into Syrian Antioch, then throughout the island of Cyprus, before moving into the various provinces of Asia Minor. The Gospel will now be preached in many Greek regions and cities, and eventually make its way to the capital of the Roman Empire.

SPIRITUAL CONFRONTATION

The joy of seeing those initial people come to a personal faith in Jesus was then tempered by a much deeper spiritual struggle that began as the Good News was being introduced into this very pagan population. Luke recounts [Acts 16:16-24] his first-hand eye-witness experience seeing a local Greek slave-girl whom her masters utilized as a fortune-teller to make themselves wealthy. She had a "spirit of divination". This is to say she did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in her, so each of the testimonies she spoke were not sound and righteous, but were rather a manipulation by others simply for monetary profit. She began to follow Paul around wherever he was teaching, and would cry out for all to hear, *"These men are bond-servants of the Most High God and are declaring to you the way of salvation"*. Notice she is not saying anything blatantly opposing about Paul or Silas. In fact, one could say she seemed to be speaking out a true testimony about the Apostle, that he was in fact a *doulos* of the Most High God [in Greek it means for a former slave to now willingly give himself to service to his master, not by any force or by compulsion], and in fact Paul's message was the Gospel – a testimony of the way of salvation for men and women.

However, she was calling this out loudly, probably over and over, and maybe with a sarcastic tone, as a bothersome distraction to both Paul as he taught, and those trying to concentrate on the message from God's Word that was hard to hear with her yelling out nearby. There have been several times over the last few decades where I was listening to Pastor Chuck, or Ricky Ryan, or Chuck Missler and some guy starts talking out loud in the sanctuary or fellowship hall. And while these teachers tried to stay on track with their lessons, it became quite a nuisance for both them trying to speak over the other voice, as well as for all of us in the audience wishing to stay focused on the teaching. I have also been the teacher when a similar distraction has happened. It is an awkward moment in trying to block that out and speak over the other person, seeing it on the congregation's faces as they wonder when someone will go over and get him or her to quiet down.

This is no doubt one of the many tangible experiences Paul had in dealing directly with evil spirits and Satanic forces that sought to challenge and undermine his teaching, because he would later write to the Ephesian church [6:11-12] that he fully understood how Christians do not simply wrestle against flesh and blood, but the schemes of the literal Devil, against RULERS, against POWERS, against the WORLD FORCES of THIS DARKNESS, SPIRITUAL FORCES of WICKEDNESS in the heavenly places. That is such a provocative passage to consider for any believers in Jesus who come against direct spiritual opposition as they seek to do ministry for the Lord. It is not merely some people who are offended by the Gospel message and then give Christians a hard time. Rather, it is literally a unique *spiritual* dimension that co-exists alongside the natural, physical world in which we live and what we are able to see with our own eyes. For against such spiritual attacks Paul explained believers must always put on the full complement of spiritual

armor [Ephesians 6:13-17] including: a] being girded in truth, b] with a chest-protector of righteousness, c] shoes that fit for the preparation of the Gospel of peace, d] a defensive shield of faith, e] the helmet of salvation, and f] the offensive sword of God's Spirit - the very Word of God - that is [Hebrews 4:12] sharper than any other two-edged sword, being able to distinguish between the soul and spirit of a person, able to judge both a person's thoughts [soul] and intentions [spirit].

It is Paul's shield of faith that provides a *spiritual* defense against this gal as she hurled fiery arrows at Paul in her daily, relentless crying out while he tried to teach the Word of God to the people. One might say, "She was speaking the truth about Paul and Silas" - but the key issues here are, first - she could literally not say anything else because her evil spirit found itself in submission to the Holy Spirit dwelling in Paul and Silas. Second, her nonstop yelling at them was a bothersome spiritual distraction and annoying to try and teach over. Why then would the evil spirit keep saying Paul and Silas were bondservants of the Most High God who teach the way of salvation? This is similar to Luke's Gospel account [2:28] of the man in Gennesaret possessed by the demons calling themselves Legion, who fell at the feet of Jesus and cried aloud that same testimony, "What do have to do with me Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" How interesting that supposedly frightening spiritual demons and evil spirits must openly confess the truth of Jesus when confronted by Him in person, or with those who proclaim His Gospel.

The key word that comes to mind from God's Word associated with this type of direct spiritual encounter with evil is "craftiness" [in the Greek the word is *panourgia*]. It literally means to be **cunning and subtly false**. Be sure to make note of that. It is not about blatant lies and readily identifiable false doctrines. Rather, it is about evil that is **cunning**, while

its falsehoods are **subtle**. It is one thing to have something completely erroneous come up against God's Word – where everyone is quick to see it for the lie it is. But it is a **cunning** strategy when untruths may at first glance have the appearance of being truthful, but their lack of alignment with God's Word is so **subtle** that it can easily lead people astray who do not have strong spiritual discernment to recognize it as evil. Paul uses *panourgia* in 1st Corinthians 3:19 when he notes that the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God, for God catches them in their "*subtle craftiness*" to deceive. It also refers to how those in the world think they are so knowledgeable, but they are actually foolish in how they instead rely on their own reasoning, thoughts, and interpretations. Paul also used it in 2nd Corinthians 4:2 when he proclaimed believers must renounce ***those things hidden of dishonesty*** - because of our shame, for we no longer walk in the *panourgia* like those who "adulterate" the truth of God's Word.

Later on in 2nd Corinthians 11:3, Paul compared the deceitfulness of false doctrine coming into the church, that leads minds astray from the simplicity and purity of following Christ, as being similar to the way that Eve was also deceived by the *panourgia* of Satan, as his **cunning** ever so **subtly** twisted God's Word. And then in Ephesians 4:14, Paul makes it very clear that we are to no longer be like little children in our faith, being tossed here and there by waves and every wind of false doctrine that comes along, by the trickery of men, by that same *panourgia*, and deceitful scheming. This is the how **subtle** and **cunning** deception occurs within the church. Satan used this very same strategy to tempt Jesus in the wilderness [Matthew 4:1-11, also in Mark 1 and Luke 4] – manipulating and twisting the true meaning of God's Word.

This girl had a spirit inhabiting her that was not from God, and so she becomes a nuisance as she follows Paul everywhere and continues to distract his listeners from the Word he is teaching. Notice she does not say that Paul and Silas are something blatantly untrue, but instead the evil spirit within her is simply responding to the truth of the Holy Spirit in them – that which is so different than what is in her. And we know that the spirit within her is evil and not from God because Luke writes [Acts 16:18] that Paul stared her down and said to the spirit in her [not just to the girl herself], *“I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her”* – and the spirit did so that very moment. Paul would not command the Holy Spirit to come out of the girl – that would make no sense at all. This is instead Paul, by the Holy Spirit richly dwelling in him, commanding an inferior evil spirit within the girl to come out. This is the one true God having dominion over a deceitful evil spirit who has no choice but to immediately submit to the Lord’s power and authority. It is just as James [2:19] stated, that evil spirits very plainly know and believe in the one true God and they shudder at His presence. Jesus clarified this when the religious leaders accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub [Matthew 12:24-29] - and He replied, *“Does Satan cast out Satan?”* Of course that is not the case. Jesus clarified for them, *“I cast out demons by the Spirit of God who has come to you”*. Paul was clearly dealing with an opposing evil spirit.

When this gal’s masters saw that her divining spirit had departed, they knew their money-making scheme had also departed [Acts 16:19], so they grabbed hold of Paul and Silas to bring them before the Philippian authorities at the public marketplace, accusing them of “throwing our Roman city into a state of confusion because they are Jews who proclaim Jewish teachings and customs which are not lawful for us to

accept - seeing how we are all *Roman citizens*" [Acts 16:20-21]. The citizens of Philippi then joined in this uprising against them. The chief magistrates ordered Paul and Silas stripped down so they could be beaten on their bare backs with rods, after which he had them thrown into the local jail with guards ordered to hold them securely. Paul and Silas were hauled into the inner cellblock [Acts 16:24] where their feet were put in ankle chains [stocks] so they could not move about.

SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

The preaching of the Gospel, in complete obedience to what God had called Paul to do, resulted in people coming to faith in Jesus Christ, but also intense spiritual opposition that landed them in a Philippian jail. It is worth noting that God has never promised "all will run smoothly and everything will be wonderful if you follow me and serve me in ministry". Jesus plainly taught His Apostles [John 16:33] *"In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart for I have overcome this world"*. James concurred [1:2-4] that believers should *"Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and let such endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete – lacking in nothing"*. Paul later explains to the young pastor of the church in Ephesus, *"Indeed, all who desire to lead a Godly life will be persecuted"* [2nd Timothy 3:12]. Peter also understood this [1st Peter 4:12-14] as he encouraged believers to not be surprised *"at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though this was something strange happening to you, but to the degree that you get to share in the suffering of Christ, keep on rejoicing, because if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because His Holy Spirit dwells with you"*. Jesus very clearly stated [John 15:19] *"If you were of this world, then it would love you as its own, but because you are not of this world, as I have chosen you out*

from this world, then the world will hate you". Jesus also made it clear [John 16:33] that "in the world you have tribulation, but take courage for I have overcome the world". Paul would later write to the believers in the church in Rome [5:23] "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that this produces endurance". Persecution was part of the ministry.

SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE

Paul and Silas were in the Philippian jail because of a spiritual battle. It was around midnight [Acts 16:25] when they were sitting up, their legs still fettered, and were singing hymns aloud, for the other prisoners were listening to them as the sound carried down the hallways into the various cells. Suddenly, an earthquake rocked the facility so that the cell doors were opened and the fetters came off all the prisoners. This was not simply coincidence with the occurrence of a natural event, but it was a miracle God used to show His power. Luke records when the jailer realized all the doors were open, he assumed all those previously in chains were now gone. Knowing that death was the penalty for allowing prisoners to escape, the jailer drew his sword to take his life, rather than be arrested and perhaps flogged to death. But Paul called out loudly to him, "Do no harm yourself, for we are all here". The jailer got his lantern, went inside the cell of Paul and Silas where he bowed before them in fear and trembling. He then led them out of the jail to his house and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" Such a provocative question. The prisoners are the ones who have just been released from bondage, but he asks what HE must do to be saved. Paul clearly explained the simplicity of the gospel message [Acts 16:29-34] that the jailer and his entire household need only "believe in the Lord Jesus and you will; be saved". This brand new brother-in-the-Lord takes time right then in the middle of the night to wash and treat the

bloodied open wounds Paul and Silas had from their being beaten with rods. Then they all have some food together while rejoicing greatly in how the Lord brought salvation to that household. It is amazing to think God allowed Paul and Silas to be beaten and put in jail, which resulted in the jailer and his entire household coming to saving faith in Jesus. It is often only after we have the 20/20 vision of hindsight that we fully recognize the amazing way God uses our circumstances to bring about His will in us, and in others. Paul will later pen the famous words [Romans 8:28] *"God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose"*.

PAUL KNOWS ROMAN LAW

When the meal is finished it is inferred that Paul and Silas probably get some sleep back at the jail [Acts 16:40] – perhaps in the courtyard rather than in their cells, which were probably damaged by the quake. When morning arrives the chief magistrate of Philippi sends some constables to the jail with the message to release Paul and Silas. This seems to connote that news of the earthquake and prisoners being at the jailer's home had made its way to the magistrate, and wanting to rid himself of any further involvement with such a supernatural event, the magistrate decides it is best to **secretly release them** [Acts 16:37] and hope nothing more comes of this predicament. In fact, he even tries to slide in the closing salutation, "Go in peace" as if to treat all that happened with the arrest, beatings, and imprisonment like it was no big deal or some misunderstanding. However, Paul is a lawyer by training, a rabbi-Pharisee who knew the Law of Moses inside out and backward. He also was a free-born Roman citizen from Tarsus of Cilicia, so he no doubt knew Roman law as well. When the jailer tells Paul the message from the magistrate he replies [Acts 16:37] with a message back to the magistrate clearly stating that Paul and Silas are Roman

citizens who have been beaten and jailed without being given a fair trial. Paul includes in his reply the mandate that if they want he and Silas out of prison [and to go quietly on their way] then the magistrate must come down and personally release them from the jail. When he does arrive, he is so distraught about having punished two Roman citizens without a trial that he literally begs them to come out, and repeatedly appeals to Paul and Silas to leave Philippi. When they exit the prison, they go over to the home of Lydia and have a nice meeting with the Christian brothers and sisters before they head out of the city, no doubt recounting their full testimony of what God accomplished in the prison, as well as with the jailer and his entire household.

THESSALONICA

The next step on the itinerary is to head some 14 miles southwest from Philippi to the port city of Thessalonica. This was where the Ignatia Way from Italy intersected the north-south trade route from the Aegean Sea to what is now the Danube River. Since 146 BC it had been the capital of Macedonia. In 42 BC it became a free city after the battle of Philippi.



During the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, Thessalonica was first loyal to the "Roman Senate" and Pompey, but later switched its support to Anthony and Octavian for which it received the designation as a free city [entirely Roman in every way – as if one lived in Rome itself, even though it was northern Greece]. This journey went through the two smaller enclaves of Amphipolis and Apollonia - the former was home to a large outdoor amphitheater, while the latter was home to a famous temple to the Olympic deity Apollo.

When Paul and Silas arrive, they go right to the local synagogue of the ex-pat Jews living there, and [Acts 17:1-4] were granted opportunities to speak [teach] on Shabbat for three consecutive weeks, expounding the Torah, the prophets, and the Psalms. The result was initially good, as some Jews believed that Jesus was the Messiah, along with a large number of the local Greeks who were God-fearing men, and many of the leading women in the city. However, a mob of Jews and many local Greeks from the marketplace attacked the house of Jason, believing Paul and Silas were inside. When they find they are not in this house, the mob drags Jason outside to the legal authorities of Thessalonica shouting that these men who have upset the world [Acts 17:5-9] have now brought their teachings here and Jason has welcomed them. They say Paul is in direct contradiction to Roman law and the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king named Jeho-shua. It is not clear whether they ever get Paul and Silas to the local judicial body, but they did stir up the citizens to the point of forcing Jason to swear an oath – perhaps making a very public legal pledge of loyalty to Caesar and the laws of the Roman Empire. This seems to infer that his pledge was that he would not follow this new teaching about "king" Jesus, and he would no longer welcome Paul and Silas into his home in the future.

BEREA

Having left Thessalonica, Paul and Silas continued moving southwest to Berea [refer back a few pages to the prior map]. This is a much smaller city that sits on the eastern slopes of Vermio Mountains, which is just north of the famous Mount Olympus. When they arrive, once again they go straight to the local synagogue [Acts 17:10] to begin teaching about Jesus and the Gospel from the Torah, the Psalms, and prophets. Many seasoned students of the Bible will have their ears perk up when Berea is mentioned. Luke writes in the now famous Acts 17:11, *“These in Berea were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the Word of God with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see whether the things being taught were so”*. This has been referenced as a great description of how all believers should function – being strong, diligent students of the Word of God, knowing the Scriptures very well. The “noble” [*eugenes* in the Greek] refers to a person who has an inherent temperament ideally suited for reason and rational inquiry. The Bereans did not simply accept the Gospel solely on the basis of Paul’s teachings alone. Rather, his instruction was the basis [the gateway] by which they were willing to further examine what the Scriptures did in fact teach about Messiah, His suffering, and the resurrection from the dead. As such, they were most likely putting to the test all that was preached to them about Jesus of Nazareth being the Messiah, by carefully reviewing what had been written in the Torah, Psalms, and the prophets to ensure it all lined up with the ministry of Jesus and how He died on the cross for the sins of the world. It is well worth noting that the comparison to the believers in Thessalonica was not ignorant ineptitude versus Berean noble-mindedness. In fact, Paul says [1st Thessalonians 2:13] that he thanked God that when those in the church at Thessalonica received the Word that Paul taught them, it

was not accepted simply as the “word of a man”, but rather for what it truly was - the very Word of God which performs its work in the men and women who believe. This clearly means the Thessalonians did not accept the Gospel based just on Paul’s ability to deliver a great message or teaching-lesson. Paul commends this church in the first ten verses of his initial letter to them, regarding their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in the Lord. As such, they became examples of a sound church to believers throughout Achaia and Macedonia [1st Thessalonians 1:7-9] as they turned away from idol worship to the One true God. They were Greeks, the same as those in Berea, and they valued wisdom, knowledge, learning new things, and exposure to different ways of thinking as any Greek would [Paul speaks of this in 1st Corinthians 1:22]. But Luke’s commentary in Acts 17:11 made the distinction that those in Berea were *MORE noble-minded*.

With regard to 1st Thessalonians 2:13, the Greek word for “received” is *paralambano*, and has two meanings. One refers to taking or grasping understanding from someone else. The other refers to fully accepting and eagerly embracing. So those believers in the Thessalonica church were similar to those in Berea because they understood that what Paul taught was not something he came up with on his own. It was not Paul making up his own ideas about God. The difference between those in Berea and those in Thessalonica was that the Bereans were even *MORE noble-minded* [as Luke says], to the extent they went that one step further to fully embracing the Gospel, for they took it upon themselves to ***personally search the Scriptures daily*** to confirm that what Paul was teaching was in fact verifiable in every way with what was written in the Torah, the Psalms, and the prophets - that Jesus of Nazareth is Messiah and he literally fulfills everything prophesied about God’s Anointed.

Luke observed firsthand [Acts 17:12] what took place in Berea – that “many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek men and women”. Be sure note exactly what Luke means in his description. The *MORE noble-minded* Bereans were ex-pat Jews who went to the small local synagogue and had access to the Hebrew Scriptures [most likely a Greek Septuagint translation of the Torah, Psalms, and prophets – as completed in Alexandria in the early part of the 3rd Century BC]. These were the ones who knew the Law of Moses, the prophecies of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Malachi, Hosea, Samuel, Zechariah, Jonah, Ezekiel, along with how David, Asaph, and Korah referred to Messiah throughout the Psalms. The “many of them” he clarifies as that first group, the ex-pat Jews. Then he clarifies that a second group also believed – the prominent Greek men and women. It shows that while some Jews were still going to their little synagogue on Shabbat each week to hear the readings of the Scriptures, not only did some of them put their faith in Jesus as Messiah and Savior, but Greeks also were persuaded by Paul’s teachings that they needed to put their own faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

However, spiritual attacks continued. Word got back to Thessalonica that this Pharisee named Saul from Tarsus preached in Berea and both Jews and Greeks accepted his teachings and put their faith in Jesus. So those same Thessalonians who dragged Jason out of his home and petitioned the legal authorities that Paul contradicted Roman law and the decrees of Caesar [saying there is another king named Jeho-shua] – these agitated the Berean populace in opposition to Paul. The local believers sent Paul outside Berea [Acts 17:13-15] all the way down to the Aegean Sea, while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. From there they escorted him all the way south to Athens. Most likely they went by

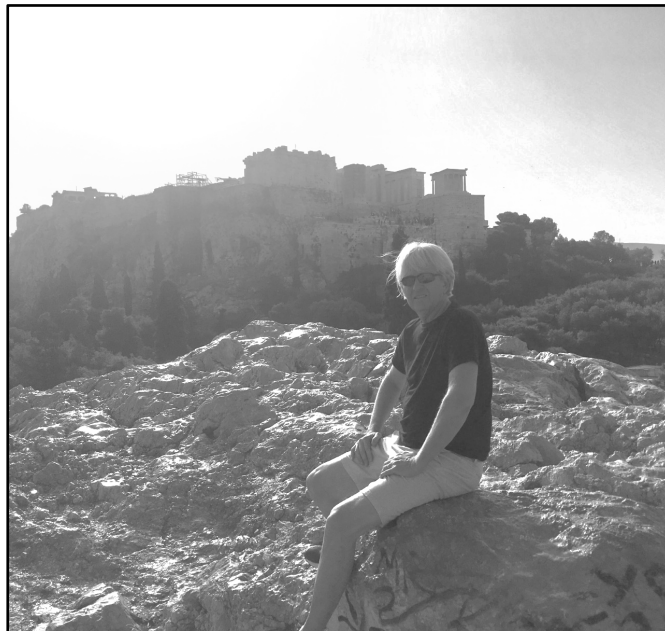
boat – from the coast just southeast of Berea, and then sailed along the shoreline into Piraeus, the seaport of Athens. In the 1st Century AD, the famous stone “Long Walls” provided a 600-foot wide corridor between two parallel walls going from the Piraeus docks all the way up into the city. When his escorts returned to Berea, Paul gave them a message for Silas and Timothy, to come and join him in Athens as soon as possible.

ATHENS

Beginning in verses 15 and 16 of Acts chapter-17, Paul is in the city of Athens - the capital of Attica. It only had about 20,000 inhabitants in the late 50s AD, compared to Corinth’s population of over 100,000. But this was clearly the central hub for Greek learning, art, philosophy, and literature. This all spilled over into pagan pantheism, as Athenians had literally thousands of gods [with a lower case ‘g’] attached to everything from the stars, sun and moon, to the ocean, rivers, and weather, as well as the mountains, plants, animals, alongside fire, wind, and earth. Paul begins his outreach as he did in virtually every other city he entered, by going to the synagogue on Shabbat to “*reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks*” - but he also went into the public marketplace every day with any who happened to be there [verse-17]. Luke must have spoken with Paul quite a bit about what it was like to be in a new place and preach the Gospel message to whomever God would bring along. In verse-16 he recalls how Paul’s inner spirit was being provoked [he was wrestling with his thoughts], as he observed all throughout Athens the various idols with their related temples, statues, and altars.

Paul encountered some Epicureans and Stoics in the marketplace who engaged him in deep conversation. Some commented about Paul, “What is this idle babbler rambling on about?” while others said, “He seems to be proclaiming information about some sort of new deities”.

So they invited Paul to join them at a central location in Athens where Epicureans, Stoics, other philosophers, and all types of visitors to the city gathered for the purpose of either telling new thoughts and ideas, or hearing such from others. This Areopagus was just across from the majestic Parthenon that stood on the Acropolis. "Areo" in the Greek referred to Ares, also called Mars - the red planet associated with the god of war. "Pagus" meant an outcropping of a rocky mount or hilltop. In English it would have been called "Mars Hill" [the rock devoted to Mars]. The Parthenon temple was dedicated to the goddess Athena, built between 447 and 438 BC. She was the most important deity worshipped in the city that was named after her. In Greek, Acropolis means "high" [like someone with acrophobia has the fear of heights] "city". It was [and remains] the highest point in Athens, looking down on the city in each direction. In this photo, I am sitting on the same rock



outcropping - the pinnacle of the Areopagus - and the Acropolis with the Parthenon are over my shoulder. The steps to this gathering place are the exact same carved-in-the-rock entrance that was present in the 1st Century when Paul was escorted up to Mars Hill by the philosophers.



These weekly discussion-forums allowed local Greeks and foreigners in Athens to interact with lively dialogues about how best to understand the various facets involved in daily living. The Epicureans were devoted to the god *Epicurus*, which in the Greek means “over [epi] pleasure and comforts” [urus]. They were always seeking after how to sustain modest pleasures in this earthly life. Even today many around the world still consider themselves sophisticated *Epicureans* who enjoy the finer things in life such as gourmet food and fine wine. The Stoics sought how to be free from the emotions of daily living, and to accept that

'Destiny' controlled one's life, so there was then no need for fear, unhappiness, or anxiety about all that might occur during a person's time on earth. In Acts 17:19-20 Luke records that when they brought Paul to the Areopagus, he was the featured speaker, having been given the introduction, *"We would like to know what this new teaching is that you have been proclaiming, for you have brought some strange things to our ears, so we want to know what these new things mean"*. What a nice introduction for Paul to stand up among them and make this interesting presentation, recorded by Luke in verses 22-31.

PAUL'S FORUM ON MARS HILL

He begins his address with a provocative baseline observation that he perceives the men of Athens to be quite religious in all respects. This is an interesting starting point from which to preach the Gospel. Paul sees that his audience already has an inherent proclivity toward connecting daily living on earth in this physical life with a recognition that a higher power from outside the world is involved and should be recognized. It is an excellent jumping off point from which he sets the tone of his talk to be about the gods – and then eventually *THE one true God*. His next point is to segue from "I perceive you are already religious" to noting that among all the statues, temples, and altars Paul encountered in his walks around Athens, he found it curious there was one shrine devoted "To An Unknown God". Considering that Athenian pantheism named each and every god or goddess to a very specific aspect of the world, it was as if the Greeks wanted to be sure to cover all their bases with one additional altar inscription in case there was one more potential deity in the world they had missed or overlooked. Paul capitalizes on this idea by clarifying that this last "unknown" among your many gods refers to your being ignorant [accidentally not knowing] about who in fact this

God truly is. Think of that for a moment. Homage paid to something they consider “unknown” because perhaps they recognize deep inside that there must be one who transcends all the others. Or perhaps it is simply that they *imagined* one additional deity to encapsulate whatever was not represented among the hundreds [maybe thousands] of gods they worshipped. Whatever the case, it was Paul who introduced this notion of an “unknown” God, but the Greeks themselves have already pondered such and erected an altar within the city to ascribe worship and honor to such, even if they remained at a loss as to who this is.

Paul segues into a very logical statement given their definition of this god being one who is not known at this time. *“This God is the one who created the world and all that is in it”* [Acts 17:24]. He follows up with declaring that because this God is the one who made everything in the world, He is therefore Lord of all the heavens and the earth, and does not dwell in temples made by men’s hands. Recognize clearly that Paul is stating all the other gods were created by you [men and women] and you placed these idol-statues into temples and on altars that were also made by you. On the contrary, the “Unknown God” transcends all that is in this physical realm because He made all of it. As such, He has no need of anyone to attend to Him, in the same ways that you attend to these idols, statues, altars, and temples. These are of your creation and you maintain them. The Unknown God has no need of such service, as He is the One who gives life and breath to all people and the animals who live on the earth. Every nation on earth originated with one man [Adam], and it is this God who determined their appointed times and boundaries for the various peoples, tribes, and nations. Paul is saying that even your Athenian culture on this Greek peninsula has been given its time [from its founding in the 5th Century BC to the present as they sit there on the Areopagus] and political boundaries for Attica, Epirus,

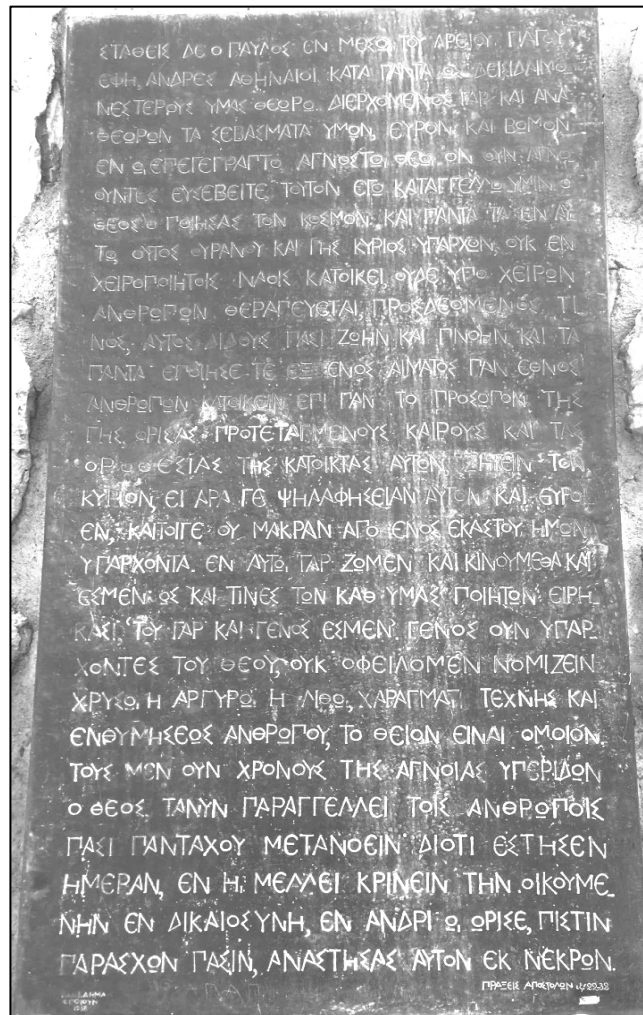
Macedonia, Thrace, Achaia, Illyricum, Crete, and Moesia. Paul then says that these various “peoples” will seek after Him, to know Him, even to [awkwardly] *grope for Him* – and in doing so they WILL find Him for He is not far off and detached from mankind, as is the case with your many other gods and goddesses. In Acts 17:28-29 Paul is going to really shift His apologetic into a personal application of these many principles for the Epicureans, Stoics, and other foreigners present that day on the Areopagus, as he proclaims, *“For it is in Him that we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have stated, ‘For we also are His children’ – so then being children of this One Unknown God, we should not think of His divine nature as captured in gold, silver, or polished stone. These are nothing more than images thought of and formed by the artistry resident in the minds of men.”* Quite a statement to make.

Paul is now going to pivot his apologetic from refining and re-defining this Unknown God, to a very specific and highly personal call to every man and woman, that this God is openly declaring that they need to repent of their sinful ways because this same God is going to judge the entire world because of their waywardness from Him. There is a fixed day when He will judge this physical-material world in righteousness. And that will be accomplished through one man He has appointed, having furnished indisputable proof to every person by raising this one from the dead. Paul is set to deliver the person of Jesus Christ being that One. However, when the audience hears the phrase about raising this man from the dead, there are two basic reactions. The first reaction is of those who immediately sneer [*chleu-adzo* in the Greek], meaning they mock and jeer with strong derision. This brings to mind Paul’s commentary in 1st Corinthians 1:18-23 how *“the message of the Gospel is **foolishness** to those who are perishing [and will be judged by the*

Unknown God]. It is the wisdom of this world that is **foolishness**. For the world through its own wisdom does not come to God, so then God was well-pleased by the **foolishness** of this message preached to save those who believe. Jews seek after signs, Greeks seek wisdom. So then Jesus crucified is clearly a stumbling block to the Jews, and **foolishness to the Greeks**.” The second reaction is [sad to say] not that the others who did not sneer readily accepted Jesus as Savior, but rather they responded with, “We would like to hear from you again on this matter” – meaning Paul will be invited back to deliver Part-II of his address. It is nice that as Luke closes out his description of this time on Mars Hill he says Paul left that philosophy forum [Acts 17:33] and **some men went with him** as he left, and **they believed what he taught** [verse-34]. Luke writes that one of those who believed was named Dionysius the Areopagite. Consider that name for a moment. He must have been a fairly well-known and frequent attendee on that rock outcropping of philosophers because everyone referred to him by his name with the label that he was Dionysius, the guy who is always up there on the Areopagus [verse-35]. Luke also notes a woman named Damaris, and a few others who were present for Paul’s teaching, also believed.

It was incredibly thrilling for me to sit on the Areopagus across from the Acropolis and Parthenon, seeing firsthand the simplicity of this ages-old timeless rocky mount that has not changed in more than 2,000 years. Bringing up Acts 17 on my smartphone app, it was quite powerful to read aloud Paul’s sermon word-for-word – imagining what it was like the day he addressed those Greek philosophers. The top of the next page is my photo of the placard carved into the base of that stone outcropping. It is all upper-case Greek lettering recounting Paul’s entire address word-for-word. How amazing to see Paul flee Thessalonica for Berea, and then Athens, and while waiting for Silas and Timothy he met

some men in the marketplace who took him to the Areopagus, and his sermon remains today on that plaque - 2,000 years later for all to read.



The fifth line from the bottom right side, the word begins with alpha [A] ANTHROPOS [means "men", like the study of man is "Anthropology"]. It continues to the next line on the left: PAS, PANTAXU, METANOEIN [the end of Acts 17:30] "All men everywhere repent". The bottom line ends verse-31 [from the left] PARAEXO PISTIS ANASTEMIS AUTO ES NEKRO: "Furnished proof to all men raising Him from dead". While

modern Greek is a bit different than the Bible's ancient Greek I studied in college, it is still fascinating to read Paul's sermon 20 centuries later.

PAUL IN CORINTH

Chapter 18 of Acts picks up as Paul begins his next stage of the mission trip by returning to Corinth, most likely early in 52 AD. His second journey will conclude at verse-22 when Paul's ship lands at Caesarea Maritima and he returns to update the church at Syrian Antioch. Corinth of Achaia is about 50 miles west from Athens across a thin strip of land that connects the Peloponnese peninsula to the mainland of Greece. Today there is a steep and very narrow man-made canal across the thinnest section of the isthmus, allowing ships to move easily between the Ionian Sea to the south, and the Gulf of Corinth to the north. The bridge across that canal is only about 50 yards wide. Paul, Silas, and Timothy would have walked across the land-isthmus over to Corinth, which is nestled inland a few miles up from the coast and seaport. Luke notes [Acts 18:2-3] that when Paul went into Corinth he found a fellow Hebrew names Aquila, who was originally from Pontus in Asia Minor – a region just north of Paul's hometown of Tarsus in Cilicia. Aquila was recently living on the Italian peninsula, probably in the capital of Rome, because he had just come over to Greece with his wife Priscilla when Emperor Claudius decreed that all Jews must leave Rome [probably in 52 AD, as noted by the historian Suetonius]. When Paul writes his letter to the churches in Rome, he greets thirty people by name, including Priscilla with Aquila. Claudius was poisoned in 54 AD and succeeded by his 16-year old adopted son who took the title 'Caesar Nero'. Paul wrote Romans from Corinth in 57 AD, so with Claudius now dead, many Jews returned to Rome. Records from that era show over 40,000 Jews lived among a population of one million people at the time Paul penned his letter to what were probably dozens of churches in the city.

Paul went into the local synagogue each Shabbat and reasoned with Jews and Greeks [Acts 18:4-5] persuading some that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior. Silas and Timotheus arrived in Corinth from Macedonia, and Paul felt very pressed by the Holy Spirit to personally testify to the Jews that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah prophesied of in the Torah, Psalms, and the prophets. He devoted himself full-time to teaching and preaching. Many of the ex-pat Jews in Corinth rejected Paul's teaching, accusing him of blasphemy, so he shook his garment of any dust from that city, and said he would no longer spend his time teaching Jews in synagogues, but would now exclusively preach the Gospel to Gentiles. Leaving the synagogue, Paul stayed with a Greek named Titius Justus, a local Corinthian who worshipped God - whose house was adjoined to the synagogue. Crispus headed up the synagogue and believed in the Lord with his entire household. Many other Corinthians put their trust in Jesus and were baptized. Having visited ancient Corinth [see below], the main street has been unearthed alongside foundation stones of all the buildings that lined this busy thoroughfare.



Archaeologists believe the synagogue was located to my right, where the ruins of the marketplace clearly show extensive levels of shops just below the temple to Apollo [see below] which had a huge bronze statue of the Olympic god of the sun who oversaw every form of Greek dance, music, and poetry. The home of Justus and the synagogue were



then in the center of the city's busy commercial-political-legal district. The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision that it was safe to speak out boldly in the city, that no harm would come to him as God now had many believers in Corinth who would support Paul in his teaching and preaching of the Gospel. What a joy that must have been to hear the word from the Lord, "I am with you, and no one will attack you", encouraging Paul that there were now many people throughout the city that had put their faith in Jesus. Luke then records that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half [Acts 18:11], freely teaching the Word of God among the people – both Jews and Greeks. This is a high point in the missionary work of Paul in Europe. Eighteen months to speak openly and boldly about the Gospel, holding on to God's promise to protect him from any negative backlash from the local population.

It seems reasonable to assume that as that year-and-a-half concluded God probably prepared Paul for a subsequent season when people would rise up in anger against him and the preaching of the Gospel. Acts 18:12 notes the transition in the office of proconsul came about as Gallio was installed over all of Achaia, of which Corinth is a major city. It was at this time that the Jews in Corinth were emboldened to rise up against Paul and bring him before the “Bema” [judgment seat]. Below is where that main street in Corinth comes right to the raised stone dais [the Bema] where the Achaian Proconsul sat to hear the testimony of witnesses in any legal disputes. The prosecution went first [verse-13]



stating the charges against Paul, “This man persuades men to worship God, which is contrary to our [Corinthian-Achaian] law”. Gallio’s reply is similar to how Pontius Pilate did not see the connection between some Jews who had a dispute regarding their Mosaic Law, and what that had to do with Roman laws for capital crimes that carried a death sentence. Just as Paul is about to stand and speak in his own defense, Gallio said to these Jews, “If this [alleged] matter were about a wrong or vicious crime, then it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; however,

if these are questions about words and names from your own [Jewish] laws, then look after this in your own manner, for I am unwilling to be the judge of these matters". And with that judicial summation, Gallio had them all removed from before the Bema. He essentially said the Law of Moses was a legally unrecognized set of religious statutes within a small minority of ex-pat Jews, and has nothing to do with Achaian laws, so this was not his problem, and they should be able to deal with this themselves, perhaps within their own synagogue.

It is important to remember that Paul had been told by the Lord he would have eighteen months of freedom to preach without any harm. If this was within that time period, then Gallio's commentary was used of the Lord to spare Paul any flogging and/or imprisonment. But it may have been the year-and-a-half was concluding soon, because when the Jews were brushed aside by Gallio, their response was to literally take the matter in their own hands, as they dragged Sosthenes [the leader of the synagogue] back to the Bema and beat him there, even as Gallio looked away and took no regard of their actions. Notice that earlier in Acts 18, Crispus was noted as the leader of the synagogue. It could very well be that the year-and-a-half was finishing, the synagogue was now under new leadership, and a brand new round of persecution was set to begin. This seems plausible, for Luke writes that Paul remained in Corinth many more days. It is provocative to think he stayed right up to the conclusion of the eighteen months of safety God had promised. Then, when that time was over, he went down to the coastal harbor of Cenchreae with Aquila and Priscilla where they boarded a ship heading for the seaport of Caesarea Maritima in the Syrian Province. Before they departed, Paul shaved his head as a sign of a vow he was taking. It is worth taking a moment to examine more closely what exactly this is.

PAUL'S VOW

Within the Torah, Numbers 6 describes a Nazirite vow: When a person vows to be separated for a time to the Lord. An offering is consecrated and no wine or anything from the grapevine [grape juice, vinegar, fresh grapes, raisins] is to be had during the vow. Men shaved their heads and beards [the obvious sign for the start of the vow], and then used no razor during the vow, as all the hair on the head and beard grew back. Also, no contact was allowed with a dead body. When the vow time period ended, offerings were made to the Lord [Numbers 6:13-21] and the head was shaved again. The hair that grew during the vow was put on the fire with the final burnt offering. No explanation is provided for WHY Paul did this. The wording in Acts 18:18 could also be read, "He had his hair cut, for he had been keeping a vow". It is plausible he began the vow when the Lord promised him eighteen months of safety to preach the Gospel in Corinth. And remember, Paul had decided to not go into synagogues any longer, but to take his message to the Gentiles only, after the persecution he faced from ex-pat Jews angered by his preaching about Jesus as Messiah. As that time ended, Paul had a year-and-a-half long beard with several inches of hair grown back in on his head. Paul then *concluded* his Nazirite vow, shaving his head and beard in Cenchreae before boarding the ship for Antioch. He would have saved those clippings to bring with him to Jerusalem so he could burn them on the altar at the Temple. This is a highly probable explanation for Luke's mention of Paul's taking a vow.

It is very different from Acts 21:20-24, when Paul is in Jerusalem with James [the brother of Jesus] and the Jewish church elders, and he testifies about many Gentiles throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia [Greece] accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Their response was

to recognize the thousands of Jews who had come to Christ AND who remained zealous in keeping the law of Moses. But they noted how Paul was teaching ex-pat Jews living among the Gentiles they did not have to keep the Mosaic Law. This proposed shaved-head vow was simply to appease men by the outward appearance of Paul alongside four other men taking a vow, and not teaching in that way, and he was a “walking orderly, keeping the Law”. This was certainly not what a true Nazirite vow was intended to exhibit and accomplish [see Numbers 6].

RETURN TO ANTIOCH

The ship’s journey made a connection in the port of Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor. Here, Aquila and Priscilla remained while Paul went into the synagogue to reason with the ex-pat Jews. This seems to support that in Cenchreae he *concluded* his eighteen-month Nazirite vow of preaching only to Gentiles, not going into synagogues to teach the Jews, and then having an extended time of no hostility against him as promised by the Lord in the vision. With the vow completed and his message delivered to the Ephesian Jews, they responded favorably and asked him to stay on for a longer time. But Paul did not consent to stay there and boarded a ship for the final leg of his journey back to the coast of the Syrian province. Luke records [Acts 18:22] that when Paul’s ship arrived in port at Caesarea Maritima, he greeted the church there and then went down to Syrian-Antioch to update the congregation that had sent him out over two years earlier on this second mission trip.

LIFE ON THE ROAD

It can be very easy to read through the Biblical accounts of Paul out on the road traveling to various cities or regions, and get lulled into the mindset that because certain summary events fit within a few chapters of the text, that it happened during a short period of time. The prior

chapter concluded with a timeline of the first mission trip that covered a full year, from 46 to 47 AD. The summary for this chapter shows the timeline for this second mission trip occurred between 51 and 54 AD. Chapter Seven [coming up next] also includes a timeline for the third mission trip when Paul was on the road from mid-54 until the Spring of 57 AD. And while it is worthwhile to consider the amount of time that Paul and his colleagues were traveling on each of the three mission trips, it is also important to understand what travel entailed during the mid-1st Century AD. While there were mapped roads and shipping routes throughout the Roman Empire, traveling still came with several inherent risks. As Paul writes his second letter to the believers in the church at Corinth [11:23-31] he expounds on these risks encountered in his journeys around the Mediterranean basin. They included dangers from fast-flowing or deep rivers, robbers laying-in-wait for travelers in remote areas, and being shipwrecked - about which he notes he once spent an overnight and a full day in the sea before being rescued. He encountered dangers from his own Jewish countrymen, as well as from hostile Gentiles. He was put in prison, and beaten so many times Paul could not recount the exact number - and a few times came close to dying. Five times he received 39 lashes from the Jews, and three times was beaten with rods. These dangers were sometimes in the cities, other times out in the open wilderness between populated areas, and from many false brethren who openly harassed and persecuted him and his colleagues. Paul explains he often went hungry or without fresh water to drink, and was many times very cold, being exposed out in the open to the elements without shelter. Life on the road as a missionary was not a low-key endeavor. It was challenging from multiple impacts. He notes that on top of all the persecutions and dangers, he also was under tremendous stress to his mind and spirit, as "*apart from such*

external things, there was also the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches” [verse-28]. And yet, in all of this, Paul was able to say with a full heart, “I will boast [only] in what pertains to my weaknesses”.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

It must have been quite the sight when after some three years had passed, Saul walks back into Antioch and begins greeting people he knows. The city must have been abuzz with word spreading quickly that Saul from Tarsus – Paul the Apostle – is back from his long journey. Everyone in the church was anxious to hear where he had been, how were his travels, whom did he meet, what special things had God done. Below is the basic summary itinerary and timeline for this second trip.

TIME	LOCATION
Mid-51 AD	Starts in Syrian-Antioch
	Barnabas, John-Mark sail to Cyprus
	Paul, Silas overland to Asia Minor
2 months	Tarsus and Cilicia
2 weeks	Derbe
2 weeks	Lystra [pick-up Timotheus]
2 weeks	Phrygia
2 weeks	Galatia
1 week	Mysia [but not allowed to Bithynia]
1 month	West Coast Asia Minor [7 churches]
1 week	Troas [pick-up Dr. Luke]
1 month	Macedonia
2 weeks	Neapolis
2 months	Philippi [Strymon and Nestos rivers]
2 months	Thessalonica
2 months	Berea
2 months	Athens
18 months	Corinth [depart from Cenchreae]
2 weeks	Sail to Ephesus
1 week	Sail to Caesarea Maritima
1 week	Return to Syrian-Antioch
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Mid-54 AD	About 3 years Total

It is amazing that in the 1st Century a person could leave on such a trip and then return in three years to report about all that occurred in those far-off locations such as the island of Cyprus, in Asia Minor, and across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia and Achaia in Greece. There was no GPS-satellite tracking. No phones to call and check in. No social media to post updates. That is where the phrase "Go with God" comes from. In French one would bid "à Dieu" [with God]. In Spanish it is "A Dios". The British honed the phrase "Godspeed" as merchant ships departed England for what could be a two- or three-year voyage. Each of these understood that a person who ventured out on a trip might not be seen ever again, so they were commended "to God". And what a joy it would be to see that person return again at a future date.

This missionary journey is first written by Luke using the *third person* ["they came", "they spoke", "they went"], until Paul gets to Troas, when the text language switches to first person ["we came", "we arrived", "we saw"] as Luke is now recording what he was present for as he writes from his own first-person experience, along with Paul and the others with whom he joined. Some have proposed that Luke is the one Paul sees in his night vision looking over to the west coast of Asia Minor [while in Troas about 225 miles north of Ephesus]. If Luke is from that area of Troas, it does not seem likely that he is also the man across the Aegean Sea in the northern Greek region of Macedonia standing on the shore appealing for Paul to, "Come over and help us" [Acts 16:9]. The next chapter reviews Paul's third mission trip.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Third Mission Trip

Paul left Antioch and went through the regions of Galatian and Phrygia strengthening all the disciples.

Acts 18:22-23

START IN ANTIOCH

Paul's third journey is recorded by Luke, beginning in Acts 18:23 and continuing through 20:28. This happens most likely between 54 and 57 AD, starting once again in Syrian-Antioch. Luke first states that after the second mission trip was concluded and Paul was back in Antioch, that he "spent some time there" [Acts 18:23]. It is of course speculation as to what length of time this refers, so the basic reading points to Paul probably *spending some time* with his friends in that Antioch church body – both for refreshing his own spiritual life as well as resting and gaining strength for his physical body prior to embarking once again on a mission trip that he knows will probably have him traveling for at least

a few years. It could also be argued that Paul, like many today who preach God's Word as itinerant pastor-teachers, only needed a few weeks to rest up and enjoy some fellowship with his local church family before feeling the calling [need] to be back out on the road once more. Whatever the case, Luke simply states that Paul "left and passed successfully through Galatia and Phrygia" to start this third mission trip. His overall plan was to return to many places he had been previously, to strengthen those disciples in the various church fellowships.

GALATIA - PHRYGIA

Referring to the map below, notice that Luke's opening explanation is that Paul departed the Syrian province and traveled straight through his home region of Cilicia, then traveled through Cappadocia and Lycaonia



right into the Galatian province before heading west into Phrygia. It is always good to be reminded these are not short commuter flights on *Easy Jet* or *RyanAir*, but are long treks overland for several weeks at a

time covering hundreds of miles. No specific details are provided about what happened in these opening regions of the trip, but Luke does say that Paul was “strengthening all the disciples”. Just as it was exciting and encouraging to have Paul return to the Antioch church with news of how God was using him on his mission trips, so too the believers in all those cities who hosted Paul during his first and second journeys were no doubt equally excited and encouraged to have him arrive again a few years later with news about all the churches God raised up.

APOLLOS

It seems evident that Luke was probably waiting for Paul in Ephesus, on the west coast of Asia Minor, because in Acts 18:24 his account of this third journey takes on the descriptive language of someone observing everything firsthand. He goes right into the introduction of a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt named Apollos. That is quite the legacy-name in that Roman-Hellenist culture, because Apollo was the Olympian Greek god who presided over everything from music, painting, dance, poetry, and dance, to archery and the hunt, along with truth and prophecy. The city of Alexandria was world-renowned as a major center for higher learning and formal education. Presiding over its harbor was the 350-foot tall lighthouse built in 280 BC – one of ‘The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World’. It also was home to a massive library dedicated to the nine Greek muses who inspired the arts. The Roman census of 32 AD states the population was “180,000 males”, so it was second only to Rome among the main cities in the Empire. Luke states that Apollos came to Ephesus and he was an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, who was fervent in the spirit to teach others. He had been previously instructed in the Gospel of Jesus, but was only aware of the baptism of repentance from sin [as per John the Baptist at the Jordan River]. He

was speaking out boldly in the Ephesian synagogue, but Luke explains [Acts 18:26] that when Aquila and his wife Priscilla heard Apollos speak, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately to him. Many sermons have been preached over the centuries about what exactly Apollos needed to have explained to him, or how this is a great model for the process by which Christians provide correction to one another. Rather than speculate, the immediate Biblical context states that Apollos was “only aware of the baptism John the Baptist” [who did water baptism as a symbol for repentance from sin], so it is most logical that “the way of God more accurately” was instructing Apollos about the baptism of the Holy Spirit for those who put their faith and trust in Jesus as Savior. Notice there is no mention that what he preached was wrong, or bad doctrine that leads people astray. Instead he was shown a *more accurate* ‘baptism’. Remember, John the Baptist was doing his water baptism at the Jordan River *before* Jesus even began His ministry in September of 29 AD [when Jesus turned 30 years of age]. This was a baptism of repentance as a person outwardly showed they were truly sorry for their sins. That baptism is not the same as Jesus speaks of in Matthew 28:18-20 – baptizing people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit [the promised Holy Spirit would come with great power in less than two weeks’ time at the Feast of Pentecost in May 32 AD]. It was important for Apollos to fully understand this new baptism by God through the gift of His Holy Spirit to all who believe in Jesus. With his “accuracy” squared away, Apollos wanted to cross over from Ephesus to the Achaia region where Corinth and Athens were located. All of the brethren encouraged him to do so [Acts 18:27-28] and even gave him letters of introduction and welcome to the believers across the Aegean Sea, so that as he arrived *“He greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public* [debate and

discourse] *demonstrating by the Jewish Scriptures* [Torah, prophets, Psalms] *that Jesus* [from Nazareth] *was the Christ* [Israel's long-awaited Mashiah]". The next time Apollos is mentioned is when Paul has to bring correction to the believers in Corinth [Chapter-1 and Chapter-3 of 1st Corinthians] who begin arguing with each other about their personal spiritual status based upon whether they were baptized by Paul, or by Apollos. Paul also mentions him to Titus, in bringing him along to Nicopolis where Paul is planning to spend the winter [Titus 3:12-13].

EPHESUS

With Apollos across the Aegean in Corinth of Achaia, Paul traveled over to Ephesus [Acts 19:1] and found believers in Jesus. It is interesting to see that, having just heard and seen how Apollos was instructed in the more accurate doctrine of the baptism from God's Holy Spirit, that Paul's first line of inquiry to these Ephesians Christians [Acts 19:2] is to ask them whether they had received that baptism of the Holy Spirit when they believed. My heart is always touched with tender affection for these Ephesians because their reply to Paul is, "No we did not, for we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit". Paul's logical reply was to ask them, "then into what were you baptized when you put your faith in Jesus?" They reply it was the baptism of John [the Baptist] of repentance for their sin. Notice how Luke ties in how Apollos had *inaccurately* preached boldly about John's baptism and now Paul encounters believers in Ephesus who had also heard the Gospel message with the missing component of the baptism of the Holy Spirit for believers. It seems reasonable that some of the churches launched after Peter's sermon at Pentecost in 32 AD did not recognize the same manifestation of the Holy Spirit they witnessed in Jerusalem was also available to believers in every city where the Gospel was taken after

that miraculous event. Some of the churches launched post-Pentecost probably did have the Holy Spirit baptize new believers. It was a matter of awareness, not bad doctrine. The *more accurate* message from Paul was [Acts 19:4-7] to clarify for them that the baptism of John was of repentance as he told the people to believe in the One coming after John [Jesus the Messiah]. With this new information, these Ephesian men gladly were re-baptized by Paul in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them so they both spoke praises to God in other tongues, and prophesied.

After this initial encounter, Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews of Ephesus for three full months. Many were persuaded that Jesus was in fact Messiah, but some [of course] had hard hearts and spoke evil about “the Way” [the Gospel] that Paul was preaching. So Paul no longer went to the local synagogue, but instead took his new disciples and met each day for a period of two years in the school of Tyrannus. This might be the first specific mention of a new church body renting its meeting place at a local school’s facilities. The photo below shows the ruins of that Tyrannus School of Ephesus. Once again God’s Word is verified as truthful in its accounts of people and places in



history that can be visited and studied. Tyrannus means “sovereign”, so perhaps he held a position of authority. Luke explains [Acts 19:10-11] Paul’s regular teaching at this school in Ephesus became a major hub for the Gospel going out to both Jews and Greeks living in Asia Minor [modern day Turkey]. Consider all the cities and churches this entailed, such as Iconium, Pisidian-Antioch, Laodicea, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamum, Hierapolis, Colossae – northward up to the region of Troas, and south to the regions of Lycia, Lycaonia, and probably all the way back to Cilicia and Saul’s hometown of Tarsus.

It is provocative to read Luke’s explaining how various pieces of cloth were handled [prayed over?] by Paul and then taken to people who were sick and then they were healed [Acts 19:12]. It is very sad to see that for decades [centuries even] many so-called pastors, evangelists, and self-proclaimed prophets-apostles have copied this one verse as a basis for their supposed healing of people. Some have even gone so far as to mail “prayer hankies” to unsuspecting and naïve people who pledge money to that high-profile radio or television personality so that they can be healed from cancer, heart disease, paralysis, blindness, and other maladies. These people are hurting and quite vulnerable as they search for some hope and cure of their diseases. But God never meant for this one extraordinary work of God’s Holy Spirit through Paul to be a model that can be copied in order to replicate those same results. It is important to understand and exercise spiritual discernment about the ways God used miracles in one person, which is not then a formula for how to heal. God is the only one who heals, not a man or woman, so great care must be used in how to interpret certain “Acts” of the twelve Apostles as being a special work of God - not a basis for new doctrine.

EPHESIAN EXORCISTS?

This header will no doubt catch the attention of my readers, as Luke very matter-of-factly explains [Acts 19:13-20] that there were itinerant Jewish exorcists who traveled from city to city, and these were using the name of “Jesus whom Paul preaches” to try and cast out evil spirits from individuals. There was great interest during the 1st Century in how the power of God could publicly demonstrate dominion over evil forces that plagued individuals. One of the local Jewish priests serving in the Ephesus synagogue was named Sceva, and he had seven sons who had decided to pursue exorcisms-for-pay, simply by speaking out the name of “Jesus whom Paul preaches”. It is inferred in the opening of Luke’s account that these seven men must have had some sort of track-record established, as they had already gone “from place to place” offering their services to cast out evil spirits. There is no mention of how often they had done this, or how successful they had been previously, but Luke writes that the evil spirit challenged Sceva’s sons by saying that it recognized the names “Jesus” and “Paul”, but did not know who these brothers were. The evil spirit used the possessed man to physically attack them, overpowering them and tearing their clothes, so they fled the house naked. This particular incident became widely known in the city of Ephesus, strengthening the credibility of Paul’s spiritual authority over evil by the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Many of those who openly practiced sorcery and dark magic were convicted of what they did and brought their various books of spells and conjuring into public to burn these in the sight of everyone as testimony to their turning from evil to the true power of Jesus Christ. Luke notes this was not simply one or two people, because the value of the books [scrolls] that were burned totaled fifty-thousand [50,000] silver pieces. Because this was in Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor, these coins were probably

Greek *drachmae* or Roman *denarius*, rather than Hebrew shekels. The Latin *denarius* provides the root word for the Italian [denaro], Spanish [dinero], Portuguese [dinheiro], as well as the “dinar” used in Algeria, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Libya, Kuwait, Bahrain, Serbia, and Tunisia. It was the *denarius* that Jesus used [Matthew 22:19] in His example about rendering unto Caesar that which shows his image, and render unto God those things are God’s. The Greek word that Luke decides to use is ἀργύριον [“argurion” which simply means silver]. The best and most consistent way to interpret this is through the customary vernacular of that time period in the Empire, when “silver” was the common term for the denarius. Below is such a Roman “silver” coin showing the image of



Tiberius Caesar, who ruled from 14 to 37 AD. This event in Ephesus happened sometime around 55 or 56 AD, so it is very likely this was the silver coinage used to value the books being burned. Matthew 20:2 and John 12:5 both state that one denarius was equal to a day’s wages for the typical worker. This also provides some context for when Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for what might have been one month’s typical earnings [thirty pieces of silver]. This amount quoted by Luke is the equivalent of one year’s wages for nearly 150 laborers. The Ephesians

who were purging themselves of these magic and incantation books probably represented a few dozen individuals. If it was perhaps fifty or so, each person would have destroyed around 1,000 denarius worth of books and scrolls. This large value makes the strong case this was not simply one or two people. Luke clearly stated [Acts 19:19] that “many” did this. God used Paul’s preaching to turn a large group of sorcerers away from the dark arts into the light – so the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed [Acts 19:20] when it was challenged.

THE EPHESIAN CRAFTSMEN

After his prolonged time in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul passed through Macedonia [the northern province in modern day Greece] and Achaia [the mainland province that was home to Corinth and Athens]. As this is the tail end of his third mission trip, it is 57 AD, and this lines up very well with Paul being in Corinth of Achaia in the year 57 when he wrote his letter to the believers in Rome. While the exact months of the year are not feasible to determine, it is satisfying that the longstanding date for writing the book of Romans in 57 AD from Corinth is an excellent fit with the overall narrative, itinerary, and timeline throughout this book from Luke’s chronicle for the Acts of the Apostles. Paul then “reasoned in his spirit” [Acts 19:21] it was time to finally return to Jerusalem. He is back in Asia Minor, but has dispatched Timothy and Erastus over to Macedonia to minister to, and encourage, the believers in the northern Greek cities such as Philippi, Neapolis, Berea, and Thessalonica. Before he departs for Judea, the silversmith artisans of Ephesus were called together by a craftsman named Demetrius for a trade-union meeting [Acts 19:23-29]. Luke refers to the outcome of that meeting as “*no small disturbance*” as it pertained to Paul’s preaching about The Way. Demetrius and his fellow tradesmen were skilled in crafting idol-images made of silver. In the context of the account, most of these were

probably statuettes, medallions, and small altars in the image of their Greek goddess Artemis. The Romans called her Diana. The first photo below was taken at the Louvre Museum in Paris [six-foot marble statue].



The photo below was taken at the Acropolis Museum in Athens that displays over a dozen silver statues of Artemis, ranging in size from small table-top statuettes, to pocket-sized [so she could accompany a person], up to thirty-six inches tall - perched in gardens and entryways.



These craftsmen acknowledged that making these silver idols was their financial livelihood, and this was being threatened by Paul's preaching that *"gods made with hands are no gods at all"*. They voiced concerns not only for Ephesus, but all of Asia being impacted by the message of the Gospel. In fact, they said that *"the temple of the great goddess Artemis may become regarded as worthless, and she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence"* [Acts 19:27]. This rally reached a fever pitch as they were very upset that Paul's preaching would reduce or even eliminate their businesses, so that with anger they cried out, *"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians"*. This quickly became a mob and there was confusion throughout the entire city, as they dragged two of Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia – Gaius and Aristarchus – into the city's main theater.

Paul wanted to go right in and come to their aid, but many disciples in the city, along with other Asiarchs who were his friends, kept insisting he not put himself at risk by entering that public theater where he also would be accused and threatened. It is somewhat comical that Luke is quick to explain there was great confusion inside the theater, and that many in the crowd who were stirred up actually had no idea why they were rallied together. Paul's colleague Alexander steps forward in order to make a defense for Gaius and Aristarchus, but once the crowd saw he was a Jew [probably because of his beard and clothing style], they were even more enraged and worked up as they continued the same chant for almost two full hours, *"Great is Artemis of the Ephesians"*. It is so interesting to hear the city's administrator step forward to address the crowd, as he states, *"Men of Ephesus, who among you does not know that our city is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image which fell down to us from heaven? – and since these are **undeniable facts**, please keep calm and let us do nothing rash"*. This is

an interesting line of reasoning [stating no one can make a case against our goddess Artemis] as he proceeds to explain that the men hauled to the theater did not rob the temple or blaspheme the beloved goddess. He continues that if Demetrius and his silversmiths wish to press legal charges against these men, then the local courts are in open session with proconsuls [judges] seated and ready to hear their case and make a ruling. He finishes up by saying that if you want anything more than this, it must be settled in a lawful assembly – not as a raucous mob. He clarifies that based on their very non-Greek [barbarian reactions] the educated and noble of Ephesus will be accused of inciting a riot, and all will be unable to provide a justifiable rationale for acting like this. He then dismissed the assembled crowd. When everyone had dispersed and things in Ephesus settled down [Acts 20:1], Paul sent for these men to exhort [encourage] them before he left for Macedonia and Greece. Paul spent three months in Greece, but just as he was ready to set sail for the Syrian province, a plot to kill him was formed by the Jews who disagreed with his preaching and teaching, so Paul decided to head north [overland] back into Macedonia.

A MIRACLE IN TROAS

Paul's colleagues on this trip included a Berean named Sopater the son of Pyrrhus, Aristarchus and Secundus [both from Thessalonica], Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, along with Trophimus and Tychicus. Luke says that these seven men went on ahead of "us" [Acts 20:4-6] and were waiting for "us" in Troas – so Luke did accompany Paul. It is probably late March of 57 AD because Luke says that when they sailed over to Troas from Philippi in Macedonia, it was "after the days of Unleavened Bread" [the feast in between Passover and First Fruits]. The ship took five days to get to Troas – then they stayed there another seven days.

While in Troas, on the evening just after Shabbat, the believers were all together on the first day of the week [often called "Resurrection Day" to remember how Jesus' tomb was empty on the first day of the week]. Paul plans to depart the next day [Monday]. While they are assembled to break bread together [to observe the Lord's supper of unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, in remembrance of Jesus], Paul starts a sermon, and it ends up going quite long throughout the evening. Luke states clearly that the teaching continued until "midnight". This room was on the third floor and had many oil lamps burning to provide light. But that also created a lot of carbon dioxide with less oxygen – making it easy for those in Paul's audience to be tired because of the late hour AND everyone breathing and exhaling CO₂ in that same room. One young man named Eutychus was sitting on the window sill, probably to get some fresh air. The combination of cool evening air and close-stuffy air in that packed room, plus it was almost midnight, had him nodding into a "deep sleep". He lost his balance and fell from the window to the ground. It was perhaps a 25-to-30 foot drop from that *third-story* window. He was pronounced dead when everyone rushed down to his body. Luke notes [Acts 20:10] when Paul came down, he embraced him and told everyone to not be troubled because life was still in him. They returned back upstairs, ate their meal after midnight, and then talked until dawn, after which Paul departed. For some commentators, the text seems unclear as to whether Paul raised Eutychus from the dead, or simply recognized he was still alive, even as some assumed he was dead. Luke, the beloved physician, is present, as he was traveling with Paul. He writes that Eutychus fell and "*was picked up dead*" [*nekros* in the Greek is the end of physical life]. Paul's words to everyone is "do not be troubled", which infers he had died because all WERE troubled by his high fall and subsequent death. But then Paul embraced him and

life was restored. Luke notes [Acts 20:12] they took away the young man alive, which seems to be his clarification he had been raised to life.

RETURN TO JERUSALEM

Paul's time with the believers on this his third mission trip is concluding, and his heart is set on getting over to Jerusalem. They had just finished the three Spring feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread [noted earlier], and First Fruits – so this provides insight that it is early Spring of 57 AD [Passover occurs in March or April]. Paul has been to Jerusalem three times since his encounter with Jesus on the road heading to Damascus. Paul was most likely 27 years of age in 36 AD when Jesus called him to be the twelfth Apostle. He notes in Galatians 1:16-19 that after his conversion he did NOT immediately consult with other men [flesh and blood], nor did he go up to Jerusalem to meet those who were called as Apostles before me [Peter and John], but he instead went into Arabia for three years, and then back to Damascus. Paul clearly says this interim time period was for "three years" – which would take him to age 30 in the year 39 AD. It is provocative that this Pharisee, a "Hebrew among Hebrews", will stick to the Torah's requirement that a man be 30 years of age before going into full-time service to God [Numbers 4:3]. Luke's gospel [3:22] also records that Jesus waited to start His earthly ministry until He was 30. Now that he is 30 years of age, his first official trip is noted in Galatians 2:8-9 as Paul recognized that what was working for Peter in his ministry to Jews [the circumcised] was also working for him in his ministry to the Gentiles [uncircumcised] all across the Mediterranean. Paul then states, *"We recognized that grace that had been given to us [for our unique ministry areas] so that Jesus' brother James, Cephas [Peter], and John – these three had the reputation as being the pillars of the Jerusalem church – they gave to*

Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship [koinonia] so that we [Paul and Barnabas] might go out to minister to the Gentiles”.

Paul’s second official trip to Jerusalem comes when he is based in the Syrian-Antioch church between the conclusion of his first mission trip in 47 AD, and the start of his second mission trip in 51 AD. Luke states [Acts 15:2] how Paul and Barnabas left Antioch to attend the Jerusalem Council [widely recognized as happening in 50 AD]. He is now 41 years old and has ministry experience from his first mission trip [46-to-47 AD] and being based at the church in Antioch [since 47]. It is at this Council the Apostle Peter makes the definitive argument [Acts 15:10-11] “*Why would we place on the necks of Gentile believers a yoke [circumcision] which neither our forefathers or we has been able to bear?*” And Jesus’ brother James renders the closing summary that circumcision will NOT be required of Gentiles who put their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. It would seem the matter of circumcision was put to rest in 50 AD.

Now comes Paul’s third official trip to Jerusalem some seven years later in the Spring of 57 AD. Luke clarifies [Acts 20:13-16] that Paul walked south to Assos, while Luke says “we” sailed from Troas to Assos where “we” then met Paul and took him onboard. Paul decides they will sail down the west coast of Asia Minor and not stop again at Ephesus “he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost”. The Feast of Pentecost happens fifty days after Passover. It had been a little over two weeks since they celebrated Unleavened Bread, meaning Paul had just under five weeks to journey back to Jerusalem. He will arrive in Jerusalem on a high-note of seeing the Lord do amazing work among the Gentiles. But sad to say, when he arrives in the city on this third visit, the reception will not be warm and encouraging, as Jews from Asia who are in the city for the Feast of Pentecost will once again

stir up dissensions focused on the matter of the Gentiles needing to be circumcised. The route went from Troas to Assos, to the island harbor of Mitylene, and then Chios. Next they sailed further south to Samos, then put into the mainland harbor at Miletus. It is profound that Paul's farewell to believers in Ephesus happened in Miletus [Acts 20:17-18] as Paul called the Ephesian elders to come down to him in Miletus. When they arrive, Paul gives his very famous address to these believers.



FINAL FAREWELL TO THE EPHESIANS

Picture upwards of 30-to-40 men who had been raised up as spiritual leaders over the years in the church at Ephesus, making the 50-mile journey south to Miletus to meet Paul one last time as he had called them specifically to come to him there. These men had been raised up as spiritual "elders" [*presbyteros* in the Greek]. They are not sure why Paul called them or what he wants to say. They arrive and the Apostle stands up, looks at all of them, and probably tries to hold back the

emotions inside that this is a final farewell. Luke records [Acts 20:17-38] this heartfelt summary of his missionary work with them:

*"You yourselves know from the first day I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and tears and trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews. How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, **teaching you publicly and from house to house**, solemnly testifying to Jews and Greeks of repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus.*

*And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, **I am on my way to Jerusalem**, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to me, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.*

And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock**, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among you, men [within the church] will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.

*Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. **Now I commend you to God and the Word of His grace**, which is able to build up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

*I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, just as He said, **'It is more blessed to give than receive'.**"*

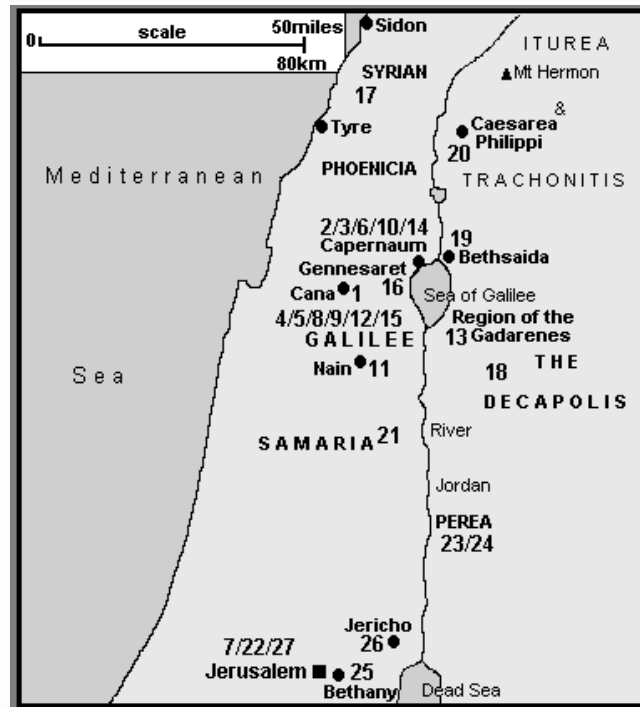
Notice in the middle of this page that Paul makes sure to warn the church leaders that once he departs and is no longer there as a solid, spiritually mature shepherd, "wolves" will come into the church body

and they will NOT spare the flock [the sheep]. These false teachers will lead people away with perverted doctrines, so they must be on their guard. That must have been a very emotional time as they recalled all the ways the church at Ephesus had been founded, grown, matured – the role Paul had in both preaching the Gospel for people to be saved, and teaching believers sound doctrine as they grew in their knowledge of the Lord and His Word. Luke closes out Acts 20 with, *“When Paul had said these things, he knelt down, prayed with them, and began to weep aloud, as they embraced him, and repeatedly kissed him, as they grieved especially over the prophetic word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.”* This closed out a major chapter in the life of Saul of Tarsus. He is about to conclude his third and final in-person missionary trip.

THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM

Paul is now onboard the first ship that sails from Miletus south to the island of Kos. They continue south to the island of Rhodes – the famous seaport on the northern tip of the island [it had been home to the huge statue of the Greek sun-god Helios - the same height as the Statue of Liberty in New York City’s harbor]. Built in 280 BC [one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World], it collapsed in 226 BC when an earthquake struck the island. Then they sailed east to the Asia mainland port of Patara in the Lycia province, and found a cargo ship heading east to the port of Tyre in Phoenicia, on the northern coast of the Syrian province [which included Judea and Samaria]. They sailed near Cyprus [Paul had visited there on his first two mission trips]. When they arrived in Tyre the ship was unloaded and they stayed in the city for seven days after they had looked up the local believers. Tyre and Sidon were the main ports of Phoenicia, with Tyre being about as north as Caesarea

Philippi [see the map below], and Sidon further up the coast, nearly as far north as Damascus. When Paul and his companions left to catch the



next ship, sailing southward along the coastline to Ptolemais, the entire entourage of believers from Tyre, including wives and children, walked Paul and his friends outside the city, where they knelt down on the beach and prayed together. But Luke notes [Acts 21:4-5] that many of the local disciples were telling Paul *through the Holy Spirit* to **not go to Jerusalem**. After staying a day in Ptolemais, they sailed to Caesarea Maritima [just below the peninsula of modern day Haifa]. It was there Paul and his colleagues stayed with Philip the Evangelist. He was one of the original seven men set apart as deacons [Acts 6:1-7] to serve food within the church so the Apostles could focus on teaching and preaching. The others were Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas [the proselyte from Syrian-Antioch], and Stephen – the one who

was stoned to death by the religious leaders [Acts 7:54-60], with Saul also present. Philip had four virgin daughters who had the gift of prophesying. After staying there several days, a man named Agabus, who was also gifted with prophetic words, came down to the coast from Judea. Luke records when he saw them all, he took Paul's belt and bound his own hands and feet [those of Agabus] and declared, *"This is what the Holy Spirit says, that in this same way the Jews at Jerusalem are going to bind the man who owns this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles"*. This certainly confirmed the word spoken to Paul up in Tyre, that he should be wary of going to Jerusalem. Everyone who heard this word from Agabus agreed and urged Paul not to continue. Paul then replies to them [Acts 21:13] that they should not cry and urge him like that, for it was breaking his heart, but that he was completely ready to be bound, and even to die, in Jerusalem for the Lord. When all could not persuade him to not go, Luke says, *"We all fell silent and remarked that the will of the Lord be done"*.

The overland trip from Caesarea on the coast up to Jerusalem covered 75 miles. Some disciples from Caesarea went with Paul, Luke, and the others. They made one final stop at the home of a believer originally from Cyprus named Mnason [that is not a typo, pronounce "MinAhson"]. In verse 17 of Acts 21, they all walk into the city of Jerusalem, and are met by many Christian brethren who receive Paul and his friends with great enthusiasm. The next day, Paul meets with Jesus' brother James and other elders [presbyteros] in the Jerusalem church. Theologians have inquired for centuries whether 'elders' included Peter and John, who were the original elder-overseers in Jerusalem when the church was launched 25 years earlier during Pentecost in 32 AD [remember, it is now May of 57 AD, as Paul gets to Jerusalem in time for the Feast of

Pentecost]. Paul begins with a great report of all the amazing work God had done during his three mission trips, starting with the first that happened from 46 to 47 AD, his second journey out from 51 to 54, and his third trip just now concluded from 54 to 57. He has been on the road preaching and teaching for nearly seven years over the last eleven years since he started in 46 AD. Luke notes [Acts 21:19-20] that the *initial reaction* has everyone glorifying God for the great news of all the new churches throughout Asia Minor, on Cyprus, and throughout Macedonia all the way down into Corinth and even Athens in Achaia.

THE GENTILES' OFFERING

It is not referred to by Luke in Acts, but Paul mentions to the believers in Corinth [1st Corinthians 16:1-4] that just as he had encouraged those from Galatia to be generous in providing a gift for the believers who are in Jerusalem, he tells the church in Corinth to do the same. He tells them they can choose whomever they wish of their own congregation to hand-deliver their gift along with any letters of encouragement, and he will accompany that person on the trip as well. It must have been quite a sight to see a monetary gift along with letters from Gentiles in Galatia and Corinth presented by a Corinthian and Paul to the elders to benefit the Jewish believers. Jerusalem was where the church of Jesus was launched at Pentecost in 32 AD, and was comprised almost entirely of Jews. And now here were expatriate Jews and Gentiles from across the Mediterranean Sea extending benevolence to them, having heard of their need and the persecution they were experiencing. It must have been encouraging to see the Apostle Paul alongside the Corinthian envoy, hearing them tell of God's great faithfulness to the churches in Asia, Cyprus, Macedonia, and Achaia.

MORE UNREST

The favorable mood regarding the gift quickly changed as they admonished Paul with their concerns that so many local Jews right there in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria have also come to faith in Jesus as Messiah - but remain overly zealous for keeping the Law of Moses. They continue to explain to Paul that these Jews have heard how Saul of Tarsus, the formerly zealous Pharisee who persecuted the church, is now a believer in Jesus, and he now teaches the Jews living among the Gentiles [in all the cities and regions Paul visited on his three trips] *"to forsake Moses, not circumcise their sons, and halt the Jewish customs"*. These Jerusalem believers are very worked up as they challenge Paul [Acts 21:22], *"So what shall we do about this? for they will hear that you are now here in Jerusalem?"* It is very troubling that Paul is immediately confronted with an incorrect concern about his preaching and teaching in places such as Salamis and Paphos on Cyprus, Perga, Lystra, Tarsus, Derbe, Iconium, Pisidian-Antioch, as well as Ephesus, Troas, Neapolis, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Athens. Seven years ago in 50 AD, Paul along with Barnabas and Titus had been present there in Jerusalem at the Council with the Apostles Peter and John, and the church elders [presbyters] led by Jesus' brother James, to address the matter of requiring Gentiles to observe the Jewish laws, traditions, and cultural customs. And while Peter clarified these were not necessary to be a believer, and James provide the closing summary position on the matter, it appears that has all been replaced with a fervor for Judaism.

REMEMBER THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

Paul and Barnabas finished up their first missionary trip when they came back to Syrian-Antioch in late 47 AD [Acts 14:26-28] and stayed with the Christians there for "a long time" [over three years until Paul went

out on his second trip in early 51 AD]. Luke records in the opening of Acts 15 that *"Men from Judea began preaching that unless a man was circumcised as per the Law of Moses, he could not be saved"*. Paul and Barnabas argued against this position, as they had seen first-hand how God did a work on the first mission trip in saving Gentiles who were not circumcised, and these had also received the Holy Spirit. So after much debate on this topic, it was decided Paul and Barnabas along with "some others" should go up to Jerusalem and meet with the Apostle Peter and with all the elders, including Jesus' brother James. It was conspicuous that Luke does not mention the Apostle John bar-Zebedee being at the Jerusalem Council with Peter and Jesus' brother James. It had been 18 years since the church launched during the Feast of Pentecost in 32 AD. John was likely up in Ephesus serving as an elder in support of Pastor Timotheus.

This Jerusalem Council took place in 50 AD - between Paul's first and second missionary journeys. The date is derived from multiple extra-Biblical sources stating the convocation took place *"twenty years prior to the fall of Jerusalem under Titus"* [in 70 AD]. It is cited by Luke that this position on keeping the Law of Moses was being championed by Pharisees who had become believers in Jesus [Acts 15:5]. Paul is of course himself a Pharisee and was very zealous for keeping the Law when he persecuted the church before Jesus confronted him on the way to Damascus. It is an interesting phenomenon to consider that Jews and proselytes had come to a saving faith in Jesus as Mashiach, yet they continued to hold to their cultural and religious heritage of Judaism being a *necessary* component of being a "Christian".

One of the visuals I use when teaching from the Bible at Calvary Chapel in Santa Barbara is to have some fun picturing what the program may

have looked like for the Jerusalem Council. Like any major conference that is convened to openly deliberate current issues and policy matters, the Official Agenda certainly took up a wide range of topics pertaining to the dozens of religious practices specified within the Law of Moses, and should any, or all, of these now be requirements for Gentiles who come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Below is an edited version of my presentation slides adapted for the space in this book's formatting. And while you may smile at this outline, the intent is to show the kinds of provisions that were most likely the major points of contention among all those attending.

JERUSALEM COUNCIL

Sivan - 50 AD

yom-1	3 rd Hour	<i>Ceremonial Washings</i> <i>Purification Rites</i> <i>Food Preparation/Butchering</i>
	6 th Hour	<i>Lunch Speaker: Titus</i> <i>"A Gentile's Perspective"</i>
	9 th Hour	<i>Keeping the Feasts</i> <i>Fornication and Adultery</i>
yom-2	3 rd Hour	<i>Uses of Leaven</i> <i>Special High Days</i> <i>Protocols for Cities of Refuge</i>
	6 th Hour	<i>Lunch Speaker: Paul</i> <i>"Gentile Update - Mission Trip"</i>
	9 th Hour	<i>Sacrifices: Bulls, Goats, Lambs</i> <i>God's Law on Doorposts</i> <i>Basics on Tithing</i>
yom-3	3 rd Hour	<i>God's Sign of Circumcision</i> <i>Keeping the Weekly Shabbat</i>
	6 th Hour	<i>Lunch Speaker: Peter</i> <i>"The Yoke"</i>
	9 th Hour	<i>Executive Session – Leaders Only</i>
	Twilight Sunset	<i>Closing Session: James Summary</i> <i>Shabbat Begins [no more work]</i>

It is interesting to note that Paul mentions in Galatians 2:1-10 that it had been 14 years between his conversion at Damascus and heading to the Jerusalem Council. This confirms the timeline presented within this book that it was most likely 36 AD when Paul traveled to Damascus [36 + 14 = 50 AD]. He also states that Titus was present with himself and Barnabas for the Council – making Titus perhaps the only other Gentile to attend other than [maybe] Luke. The program schedule lists selected aspects of the Mosaic Law as a reminder that the final plenary summation from Jesus' brother James exhibited apparent compromise that had to be struck between the two main positions – those who wanted Gentiles to keep the Law and those who understood there is no such legal requirement to be a Christian. Notice [Acts 15:19] James begins with, *"It is my judgment that we do not trouble Gentiles who are turning to God"*. How nice it would have been if that was the entirety of how the leaders settled the matter. Yet there is a comma after that initial statement, as verse-20 continues, *"Gentiles should abstain from things contaminated by idols, from fornication, and eating what has been strangled"*. So while the sign of circumcision was not going to be required of men who believed in Jesus as Messiah and Savior, the Council did include three standards for the Gentiles. The first addresses Israel's [and Yahweh's] strong position against any form of idol worship [Exodus 20:3-5] *"You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness, you shall not worship them or serve them"*. Compare that to the Gentiles who typically worshipped multiple idols in their homes as well as at the temples to the gods and goddesses of Rome and Greece. The second dealt with how the Jews strongly advocated being married relative to the Gentiles who regularly engaged in sexual relations without being married [consider the pagan temples with their own prostitutes]. The

third matter focused on how the Jews understood that life is in the blood [Leviticus 17:11] so they hung bulls, goats, lambs, rams, and all kinds of fowl upside down and slit the throat to allow the blood to full drain out before butchering - while Gentiles typically killed animals by strangulation which left a lot of blood within the meat and organs that was eaten. It is as if the final executive session among the church leaders sought to land at a middle position that did not remove the Law entirely for Gentiles, but also did not require the complete Law for Gentiles to observe. Somehow along the deliberations and debate, these three conditions were included for Gentiles to hold some modest forms of "Godly" behavior. It was, no doubt, the personal eye-witness testimonies from Paul and Barnabas about the Lord's work among the Gentiles on their first missionary trip that carried great weight with everyone, prompting the Apostle Peter to declare [Acts 15:10] *"Do we really want to place onto the Gentiles the yoke of keeping circumcision, a burden neither our forefathers or even us have been able to bear?"* This final summation of James was transcribed into a letter that Paul, Barnabas, Barsabbas, and Silas personally delivered to the "Christians" in Syrian-Antioch. And when that congregation assembled and heard the executive-summary coming from Jerusalem [Acts 15:30-31] "they rejoiced because of its encouragement". Fast-forward seven years to May of 57 AD at the close of Paul's third mission trip to mostly Gentiles, and he is being challenged once again by Jews and over-zealous Pharisees on these very same issues of Judaism and the Law of Moses.

It is worth considering yourself as a Jewish man or woman in the middle of the 1st Century AD, and you have recently placed your faith in the finished work of Jesus as Messiah - who died on the cross for your sins. However, your thoroughly Jewish eyes and ears now ponder how your

lifetime of traditional observances within Judaism will now mesh with your new beliefs. You have always kept the weekly Sabbath as outlined in Exodus 20:8-10. You tithe to the Lord and have the Law affixed to the doorposts of your home. You keep the seven Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Pentecost, Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. You sacrifice in the Temple and your newborn boys are circumcised. It is worth reviewing HOW those within the nation of Israel viewed their heritage alongside the coming of Jesus as Messiah.

A THOROUGHLY JEWISH GOSPEL

Promise of Nation	<i>Genesis 12:2 "make of you a great nation"</i>
Covenant of YHWH	<i>Deut. 14:2 God chose Israel as HIS people</i>
Promise of Mashiach	<i>175 prophecies [Torah-Psalms-prophets]</i>
Jehoshua of Nazareth	<i>Born in. Bethlehem, Ephrathah, city of David, lineage of Boaz-Obed-Jesse</i>
Jewish Forerunner	<i>John the Baptist – final O.T. prophet</i>
Jewish Disciples	<i>ALL from Judea, Bethsaida, Galilee</i>
Passover Fulfilled	<i>Lamb of God takes away the sins of world</i>
Unleavened Bread	<i>My body, my blood, in remembrance</i>
First Fruits Fulfilled	<i>Jesus' resurrection body is our model</i>
Pentecost Fulfilled	<i>Church is launched with "harvest of men"</i>
Holy Spirit Given	<i>Jeremiah 32:38 - Leviticus 26:12 – Joel 2:28</i>
Peter's 1st Sermon	<i>Jesus meets all requirements of Mashiach</i>
3,000 Jews Saved	<i>Take the Gospel all across Mediterranean</i>
Peter's 2nd Sermon	<i>God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob has appointed Christ Jesus for you.</i>

Such a litany of thoroughly Jewish people, promises, and Scriptures is the kind of heritage anyone in Judaism would be proud of. Their God, Elohiym - Adonai - YHWH has now revealed Himself to His chosen people through the person of Jehoshua who fulfilled every facet of the Mosaic Law and was resurrected from the dead after dying as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And now, God gives His Spirit to dwell within those who have embraced Jesus as Messiah. It is

easy then to see from the simple checklist above that 1st Century Jews who came to faith in Jesus would view salvation as *for the Jews, from the God of the Jews*, brought through the *fulfillment of their Law*, by a *Jewish Mashiach* who embodies God's redemption of sinful mankind.

But there is another checklist worth noting – one that provides clear evidence from the Torah, Psalms, and prophets that YHWH did in fact have the Gentiles in mind when He sent Jesus as Messiah to die for the ***sins of the world***. Consider the following message to that end:

ALSO A GENTILE GOSPEL

Abram	<i>A pagan from Ur of the Chaldeas, called, chosen by God BEFORE circumcision, Israel [Jacob], the Law [through Moses] His name means "exalted Father"</i>
Abraham	<i>Add a simple "Ha" – "breath of YHWH" and he becomes "Father of many"</i>
Peter's 1st Sermon	<i>God will pour His Spirit on ALL mankind</i>
Genesis 12:3	<i>ALL families of the earth will be blessed</i>
Hosea 2:23	<i>Those not my people I will call my people</i>
Isaiah 10:22	<i>Only a remnant of Israel will believe</i>
Psalms 22:27	<i>Ends of earth turn to Lord, worship Him</i>
Isaiah 49:6	<i>Salvation extends to the ends of earth</i>
Isaiah 56	<i>Foreigners join themselves to God</i>

God always knew the end from the beginning, that His plan of salvation through Jesus would include the Gentiles, alongside His chosen people Israel. The deliberations, discussions, and perhaps heated debates of that Council were no doubt impassioned from both sides of the aisle. It was hard for Jews to understand how the promises of Mashiach from YHWH could also be intended for Romans, Greeks, Ethiopians, Arabs, and barbarians all across the Empire. Were not the Hebrew prophets in agreement as they wrote about Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and then

Jacob who became the namesake for the nation of Israel? And yet the evidences from Paul and Barnabas, as well as wording in God's plan for "all the world" to be blessed clearly showed that salvation and the Holy Spirit had come to Gentiles as well. What seemed to have been settled under the leadership of Peter and Jesus' brother James, alongside Paul and Barnabas seven years ago, was back on the table as a major point of contention – and this was among all who believed in Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It certainly reminds us today that people within the church are fallible and still subject to disagreements about what seems best about how to truly serve God and be faithful to His Word.

TWO CONSPICUOUS ABSENCES

This third official trip to Jerusalem is also notable because Luke makes no mention at all of Peter [Cephas] or John bar-Zebedee. He only refers to "James and the other elders". These elders were the *presbyteros* [in the Greek], and not any of the original eleven Apostles. It is certainly an omission worth noting, as these two original disciples of Jesus were previously referred by Paul [Galatians 2:9] as the recognized "pillars" in that church. Paul is probably 48 years of age in 57 AD. Those disciples of Jesus [Peter and John] were most likely closer in age to Jesus [perhaps born between 6 BC and 2 BC] so they would be 9-to-13 years older than Paul and therefore between 55 and 60 years of age. James was probably just two years younger than his older brother Jesus, so he would be around 55 years old. I base that on John Mark probably listing Jesus' four brothers from oldest to youngest in Mark 6:3, with James being the next oldest after Jesus [Mary's firstborn son], followed by Joses, Jude [author of the book of Jude], and Simon. Mark includes an endnote of "His sisters", who would not have been named or noted in the birth-order, but Jesus did have at least two. Recall how Paul met all three men – Peter, James, and John – on his first trip to Jerusalem

[in 39 AD] when the right hand of fellowship was extended to him as an Apostle. Recall also how prior to Paul's second trip, at the Council of Jerusalem in 50 AD, it had been eleven years since the first visit, and Luke mentions [Acts 15] only Peter and James – but not John. Another seven years then passed, and on Paul's third and final official trip to Jerusalem there is only mention of Jesus' brother James. It is certainly a conspicuous absence within Luke's narrative. James is mentioned in 39, 50, and 57 AD. Peter is mentioned in 39 and 50. John is only included in the meeting of 39 AD – as Paul emerged from Arabia and Tarsus.

The church was launched in 32 AD during Pentecost, and it was now 25 years later [Pentecost of 57 AD] and not a word about Peter [who gave that famous sermon] or John bar-Zebedee. We do know Peter and John were sent by the Holy Spirit to Samaria [Acts 8:14] to preach the Gospel. Acts 9:32 says Peter traveled up to Lydda [17 miles inland from Joppa on the coast]. In Acts 10 he traveled up to Caesarea Maritima to meet Cornelius. He took flack [Acts 11:1-3] from local Jewish Christians for spending time with Gentiles. Peter also traveled to Syrian-Antioch and Paul notes [Galatians 2:11-14] how he had to confront Peter about his hypocrisy in not eating with Gentiles to placate zealous Jewish believers who still held to circumcision and the various requirements of the Mosaic Law. Peter's behavior also influenced Barnabas to join him in doing the same. The Bible states [Acts 12:1-3] that John's brother James bar-Zebedee [one of the "sons of thunder" as called by Jesus] was killed with a sword on the order of Herod Agrippa [Acts 12:1-2], earning the king favor with the Jews, emboldening him to have Peter imprisoned. When Peter fled Jerusalem after being miraculously set free, he told those praying for him at Mary's house [Acts 12:17] "*Report these things to James [Jesus' brother] and the brethren*". Peter then

left, most likely going far from Jerusalem. Historians such as Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, Polycarp, and Flavius Josephus write that Peter left Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria - arriving in Rome in the late 50s. It is likely when Paul gets to Rome and is under house arrest awaiting his appeal to Caesar, they saw each other. Caesar Nero had Peter crucified [by many accounts, upside down] in 64 AD - when he blamed the Rome fires on "Christians" - three years before he had Paul beheaded.

The Bible mentions Jesus' brother James as one of the pillars of the first church in Jerusalem [Galatians 1:18-2:10] - who also knew Paul. The 2nd Century AD historian Papias refers [Fragment X] to James as an elder [*presbyteros*]. Clement of Alexandria in Egypt [also 2nd Century] writes that Jesus' brother James was chosen as *lead elder* over the Jerusalem church by Peter, John, and James [the sons of Zebedee]. Clement also wrote that James was executed when the High Priest Hana ben Hanan and the Sanhedrin had him thrown down from the top of the Temple – and while still barely alive, he was beaten with a club until he was dead. This would have been prior to the death of the Romans procurator Porcius Festus in 62 AD.

The Apostle John wrote his Gospel account most likely when he was living in Ephesus, serving as an elder and spiritual mentor to Pastor Timotheus. Irenaeus, Polycarp, Ignatius, and Papias all wrote numerous accounts of John in Ephesus before he was exiled onto the island of Patmos. Many scholars advocate this happening during the reign of Emperor Domitian [sometime after 81 AD as he ascended the throne at the death of Titus Vespasian] – putting John in the Patmos cave in the late 80s or early 90s. My position is a much earlier date for his exile during the Fall of 68 AD under Emperor Galba, who ruled from June of 68 until January of 69. He was the first of four ruling in the infamous

"year of the four Emperors" [69 AD] after Caesar Nero had committed suicide. The Praetorium guard killed Galba at the Forum. Otho became Emperor for three months before committing suicide. Vitellius followed and ruled until December 20th when Vespasian's men killed him. The Roman Danube Army laid siege to Jerusalem, and then in August of 69 declared its allegiance to Vespasian. The Roman Senate acknowledged Vespasian as Emperor on December 21st. Strong evidence for this earlier year is also how the Apostle John makes NO mention of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by Titus Vespasian in 70 AD, exactly as Jesus had prophesied [Matthew 24:2, Mark 13:2 *"not one stone will be left upon another"*]. These would be events to include in the context of Jesus giving detailed revelation to John about end times – considering the rebuilt Temple in the 70th seven-year period for Israel described in Daniel-9. Also, Revelation 17:10 seems to reference Galba [who "is" present tense] as he follows "five who have fallen", with one still-future king to come. That Luke does not mention Peter and John in Jerusalem in 57 AD is plausible, as it had been 25 years since they were those widely-recognized pillars at the church-launch, and there is much evidence they traveled from Jerusalem later in their respective lives.

A BAD PLAN

Think back to what was just said to Paul as he came to Jerusalem this time in 57 AD - after his mission third trip - as he reported on the work God was doing with the Gentiles. The crowd implored him, *"What shall we do about this? because they will all hear that you are now here in Jerusalem?"* What transpires next is what I refer to as a bad plan that demonstrates how even Paul had to deal with the misguided schemes that men often come up with in their political in-fighting among church leaders. Luke describes [Acts 21:23-26] the Jerusalem elders decided that Paul should feign a strong commitment to the Law of Moses as an

outward display of conformity in order to satisfy all the Jews who were believers and remained zealous to keep the Law. There were four men who had recently taken a Nazirite vow. When the vow was completed the person would shave his head as a sign to everyone that this sincere promise [or pact] had been successfully completed. The Jerusalem elders want Paul to also shave his head and slide in alongside them as if he is a fifth man finishing this vow. This is so all would see Paul with a shaved head and it would placate those zealous Jews that Paul *“also works orderly and keeps the Law”* [Acts 21:24]. How sad that men need to connive an outward appearance to satisfy another group within the church. It is actually an outright lie, because Paul did NOT recently complete a vow for which he would have shaved his head.

It is troubling that Paul is agreeable to this deception, as he went along the next day with these four other men, shaved his head with them, and then went over to the Temple to give notice to the priests that the days of purification were completed [the vow fulfilled], and the appropriate sacrifice was offered for each of them. Luke provides no further details on this. It is perhaps an example to us that Paul was entirely human as we all are, and could make a bad decision, even as we are capable of doing. As in any church today, a few men conspired to plan an outward action to be viewed as compliance with a religious rite they held dear. That Paul went along with it shows how susceptible any of us can be to peer-pressure imposed by others. We are left to assume that it sufficed as an outward sign the Jews needed to see so they would be satisfied that Paul keeps the Law of Moses, even as they believed it should.

PROPHECY FULFILLED

Paul had been admonished by the believers in Tyre, as well as the clear word of prophecy demonstrated by Agabus, there would be trouble if

he set foot again in Jerusalem. He had been out on the road for just over seven of the last eleven years, with extended stays in Ephesus, Corinth, Athens, Troas, Thessalonica, and the island of Cyprus. There is no official log of how many people came to faith in Christ - such as Luke's recording that 3,000 believed and were baptized after Peter's first sermon at Pentecost in 32 AD [Acts 2:41], and that 5,000 "men" believed after Peter's second sermon [Acts 4:4]. However, there were now brand new churches in more than thirty named cities and regions throughout the Roman Empire. Just as those seven days of purification were finishing up as the vow was completed, Paul is going to encounter significant persecution from Jerusalem Jewish "Christians" who see him as a threat to all they hold dear in their traditional Judaism.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Saul has finally returned to Jerusalem, and brought a gift from believers in Macedonia for their fellow saints. This is mentioned in his letter to the Romans [15:25-27] - writing from Corinth, *"Now I am going to Jerusalem, serving the saints, for [believers in] Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem; they are pleased to do so and [the Gentiles] are indebted to them [Jewish believers in Jerusalem], for if Gentiles have shared in the spiritual things [of the Jews], they are indebted to minister to them [the Jews] also in material things"*. That must have been quite the reception as Paul, along with Gentiles such as Dr. Luke, Sopater of Berea son of Pyrrhus, Aristarchus and Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia, Timotheus [he was half Jewish, half Greek], and some unnamed Corinthians who traveled with Paul, laid out the monetary gift from the Gentile believers in Corinth and Ephesus [Romans 15:14-16 and 2nd Corinthians 8:18-21]. Certainly, such tangible love and care for fellow Christians would confirm what

Third Mission Trip

had already been decided seven years earlier at the Council in 50 AD. Paul had been on the road nearly three years [see below] and was making his way back to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost – the 25th anniversary of the birth of the church in 32 AD after Peter’s famous sermon in Acts-2. It should have been a time of rejoicing in God’s work in the Gentiles. It turns out to be what will send Paul to Rome, as the next chapter shows things did not happen as Paul had planned.

TIME	LOCATION
Mid-54 AD	Starts in Syrian-Antioch, then walks overland into Galatia and Phrygia
3 months	Ephesus
2 weeks	Sailed over to Macedonia [Philippi, Neapolis, Thessalonica, Berea].
1 week	Sailed back to Troas from Philippi [reunion with the 7 men]
2 years	Based in Ephesus
3 months	Stays in Corinth of Achaia and writes letter to believers in Rome.
1 week	Troas
	7 men sail to Assos [Paul walks]
1 week	Sail to Mitylene [east coast Lesbos]
	Chios [on island south of Lesbos]
	North to the island of Samos
	East to mainland and Miletus
1 month	Ephesian elders to Miletus
	Sailed to Kos, then Rhodes, Patara
	Gets ship for Tyre in Phoenicia.
1 week	Stayed one week in Tyre
2 months	Sailed south under Cyprus.
Few days	Sailed down coast to Ptolemais.
Few days	Continues to Caesarea-Maritima.
1 week	Walked to Jerusalem for Pentecost.
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Mid-57 AD	Approximately 34 months Total

CHAPTER EIGHT

Arrested in Jerusalem and Appeal to Caesar

Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem and stand trial, but Paul appealed to Caesar, so Festus said, *"To Caesar you shall go"*.

Acts 25:9-12

SETTING THE STAGE

The previous chapter covered Paul's third missionary journey and ends with him returning to Jerusalem for the first time in seven years, since he attended the Jerusalem Council in 50 AD. With so many Jews being in the city from all across Asia Minor, it would appear Paul had in fact made it back in time for Pentecost. It is most likely late May of 57 AD, sometime just prior to the Feast which happens 50 days [seven weeks] after Passover. It has also been exactly 25 years since the birth of the church at the Feast of Pentecost in 32 AD. Jesus had been crucified on Passover [Nisan 14] which fell on April 10th in that year. The tomb was

empty on the Feast of First Fruits [Nisan 17] which was April 13th - the first Easter Sunday. Jesus was then seen in person by several hundred eye-witnesses during the ensuing 40 days through May 23rd [Acts 1:3], prior to returning to the right hand of the Father. He told His remaining eleven disciples [Acts 1:13 roll-call] to WAIT in Jerusalem for “*You will be clothed with power from on high*” [Luke 24:49]. It was Peter who advocated selecting a replacement for Judas Iscariot [Acts 1:22]. They narrowed it down to Joseph-Barsabbas and Matthias, then drew straws and chose the latter. But Jesus was the One who personally selected and called each of His Apostles. And He would do the same outside of Damascus with Saul of Tarsus, to be His twelfth Apostle. Being back in Jerusalem for the 25th anniversary when the Holy Spirit launched the church must have been something exciting to anticipate.

But Paul had been strongly admonished not to set foot in Jerusalem, and Agabus had specifically prophesied that he would be bound by the authorities. This provides a very interesting concept about prayer and the Holy Spirit gifting a person with prophetic words. The same Spirit that is moving on believers with words of warning, including the very specific admonition that Paul will be bound [arrested and taken into legal custody], is the same Spirit of God that is leading, guiding, and directing Paul to return to Jerusalem after his third mission trip. This does not mean the Holy Spirit is confused or somehow mixed up in the messages given to Paul and the others. It simply means that the Holy Spirit is going to glorify Jesus through both the precision of His word to Agabus, AND His perfect will in how He plans to bring Paul to Rome, while also using his incarceration time to produce letters to multiple churches that will ultimately form the foundation of Christian doctrine in the Bible for two millennia going forward – right up through today.

It is also quite interesting that after the spectacle of all the magic and incantation books being burned by the sorcerers living in Ephesus, Luke says *"The Word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing"* [Acts 19:20-21], so with such enthusiasm for the spread of the Gospel, Paul purposed in his spirit that he would visit Jerusalem, *"After I have been there I must also see Rome"*. Consider that while he is in Corinth on the tail end of that third missionary venture, he writes a very upbeat and positive letter to *"All who are beloved of God in Rome called as saints"* [Romans 1:7]. It is reasonable to assume that Paul was feeling very encouraged by what God was doing with the ex-pat Jews and Gentiles outside of Judea. That forward momentum probably had him thinking that he would be very well received when he went back to the city of Jerusalem for the first time in seven years. The report of all God was doing in bringing salvation across the Roman Empire would no doubt be enthusiastically received by the elders and congregation of believers in the holy city. Being in Jerusalem on the 25th anniversary of Peter's sermon and the amazing outpouring of God's Holy Spirit during the Feast of Pentecost back in 32 AD, was no doubt an anticipated high-point to cap off all those years out on the road as a missionary. At that now-famous Feast 25 years earlier some 3,000 Jews believed Jesus was the Messiah who died on the cross for the sins of the world - and had been raised to life after *"three days and three nights"* on the Feast of First Fruits. Just as that landmark Pentecost had Jews and proselytes arrive in Jerusalem from places such as [Acts 2:9-11] Parthia, Media, Mesopotamia, Elam, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Egypt, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Libya, districts around Cyrene, Rome, the island of Crete, and Arabia - once again there would be thousands of pilgrims from all over the Empire - perhaps Paul hoped God would do another amazing work of salvation this time through him preaching to the Jews.

It is very plausible for Paul to believe and anticipate that he will have a great homecoming in the city he fondly recalls in Acts 22:3 as *the place where he was brought up*, and where he was educated by Gamaliel. It also makes sense that he fully expects to visit the capital of the Roman Empire [Acts 19:21] and meet in-person all those believers he heard about, because as he wrote them from Corinth [Romans 1:8] that their witness and *strong reputation of faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world*. In fact, they are so well-known by Paul that he extends greetings to over two dozen believers in Rome *by name* to conclude his epistle [Romans 16] – people like Phoebe, Aquila, and Priscilla – family members Andronicus and Junias, as well as Urbanus, Tryphosa, Rufus, Phlegon, Julia, and Olympas. It is provocative that Paul will soon head to Rome, but not by the circumstances he expected.

AND SO IT BEGINS

Beginning in verse 27 of Acts 21, the ruse of the Nazirite vow with its subsequent purification rites and summary sacrifices at the Temple had concluded, and Jews from Asia who were in the city for the Feast of Pentecost, recognized Paul in the Temple. They stirred up a mob to confront him, then grabbed him [Acts 21:28] crying out, “*Men of Israel, come to our aid, this is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, the Law, and this Temple – and he has defiled this most holy place*”. The anger over *defiling the Temple* was because **they claimed** they had seen Trophimus [Paul’s friend who was a Greek-Hellenist from Ephesus] in the city and simply **assumed** Paul brought this Gentile into the Temple. They took hold of Paul and dragged him out of the Temple while the doors were closed tightly behind him, as if to symbolically say he was not welcome within their beloved Temple. In their rage, those in the crowd were ready to kill Paul, but someone went and reported to the head of the Roman cohort about the mob-

scene in front of the Temple. Soldiers and centurions were dispatched, and when the crowd saw them along with the Roman commander Claudius Lysias [named in Acts 23:26] they stopped beating Paul. The Roman contingent put Paul in chains and began to interrogate him about who he was and what he had done to incite this violent mob. It was impossible to hear all the voices shouting at the same time, so the Roman commander takes Paul to their barracks in the Antonia Fortress [the citadel built by Herod in 35 BC and named for Marc Antony]. The crowd got so bad the soldiers had to carry Paul up the stairs above all the people yelling and pushing as they shouted, "Away with him". When they got Paul up to the top of the stairs and ready to enter the barracks, he spoke to the commander [in Greek], "May I say something to you?" Claudius Lysias was very surprised to hear Paul speak Greek. This, and what happens next, both infer that the crowd must have been shouting all those threats in their native Hebrew [Aramaic] – probably the reason the Romans could not sort out all the various accusations being yelled by the crowds against Paul. The commander was then surprised to ascertain that Paul was not a notorious Egyptian rebel who had stirred up a revolt against the Romans, leading some 4,000 men of the "Assassins" sect into the wilderness. Paul replied that he was a Jew and a Roman citizen from the very prominent city of Tarsus, capital of the Cilicia province. Paul asked if he could address the crowd from the relative safety at the top of the stairs [an elevated place where all would be able to hear him speak]. The commander Claudius allowed this and Paul motioned his hand to the crowd below and they became quiet in anticipation of him speaking. Luke says [Acts 21:40] that Paul switches from Greek into their Hebrew [Aramaic] dialect as he makes his address that starts at the beginning of Acts chapter-22.

When the crowd hears him speak Hebrew-Aramaic, they become even more quiet. Acts 22:3 is perhaps Paul's most concise summary of who he is, that he is a Jew [just like them] who was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, **but raised there in Jerusalem**, educated under Rabbi Gamaliel *strictly* according to their Jewish forefathers, and zealous for God [just like them]. He explains that he had previously arrested and bound men and women who followed this new movement known as "The Way", putting many in prison and to death. It is easy to picture that the large crowd must have been hanging on every word he said, as Paul essentially explained that he also used to be angered by the teachings of the Gospel [just like them]. He recounts his incredible experience as he was heading into Damascus to arrest "Christians", and then the prophetic word Ananias spoke over him, that Paul was called by Jesus the Messiah to be His witness all across the Empire. He continues that he was baptized, returned to Jerusalem, and initially no one accepted his testimony because he was so well known as being hostile to those who had faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul makes sure to recount how he was present [and gave *hearty* approval] over twenty years ago, when the Sanhedrin stoned Stephen to death, right there in Jerusalem.

Paul presenting himself as ***just like them*** in their passionate anger about defending Judaism against the supposed threats of those who followed Jesus, did not endear him to the crowd. It was then that they erupted again, tore off their cloaks, and hurled dirt into the air while shouting, "Take him away from the earth, he should not be allowed to live". The Roman commander moves Paul into the barracks inside the Antonia Fortress and decides to stretch him out for a flogging, so he can interrogate Paul and get some answers about what he has done and why everyone is so angry. Paul said to the centurion [in Greek] who was standing to watch, "Is it legal to lash a Roman citizen who has not been

tried or condemned?" When he heard Paul say he was a Roman citizen, that got his attention, and he halted the punishment before it even started, then went directly to Claudius Lysias and told him this news. [This also fits with Paul speaking to the Roman soldiers in Greek, but to the angry Jewish mob in Hebrew-Aramaic, because Paul clearly said to the crowd he was a Roman citizen from Tarsus, but the soldiers did not understand Hebrew-Aramaic.] The centurion knew it was illegal to scourge a citizen of Rome who had not been given a fair trial with a formal sentence passed down by the Proconsul in a court of law. So the commander came into the room to find Paul stretched out with leather straps, and said, "Tell me, you are a Roman citizen?" and Paul replied he was. The commander then explained that *his citizenship* had been purchased, but Paul countered that he was **born a Roman citizen**.

This is an awkward situation for Claudius, because he made the wrong assumption that Paul was either some typical Jerusalem Jew, or maybe an outlawed Egyptian rebel, which meant he could simply order Paul flogged without a trial or formal sentencing. He knows he has made a big mistake putting Paul in chains, and now in leather straps to be whipped, so he orders him unbound, then keeps Paul in the barracks as he takes the rest of the day and overnight to figure out what he is going to do next. The following day he has Paul released and orders the Chief Priests and the Council [Sanhedrin] to come and hear from Paul so he can find out why the crowd was so angered. Luke writes [Acts 24] that Paul stands up in this much more civilized and formal "court-like" setting as a witness to those religious leaders assembled.

PAUL'S DEFENSE

Luke must have been present as Paul addressed the religious Council because he records [Acts 23] Paul looked intensely at those gathered

around him, and began his testimony by saying that he has lived life with a perfectly good conscience up to this very day. The High Priest [named Ananias] immediately commanded those standing near Paul to strike his mouth – a sign that Paul was lying. It must have hurt, as Paul put his hand to his mouth and responded, *“God will strike you, you whitewashed wall, because you are going to try me according to the Law of Moses, but you strike me in direct violation to the Law”*. The bystanders then accused Paul of reviling the High Priest, which is also a violation of Jewish law [Exodus 22:28]. When Paul hears this he says he was not aware this man was the High Priest. Paul sees that the Council is comprised of Pharisees [like him] and Sadducees, so he boldly states, *“I am a Pharisee being tried because of the **hope of the resurrection**”* [this of course referring to Jesus]. This immediately divided the room’s perception of Paul, because Pharisees believe in the spirit of mankind, as well as angels, and a resurrection from the dead, but the Sadducees do not. Without another word in his defense, the Pharisees immediately shout out that they find nothing wrong with Paul, and add the caveat, *“Perhaps a spirit or an angel has spoken to him”*. The Council erupts with intense arguing among Pharisees and Sadducees, so the Romans take Paul back to the barracks. The following evening Paul is pondering his fate and what will happen next. Jesus stands right there in the room at his side and tells him, *“Take courage, for just as you have witnessed for me here in Jerusalem, **you will do the same for me in Rome**”*.

THE PLAN TO KILL PAUL

The next day, forty of Paul’s accusers went to the chief priests and Jewish leaders in Jerusalem to declare their solemn oath: that they will kill Paul before they again take any food [yes, fast until he is dead]. Their plan is a classic “lay in wait” strategy. The religious leaders will request that Paul be brought to them for additional interrogation, and

the forty men will surprise and overwhelm the four-to-six Roman guards accompanying Paul, and then they will murder him. There must have been some boasting and gossip spreading out from a few of those forty men, because word of the planned ambush became known to Paul's nephew. [Remember Paul's early years, that most, if not all, of his family came with him from Tarsus to Jerusalem, so Paul's sister has a son who had been living in the city since perhaps 40 AD, so he was **probably around 15** years of age.] His nephew came to Paul and told him about the plot. Paul notified the centurion in the barracks to "take this **young man** to the commander". When he explained the plan to kill Paul, Claudius told him not to let anyone know that he had warned the Romans of the attack. [This makes sense, as the original plot and oath had a few 'spill the beans' for Paul's nephew to hear of it, so the commander wanted no one to know he was warned of the plot.]

The reaction from Claudius Lysias is truly incredible, as he instructs two of his centurions to get 200 soldiers ready at midnight, along with 70 cavalry, and another 200 spearman [and have a horse for Paul to ride as well] and dispatches them to transport Paul out to the coastal fortress of Caesarea Maritima, to bring him safely to Governor Felix. One quick note. If Paul was considered a true criminal and threat to Rome, he would have walked - bound and leashed to a cavalry soldier's horse. That Claudius allows Paul to ride alongside his soldiers shows the commander believed that Paul was probably falsely accused by the Jewish religious leaders and the mob. A few key comments here. First, this commander is skilled in the art of war, so it is interesting that he assembles a Roman force that is **twelve times** the size of the reported "forty men" who will be laying in wait. Second, he may also have assumed if the report was of forty men, there could easily be others

who might join them, so that the ambush could involve many more than forty men. He obviously wants the Roman military escort to be so overwhelmingly large, that the ambush of Paul *will not even happen*, as the Jews will immediately recognize they are entirely overmatched. It is not that Claudius wanted sufficient numbers to prevail when the ambush happens [minimizing his casualties], but rather he is sending such a show of force that the Jews will not even attack, because they will be so fearful of these nearly 500 professional Roman soldiers and realize there is no way they could ever prevail in their 'solemn oath'.

Claudius Lysias gives the Roman soldiers an official letter to Felix that explains about the mob, how Paul was accused, and the plan to murder him [Acts 23:5]. The military escort departs in the dark of night and travels 53 miles to Antipatris, a city built in the 1st Century BC by Herod in honor of his father Herod Antipas. The Jews bound by the oath will be shocked to find that Paul is no longer in Jerusalem. Even if they did get word that he was now in Antipatris, they would have several hours on horseback to catch up, only to find nearly 500 Roman soldiers guarding Paul. That oath to not eat or drink until Paul is dead was, no doubt, quite the predicament for these Jews. The Romans left the next day and when they arrive in Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast, they delivered Paul, along with the letter from Claudius to Felix, who says he will give Paul a proper legal trial once all of his accusers arrive from Jerusalem. He orders Paul to be kept in Herod's Praetorium. This turn of events is so different than Paul could have imagined on his return to Jerusalem for Pentecost in 57 AD. Just a few months ago, he had written to the Roman believers [from Corinth] that he had been prevented from visiting them, but that after he goes to Jerusalem for Pentecost, he will then "*go on by way of you to Spain*" [in the Greek, Σπανία = "*Spania*", in the Roman-Latin, "*Hispania*"].

ON TRIAL IN CAESAREA

Luke records [Acts 24] that the Jewish delegation of Ananias [the High Priest] and the church elders arrives five days later. They also bring with them their own Roman attorney, *Tertullus, Esq.* - who brings formal charges that Paul is in violation of Roman law. This lawyer begins by patronizing Felix with celebratory accolades, *"Since by you we have attained much peace, and by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we now acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, with all thankfulness, Most Excellent Felix"*. He added that he did not want to bother Felix any more than needed, so he was very grateful for this hearing. That is quite a flattering opening statement to "butter-up" the governor to listen favorably to the legal argument of Tertullus. The charges are then stated: Paul is a "pest" who stirs up all kinds of dissension among the Jews – and not just in Jerusalem, but all over the Roman world. He is a ***ringleader among the sect of the Nazarenes***, and tried to desecrate the Jewish Temple – then he was arrested. Tertullus closed by inviting Felix to personally examine Paul so he could see that these assertions were true. The room then gets loud and rowdy, as the Jews join in and agree with these accusations.

Governor Felix motioned for "order in the court" and gestured for Paul to have his turn to respond. The Apostle makes his own statement that Felix has for many years been a judge, so Paul *"cheerfully will make my defense"*. His position is straightforward. Paul says he came into the city to worship, did not stir up any riot, and no one is able to prove the charges against him. Paul says, *"I will admit this"* and explains he is not of the sect of the Nazarenes, but *is* of the sect [as they refer to it] called "The Way", and *"we believe everything from our Jewish Law and what is written by the Prophets, including the hope of the resurrection - in*

this I always maintain a clear conscience before God and men". He says he was away for several years and returned twelve days ago bringing an offering [alms] for my nation, and they found me in the Temple, with no crowds or uproar. But **they stirred up** Jews from Asia who were in the city for the Feast of Pentecost. The only statement Paul made was that he was on trial for believing the hope of the resurrection.

It is intriguing that Felix, who had been a Roman judge in the Syrian Province for a long time, tells both the plaintiff and defense that he has an EXACT knowledge of "The Way" and will decide this case as soon as Claudius Lycias arrives [remember, he is back in Jerusalem and sent Paul to Felix]. While they all wait for him to come to Caesarea Maritima, Felix keeps Paul in the Praetorium, with "some freedoms" and allows friends to visit and minister to him. Felix is married to a Jewish woman, Drusilla, and they had many private audiences with Paul to hear about faith in Jesus. Felix sent for Paul often, hoping he would offer a bribe to be released, but it did not happen. As Paul discussed righteousness, self-control, and the judgment still to come, Felix was frightened by that and sent him away. It seems that Claudius Lycias never came over from Jerusalem, because **two years passed** by and in 59 AD Felix was succeeded as governor by Porcius Festus, who kept Paul imprisoned to gain initial favor with the Jews in the Syrian Province. Festus was just three days in office when he traveled from Caesarea to Jerusalem for his first meeting with these Jewish leaders. They asked that Paul be brought back to Jerusalem regarding the outstanding charges, so they could try "ambush number-2" to kill Paul in transit. Festus denied their request, but told the "influential men" they could accompany him to Caesarea, and if any wrong was found in Paul, they could prosecute him. Ten days later Festus left for the coast, and the next day he took his seat on the convened tribunal to hear the exact charges. Paul's

defense began with him saying he had committed no offense to either: 1] Jewish Law, 2] the Temple, or 3] Caesar. Felix, ever the politician, asked if Paul would go to Jerusalem and stand trial. But Paul stated the obvious - that he was already standing before Caesar's formal tribunal as a Roman citizen, "*where I ought to be tried*" [Acts 24:10] – and added that Festus knew Paul had not done anything illegal against the Jews. Paul then lowered the boom on that Roman tribunal [verse-11], saying that if he is guilty of any charges, he is willing to take the death penalty, but if innocent, no one has the legal right to hand him over to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, so he right then "appealed his case directly to Caesar" – which was the right of all Roman citizens. Festus conferred with the tribunal and said, "Okay then, you have appealed to Caesar, so you shall go to the Emperor in Rome".

PAUL AND AGRIPPA

Several days later, King Marcus Julius Agrippa and his wife Bernice visited Festus in Caesarea. Born in 28 AD, he was the son of Herod Agrippa who ruled Judea from 41 to 44 AD. His great grandfather was Herod the Great who ruled when Jesus was born in Bethlehem [he died in 1 BC sometime after a January eclipse]. Marcus was only 17 years of age when his father died in 44. The Emperor Claudius thought him too young to rule Judea, so he did not become king until 53 AD - a year before Claudius died and Nero became Caesar in 54. Bernice was the sister of Drusilla [Felix's wife], so King Agrippa was like a brother-in-law to Felix. Josephus notes the king was very knowledgeable of Judaism. During their visit, Festus told the king he inherited a prisoner named Paul from Felix's term in office, so would he review the case to help Festus decide what to do, because the charges levied against this Roman citizen were nothing like what he expected. The next day Paul

was brought in to see him, along with those demanding the death penalty. Felix explained that for Paul's appeal he needed to write to Caesar with substantive legal charges worthy of death under Roman law. Agrippa told Paul, "Let me hear your defense". Paul said he was fortunate to be heard by the king because [Acts 26:2-3] he is such "*an expert in all customs and questions about the Jews*". Paul gives a long explanation about being a zealous Pharisee who pursued, locked up, and punished believers in Jesus. He tells what happened in Damascus, how he remains obedient to the words of Jesus, and testifies of what the Prophets and Moses said would happen - the Christ would suffer, die, and be resurrected to proclaim light to Jews and Gentiles. Agrippa said [Acts 26:24] Paul was out of his mind, that his great rabbinical learning had driven him mad. Paul's reply was that even Agrippa knew all these things from the Hebrew Scriptures were true, to which the king replied, "*In a short time you will persuade me to be a Christian*". Paul said whether short or long, he wished that not only Agrippa, but all would believe. The king, Festus, and Bernice conferred and agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or prison. Agrippa told Festus that had Paul not appealed to Caesar, he would have set him free.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The Roman citizen Paul was not charged with a capital crime, just some disagreements within Judaism and his claim that a dead man named Jesus was alive [Acts 25:19]. With his arrest in Jerusalem and the series of events that took place in the two years from 57 to 59 AD, God specifically positioned Paul to preach to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa as his preparation for testifying about Jesus to Caesar Nero. Paul always wanted to get to Rome, but the Lord had a different plan to accomplish this. The next chapter looks at how Paul traveled to Rome, and what happened during his extended time there.

CHAPTER NINE

Paul Gets To Rome

When he entered Rome,
Paul was allowed to stay
by himself with the soldier
who was guarding him.

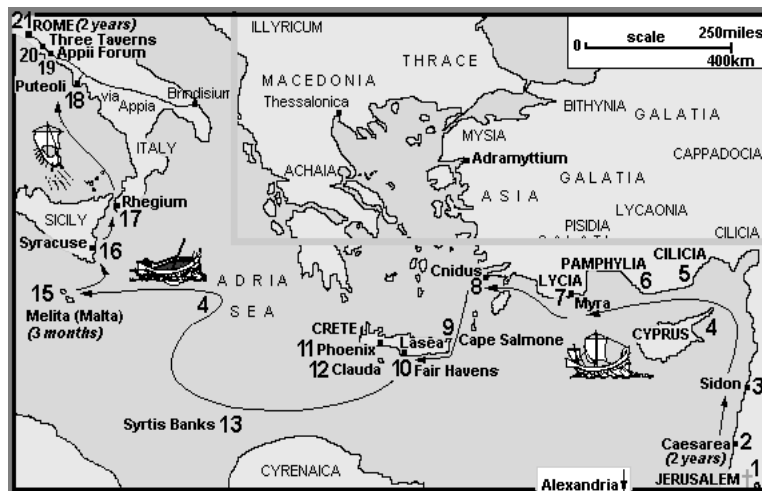
Acts 28:16

It is so interesting that the previous chapter of this book concludes with Luke's account in Acts 26:32 – that if Paul had not formally appealed to Caesar, King Agrippa would have had him released from his two years being held at Caesarea Maritima. The last two chapters of Luke's *Acts Of The Apostles* provides the account of Paul's journey from the Syrian Province to the Roman capital. The verse noted above explains that as he finally arrived he was under house arrest. Other comments from his various letters to the churches will provide additional perspective and context about Paul's time in Rome. His audience with King Marcus Julius Agrippa was the last event of his two-year saga imprisoned at Herod's Praetorium. The next thing we read is that a Roman centurion named Julius, from the military cohort of Caesar Augustus, put Paul

Paul Gets To Rome

and several other prisoners on an Adramyttian ship set to sail along the south coast of Asia. Adramyttium was a port on the west coast of Asia, just across the harbor from Assos and north of Pergamum. Luke notes that Aristarchus of Macedonia was with them at the start of this journey to Rome. [He had been dragged into the city stadium of Ephesus when the silversmiths accused Paul of hurting their trade, and a colleague of Sopater from Berea and Secundus, who, like him, was also from Thessalonica, Macedonia.] When Paul writes the Colossians [4:10] and Philemon [1:24] he mentions in both salutations that *Aristarchus is with him in Rome*, confirming that he traveled with Paul to Italy.

They sail up the coast to Sidon, as Julius the centurion shows kindness to Paul, allowing him to receive care from his friends there. Then they



sail between Cyprus and the south coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, into Myra in Lycia, where they transfer to an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy. The vessel heads south and around Cape Salome at the eastern tip of the island of Crete, and into the south coast port of Fair Haven near the city of Lasea. Paul had a lot of experience sailing on the Mediterranean

Sea, explaining to Julius that the winds and waves were obvious signs that if they continued at that time, the voyage would result in great loss of both cargo and lives. But Julius was persuaded by the captain and pilot to head out into the rough seas because the port was not well-situated against the weather as a place to stay for the winter months, so they reasoned the ship could make it to Phoenix by tacking very close along the shoreline. But a Euroclydon [in Latin, *Euroquilo*] wind rose up. This is a fierce cyclone [Nor'easter] that endangered ships across the eastern Mediterranean – pummeling them so they could no longer steer to be driven by heavy winds and big waves. The second day they tossed the cargo overboard, and on the third day they dismantled the ship's tackle to lighten the vessel and threw it into the sea. Luke notes that this calamity continued for another eleven days [Acts 27:27].

They had not eaten for days, and were no doubt sea-sick, being tossed by huge swells, so Paul encouraged everyone on board that an angel of the Lord appeared to him, assuring Paul there would be no loss of life, because he HAD to stand before Caesar and testify about the Gospel [with the condition that they run the ship aground on a 'certain island' in the Adriatic Sea, as they continued heading west toward Rome]. The manifest listed 276 people on board [Acts 27:37] so the vessel had to be 150-to-200 feet in length to accommodate them, plus the cargo. The crew took regular depth-soundings that showed they were heading into shallower waters and must be approaching land. Refer back to the map and see that the ship had been blown westward away from Crete about 600 miles to the island of Malta. The crew let loose the sails and rudder, allowing the winds and waves to drive the ship onto the beach, where it hit a reef and began to break apart from the pounding surf. The Roman soldiers planned to execute all the prisoners to ensure that

none of them escaped, but Julius ordered that no one was to be killed, and everyone should jump ship and grab whatever flotsam they could, and meet on the shore [Acts 27:42-44]. All 276 lives on board made it safely. No one died in the shipwreck, exactly as the angel told Paul.

THE MALTESE WINTER

As nearly 300 cold and wet people from the ship trudged through the heavy rains and waves crashing at the beach, the local islanders built a fire to help everyone get warm. Paul gathered some firewood and laid his bundle near the flames, but a poisonous snake slid out and fastened itself to his hand. Seeing this, they all assumed it was a form of justice, that this man [Paul] must be a murderer, and will still get his death penalty. Paul shook the snake into the bonfire and sat down to get warm. Everyone waited for his hand and arm to swell before he fell over dead. When nothing happened, they concluded he had to be a god, as the venom had no effect [refer to Mark 16:13 as Jesus commissioned His Apostles]. The lands adjoining the beach belonged to a wealthy Maltese property owner named Publius who welcomed all of the 276 survivors to his estate for three days to recover. His father was sick with a fever and dysentery, so Paul laid hands on him and prayed, and he was healed. When word spread about this, people from all over the island brought friends and family who were sick to Paul and they were also healed [refer again to Mark 16:13]. They wintered on Malta for three months [Acts 28:11]. Then a ship from Alexandria, Egypt came into port on its way to Rome. It had the famous "Twin Brothers" Castor and Pollux carved into the bow [the twins of father Zeus and mother Leda]. It seems everyone boarded for the remaining 430-mile trip, and that Publius - along with the Maltese people - were happy to resupply them with everything needed to finish the journey.

PAUL IN ROME

Their Alexandrian ship first put into the port of Syracuse for three days [modern-day Sicily], then sailed up to Rhegium [the toe of Italy's boot], continued north to Puteoli, and then to the Roman capital where the Tibur River meets the Tyrrhenian Sea. It was the Spring of 60 AD. Word spread quickly that Paul was in Rome. People came from as far as the Three Taverns [Three Inns] and the Appius Market [Forum] south of the city on the Appian Way into Rome. Luke notes [Acts 28:16] Paul stayed in a rented house with a Roman soldier guarding him [historians and theologians believe it was the home of Rufus - his father was Simon of Cyrene, whom the Romans forced to carry Jesus' cross to Golgotha]. Soon, the leading Jews of the city came and met with Paul and he explained that he had done *"nothing against our people, customs, or forefathers, yet here I am a prisoner"* [Acts 28:17]. These were not all believers in Jesus, as Luke writes that some who heard Paul's testimony and preaching the Gospel were persuaded, but others would not believe [Acts 28:24]. Paul had explained that he wore his chains on behalf of **the hope of all Israel**. It was probably quite a shock for Paul to learn [verse-21] they had heard *nothing* about him, either by letters coming from Jerusalem, or brethren who traveled to Rome. But they did want to hear about his views on 'The Way' because they knew it was spoken against everywhere [Acts 28:22]. Paul's closing apologetic quoted Isaiah 6:9-12, having gone to "this people" and now realizing they **keep hearing but do not understand**, and **keep seeing but do not perceive**. He continued that their **hearts had become dull**, their **ears do not hear**, and their **eyes are closed**. However, they still might yet see, hear, and understand, and THEN God will heal them. Paul noted the Gentiles HAVE now **heard** and **seen** and **understand**, and with that, these leading Jews left with much dispute among them.

ROME SUMMARY

Luke closes out his account of the Apostles [Acts 28:30-31] with, *“Paul stayed **two full years** in his rented quarters, welcoming all who came to him, as he preached the kingdom of God and taught the Lord Jesus with all openness, unhindered”*. This ends what is widely-recognized as the best narrative on the early church and the key sequence of events [timeline] in the life of Saul of Tarsus. He had arrived in Jerusalem at Pentecost in May of 57 AD, was arrested, then spent two years in Herod’s Praetorium in Caesarea Maritima. His trip to Rome probably started in late Fall of 59, and took about ten months to sail 1,400 miles, with three winter months on Malta. He arrived in Rome in the Spring of 60 AD, so his first “two years” of house arrest lasted until 62.

Before the shipwreck on Malta, the angel told Paul [Acts 27:24] *“You must stand before Caesar”*. That audience with the Emperor for his appeal must have happened by 62 AD, and went well, as Paul wrote Philemon [22] he **expected to be released soon**, would need new lodging, and plans to see him [in Colossae]. In Philippians 1:19-26 Paul seems to say the same thing, that *“this [house arrest] will turn out for my deliverance, according to my earnest expectation and hope”*.

ON THE ROAD AGAIN?

There are theories that after Paul’s house arrest, he traveled back to Crete to see how Titus was doing [Titus 1:5], perhaps sending Artemas or Tychicus later to bring Titus back to winter in Nicopolis [Titus 3:12]. It is proposed he also went to Ephesus [Timothy was the pastor], then Colossae to visit Philemon [22] as he wrote to him he would. Some say he went to Macedonia after Ephesus [1st Timothy 1:3], and to Miletus with Trophimus [2nd Timothy 4:20], leaving Erastus in Corinth. Paul may also have gone to Troas where he left his cloak and books with Carpus

[2nd Timothy 4:13]. If Paul was arrested for a second time in Macedonia [Nicompolis] during winter, that might explain how he arrived [again?] to Rome in winter [2nd Timothy 4:21]. However, the Bible does not specifically chronicle Paul traveling after his two years of house arrest.

DID PAUL GET TO SPAIN?

Paul wrote the Romans [15:24] he planned to visit as a stop-over on his way to Spain [Σπανία in Greek]. There is no Biblical evidence he got to the Iberian Peninsula. Clement [Philippians 4:3] was a *presbyteros* [elder] in Rome and wrote in 1st Clement 5:5-7 [not inspired Scripture] *"Paul preached in the East and West and won glory for his faith, he taught righteousness to the whole world, reaching the farthest limits of the west"*. The Empire's farthest west was Spain. In the 4th Century, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote that: "Paul, from Jerusalem unto Illyricum, preached the Gospel, and carried the earnestness of **his preaching as far as Spain**." John Chrysostom of Constantinople [also 4th Century] wrote: *"After Paul had been in Rome he returned to Spain"*. And Jerome [who translated the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek Gospels to Latin] wrote: *"Paul having been in Spain went from one ocean to another"*. The Muratorian Canon fragment [circa 170 AD] includes this: "For most excellent Theophilus, Luke compiled events that happened in his presence, as he plainly showed by omitting Peter's martyrdom, and Paul departing Rome **when he journeyed to Spain**". If he did go to Spain, it is curious his ministry there is not recorded anywhere.

ROME FINALE

Paul probably stayed in Rome after his house arrest. He penned letters referred to as his *Prison Epistles* to Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and a personal letter to Philemon - because he was *not being "hindered"* from preaching and teaching [Acts 28:31]. If he was free from 62 to 64,

he probably remained in Rome among the various home churches. The infamous fires in Rome began in July 64 AD - lasting a week. After Nero blamed the Christians for the destruction of ten of the capital's fourteen districts, Paul may have been arrested, being known as a 'ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes' [Acts 24:5]. Church historians state he was not under house arrest again [like during his appeal to Caesar], but was incarcerated in the notorious Mamertine Prison [2nd Timothy 4:16]. He knew death was certain [2nd Timothy 4:6-8] enduring three years in those dungeons until Nero had him beheaded [probably in 67 AD]. The Bible does not record the events of those final years. Clement of Rome [cited on the prior page] wrote, "Paul endured suffering before being set free from this world and transported up to the holy place, the greatest example of endurance". Tertullian's *Scorpiace* 15:4 states that Paul was beheaded – confirmed by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History* [2:25]. It was the normal execution for Roman citizens [decollation by sword] - rather than being devoured by wild beasts. Eusebius also wrote [5:2] that Apollonius was "beheaded according to Roman law". It appears the logical timeline for Paul in Rome is as follows:

- *Sails from Caesarea Maritima in Spring of 59*
- *Arrives in Rome 10 months later in Winter of 60*
- *House arrest from 60 until 62*
- *Audience with Caesar Nero sometime in 62*
- *Released and lives in Rome 2 years until fires in July of 64*
- *Arrested in late Summer/early Fall of 64*
- *Held in Mamertine Prison about 3 years*
- *Nero has Paul beheaded with the sword in 67*

Paul's perspective on earthly life and the inevitability of death: "Christ will always be exalted in my body, **whether in life or death**, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain" [Philippians 1:20-21] was no doubt how he lived the last eight years of his life in the Roman capital. The next chapter reviews his letters as the foundations of Christian doctrine.

CHAPTER TEN

Paul's Letters of Christian Doctrine

Paul's letters account for half the New Testament, inspiring a great deal of Christian doctrine. His writings are the source of much Christian terminology and provide a framework for the hierarchy of church leadership.

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The Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus, certainly had an intense eleven years [from 46 to 57 AD] when he was on the road for seven years preaching the Gospel all across Asia, Greece, and on the islands of Cyprus and Crete. Dozens of new churches were launched, while [no doubt] several thousand people came to faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Many were ex-patriate Jews residing in thoroughly Greek-Hellenist and Roman cities. Others were pagan Gentiles who had no prior experience with Hebrew Scriptures and the concept of a long-promised Messiah who would suffer and die for the sins of the world. Paul introduced the

Gospel to small synagogues. He preached in public marketplaces. He engaged philosophers in high-level dialogue. He witnessed to Roman officials, magistrates, city treasurers, regional Proconsuls, centurions, and common soldiers of the Empire. Paul maintained contact with the Christian churches by written correspondence to Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and the like. He penned strong encouragement to men like Timothy and Titus, while challenging Philemon on the matter of forgiveness and reconciliation. Paul even wrote to all those believers in Rome before he had ever traveled to the capital of the Empire. His letters were read aloud to congregations and copied multiple times so they could circulate to wider audiences of believers wanting to know more about the truths of the Gospel message and its incredible bases within the Jewish Torah, Psalms, and prophets. There were copies of those Hebrew Scriptures translated into the common Greek language [the Septuagint] as early as the middle of the 3rd Century BC – nearly 300 years before Jesus was born. Now there were dozens [if not more than one hundred] copies of Paul's letters making their way all around the Mediterranean. These Epistles [from the Greek *epistole* ἐπιστολή meaning "group correspondence"] soon became widely-recognized as the BEST commentaries on the Christian life and church life. Over time, it was clear to everyone that Paul's writings were truly inspired by the Holy Spirit - the content-pedagogy accepted as a firm basis for sound doctrine in virtually every matter of the Christian faith. They had the Greek term *didache* [did-ahkay - διδαχή "the teaching"] ascribed to them, which meant these were *God's Word* written by the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It is amazing to ponder that fourteen books of the New Testament are *epistles* written by Saul of Tarsus - the twelfth Apostle, and inspired by

God's Spirit working in him. Many commentaries only attribute thirteen books to Paul [some even less]. I remain a strong proponent that he is the author of Hebrews -a treatise to *Jewish brethren* [details covered in Chapter-12]. Paul wrote letters to believers in Rome, twice to the Corinthians, as well as those in Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and twice to Christians in Thessalonica. He also had couriers deliver letters to Titus, Philemon, and twice to Pastor Timotheus in Ephesus. With this wonderful apologetic to the Hebrews, Paul contributed 14 of the 27 books [over half] that comprise the New Testament.

Several computer word-counts note that Luke penned almost 38,000 words in his Gospel and Acts, while Paul is credited with just over 32,000 total words in his Epistles. Whichever way one views the final tally of words or pages, it is indisputable that Paul's contribution to the Canon of Scripture is truly significant. It is Luke who delivers both a wonderful Gospel account of the life of Jesus and then the *Actions of the Apostles* after the Son of God ascended to the Father. Paul then writes exceptional commentary on literally EVERY core doctrine that defines Christian life and Church life. He did not fall into a trance with his eyes closed while he involuntarily began to write. He did however, pray often as God's Spirit guided his words regarding encouragement, admonition, reproof, and correction [2nd Timothy 4:16] in his letters. This chapter overviews Paul's fourteen *epistles* that contain the full range of core Christian doctrine. Because there is so much material, the chapter is organized with some opening comments about each letter, followed by bullet-points outlining the key doctrines covered in that Epistle. Each section then closes with a list of my favorite verses from that letter which are typically very well-known Scripture passages to believers all over the world [and through the centuries].

ROMANS

Paul's letter to "all the beloved in Rome" was most likely written from Corinth in 57 AD on the tail-end of his third mission trip. He had never been to the Roman capital, but mentions early in his opening greeting the strong faith of these believers *is being proclaimed throughout the world*. It was Paul's sincere desire to one day travel to Rome, as he *"always in his prayers made the request if perhaps by the will of God he would be able to go there"*. In fact, his letter closes with specifically mentioning some 30 individuals by name [from Asyncritus to Tryphaena and Urbanus] – who were obviously among those whose reputation was being made known all throughout the Empire. The primary Christian doctrines expounded by Paul in his Roman *epistle* are:

- The Righteousness of God
- The Sinfulness of all Mankind
- The Consequences of Sin and Unbelief
- General Revelation expressed through Creation
- The Law and Circumcision
- The Process of Spiritual Maturity
- Justification is by Faith for Believers
- The Results of Justification
- Sanctification in the Christian life
- Being Dead to Sin and Alive to Christ
- Assurance of Salvation
- Believers Dedicated in Service to the Lord
- Being Obedient to Earthly Authority
- The Literal Fulfillment still to come for Israel

Here are some of the most famous doctrinal statements in this letter.

- **Romans 3:23**
All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.
- **Romans 5:8**
While we still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **Romans 5:9**
Having been justified we will be saved from God's wrath.
- **Romans 6:23**
The wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life.

- **Romans 8:1**
There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ
- **Romans 8:28**
All things work together for good to those who love God.
- **Romans 10:9**
Confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' - believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.
- **Romans 12:1**
Present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable.

1ST CORINTHIANS

Paul probably wrote his initial *epistole* to the Corinthians in 54 AD while he was in Ephesus at the end of his second missionary trip. He made a trip to the city in early 57 AD during the last leg of his third mission trip [see Chapter Seven] as he gradually made his way back to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. The believers in Corinth faced a unique set of challenges to their faith within that thoroughly pagan city. The core doctrines in Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church include:

- Marriage, Divorce, Celibacy
- The Wisdom of God and Relying on the Spirit
- Dietary matters pertaining to certain Foods
- Issues about Idol Worship
- Matters about church-congregational functioning
- The Worship of God
- Gifts from the Holy Spirit
- The Rapture of the Church
- The Resurrection of Believers

Here are a few well-known doctrinal statements in this letter.

- **1st Corinthians 2:9**
Eye has not seen, ear not hear what God has prepared.
- **1st Corinthians 6:19**
Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- **1st Corinthians 9:24**
All run the race but only one receives the prize.
- **1st Corinthians 10:13**
No temptation has come except what is common to all.

- **1st Corinthians 10:31**
Whether you eat or drink to all to the glory of God.
- **1st Corinthians 12:4**
There are different gifts, the same Spirit distributes them.
- **1st Corinthians 13:4**
Love is patient, love is kind, not proud, does not boast.
- **1st Corinthians 15:3**
Christ died, buried, raised according to the Scriptures.
- **1st Corinthians 15:50**
Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

2nd CORINTHIANS

Paul probably wrote his second letter to the Corinthians in 55 AD - a year after the prior correspondence, while he was in Macedonia during his third mission trip, probably in Philippi. The core Christian doctrines explained by Paul in this second letter to the church in Corinth are:

- Forgiveness and Reconciliation among Believers
- Treasures in Earthen "Jars of Clay"
- Being Absent from Earthly body, present with the Lord
- Afflictions do Impact/Affect Believers
- Being Unequally-Yoked
- Giving Generously to God's Work / Cheerful Giving
- The Case for Paul's Apostleship
- Admonition about Godly Church Life
- Admonition about Individual Godly Christian Life

The following verses highlight famous doctrines in this letter.

- **2nd Corinthians 2:9**
Eye has not seen, ear not hear what God has prepared.
- **2nd Corinthians 3:17**
Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.
- **2nd Corinthians 5:10**
We must all stand at the Bema to receive what is due.
- **2nd Corinthians 5:17**
If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature.
- **2nd Corinthians 5:21**
God made Him who knew no sin to be made sin for us.
- **2nd Corinthians 12:9**
My grace is sufficient for you.
- **2nd Corinthians 12:17**
To keep from being proud I was given a thorn in the flesh.

GALATIANS

Paul composed an *epistle* to all the churches in the Roman Province of Galatia [within Asia Minor] in either 54 or 55 AD, probably while he was in Ephesus during his third mission trip. The Galatian churches were dealing with intense confrontations from Judaizers who were in direct opposition to Jesus being the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. Paul will be strong to remind them that he received his Apostleship from the Lord Jesus directly [personally called] and reminds them that Peter is not somehow a better Apostle – even as Peter has become somewhat legalistic in his teaching and preaching. He warns them to be careful about those Jews who boast in their circumcision – as if they are more spiritual, and yet do not even keep the entirety of the Law themselves.

The letter highlights these essential Christian doctrines:

- Always Beware of “Another Gospel” being taught
- Paul’s Apostleship Confirmed by Jerusalem Apostles
- Some Concerns about Peter [confronted in Antioch]
- Justification by Faith, Not by the Mosaic Law
- No longer Slaves but Sons and Heirs
- Hagar [Ishmael] vs. Sarah [Isaac] Different Covenants
- Bear Each Other’s Burdens
- Be careful of the ‘Circumcision’ who Boast in That

These verses include some famous doctrines within this letter.

- **Galatians 1:11**
Know this, the Gospel I preach is not of human origin.
- **Galatians 1:18**
If an angel preaches a different Gospel, he is accursed.
- **Galatians 2:20**
I am crucified with Christ, and now Christ lives in me.
- **Galatians 3:28**
There is neither Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female.
- **Galatians 5:22**
The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience . . .
- **Galatians 6:7**
God is not mocked, you will reap what you sow.
- **Galatians 6:9**
Let us not grow weary in doing good.

EPHESIANS [*Prison Epistle*]

Paul spent a lot of time in the city of Ephesus - a beautiful cosmopolitan port on the west coast of Asia Minor, with its horseshoe-shaped harbor and promenade along the beaches. Home to the Artemis Temple, it was steeped in pagan idol worship and Greek mythology. Paul makes a strong case for the mystery of Christ and His body - the Church. It is widely-held that he penned this letter in 62 AD during his house arrest in Rome, awaiting audience for his appeal to Caesar. There were MANY Gentiles in this church [pastored by the young Timotheus] as Ephesians 2:11 notes "Remember that **formerly you Gentiles in the flesh** [called 'uncircumcised' by the Jews] were separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the Covenants of Promise". The main doctrines emphasized in this letter include:

- Praise God for your Spiritual Blessings
- Pray to God for Spiritual Wisdom
- Pray for Spiritual Strength
- God's Power in Christ – Being Alive in Christ
- Jewish and Gentile Believers are ONE in Christ
- Believers should Live in Unity by the Holy Spirit
- Believers are the Temple of the Lord
- Gifted Leadership Helps the Church Body Mature
- Old Behavior, Motivation for New Behavior
- Be Imitators of God and Walk as Children of Light
- Light Compared to Darkness
- The Relationship of Husbands and Wives

The following verses are very well-known from the Ephesian *epistole*:

- **Ephesians 2:8**
By grace you are saved, thru faith, it is not of yourselves.
- **Ephesians 4:32**
Be kind and compassionate, forgiving one another.
- **Ephesians 5:19**
Speak to one another with Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.
- **Ephesians 5:21**
Submit to one another in the reverence of Christ.
- **Ephesians 5:25**
Husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church.

- **Ephesians 6:10**
Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.
- **Ephesians 6:11**
Put on the full armor of God to stand against the devil.
- **Ephesians 6:12**
We struggle not with flesh and blood, but spiritual forces.

PHILIPPIANS *[Prison Epistle]*

Paul wrote to the church in the Macedonian city of Philippi [on the northeast Aegean coast of Greece] in 62 AD while confined in Rome [in verses 13-14 of the opening chapter Paul describes his testimony of the Gospel to the Praetorium soldier guarding him]. This fits Luke's account [Acts 28:14-31] and Paul's "house-arrest" for two years in Rome [this is not the Mamertine Prison while awaiting execution]. His emphasis is on defining true "joy" for believers, and what kind of "mind" to have. He continues this theme in thanking them for their gift to him when they heard he was in prison. Paul mentions Timotheus and Epaphroditus [who minister in the Ephesian church] to the believers in the Philippian church just across the Aegean Sea – which means they must have sailed over to visit and minister. The core doctrines Paul focus on are:

- Standing FIRM when Spiritually Persecuted
- The Great Progress of the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Whether Alive or Dead we "Live" for Christ
- Jesus' Humility and Being Exalted
- Believers are to "Live" in Godly Humility
- Hold on FAST to the Word of Life
- Be Careful of those who Do Evil
- Be Imitators of Paul's Godly Character
- No need to Anxious – Know the Peace of God
- Remain in Christian Unity with ALL Believers

Here are some well-known verses from book of the Philippians:

- **Philippians 1:6**
He who began a good work in you will complete it.
- **Philippians 1:21**
For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

- **Philippians 2:3**
Do nothing out of selfishness or vain conceit.
- **Philippians 2:10**
At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, tongue confess.
- **Philippians 3:13**
Forget what lies behind, I press on to what lies ahead.
- **Philippians 4:4**
Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say Rejoice!
- **Philippians 4:6**
Be anxious about nothing, present your requests to God.
- **Philippians 4:8**
Whatever is pure, right, lovely – think on these things.
- **Philippians 4:13**
I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

COLOSSIANS [*Prison Epistle*]

The city of Colossae is in the Province of Phrygia in west-central Asia. Paul's letter was penned in 61 or 62 AD during house arrest in Rome. Because Paul takes on what appears to be a Gnosticism controversy in the city of Colossae, so liberal theologians date it in the late 1st Century or even early 2nd Century, and say Paul is not the author. Refuting this heresy fits well with Colossae in the mid-1st Century AD, when the city *had fallen* from being the primary point on the East-West trade-route between Assyria [east] and Ephesus on the west coast of Asia. Hierapolis and Laodicea were now the two most prominent cities in the region [Jesus will later address the Laodiceans in His revelation given to John bar-Zebedee]. To counter the Gnostic idea that Jesus was not a flesh and bone physical person, Paul focuses on the true Divine nature that was in the person of Jesus the Messiah, and believers are rooted in Him [the fullness of the Deity ***dwelt in bodily form in Jesus***]. The core Christian doctrines explained by Paul in his letter to the Colossians are:

- The Absolute Centrality of Jesus Christ
- The Preeminence of Jesus Christ above all things
- ALL that God has accomplished through Jesus Christ
- The Mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ

- How Believers are made alive in Jesus Christ
- Warnings about rules-concepts devised by men
- How Jesus Christ refutes the Colossian heresy
- Seek After Things Above
- Stand Strong in Christian Relationships

These well-known verses come from the Colossians epistle:

- **Colossians 1:15**
Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God.
- **Colossians 2:9**
In Christ the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.
- **Colossians 2:14**
He canceled our certificate of debt, nailing it to the cross.
- **Colossians 2:17**
What happened as foreshadows, the substance is Christ.
- **Colossians 3:1**
You are raised with Christ, set your mind on things above.
- **Colossians 3:4**
When Christ appears you will appear with Him in glory.
- **Colossians 3:23**
Whatever you do work heartily for the Lord, not for man.
- **Colossians 4:2**
Devote yourselves to prayer, be watchful and thankful.

1st THESSALONIANS

Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica of Macedonia sometime in 52 AD during his second missionary trip. This fits with archaeological evidence putting Gallio as Proconsul from 51 to 52 AD. Paul traveled along the Neapolis – Philippi – Thessalonica – Berea – Corinth – Athens itinerary after he came across the Aegean Sea from Troas. Time in this city was both encouraging and quite challenging. Verse 2 in chapter-3 explains Timotheus went to Thessalonica after meeting Paul in Athens, while Silas [who is not mentioned] is thought to have returned to Philippi. Thessalonica is the largest city in Macedonia and lies on a strategic trade-route [the Egnatian Way] with direct northern access to the Danube. Most believers there were recently converted pagans, so

they needed some strong support from Paul. The main doctrines Paul emphasized in this first letter to those Thessalonians are:

- Jesus WILL return for Believers – the “Blessed Hope”
- Jesus will after that Return with His Saints to rule on Earth
- Let that Imminent Hope motivate Believers for daily life
- Be Continually Sanctified
- Always Continue in Love for One Another
- Comfort Each Other with the Hope of Christ’s Return
- Remain Steadfast during Trials

Consider these famous verses in Paul’s first letter to Thessalonica:

- **1st Thessalonians 1:15**
Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God.
- **1st Thessalonians 3:8**
For we truly live when we stand firm in the Lord.
- **1st Thessalonians 4:16-17**
The Lord will descend with a shout and the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God, the dead in Christ are raised first, then we who are alive will be “caught up” with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.
- **1st Thessalonians 5:6**
Don’t fall asleep but be alert and soberminded.
- **1st Thessalonians 5:9**
God has not destined you for wrath, but for salvation.
- **1st Thessalonians 5:16-17**
Rejoice always and pray without ceasing.

2nd THESSALONIANS

Paul wrote a second letter to Thessalonica most likely in late 52 or early 53 AD – probably only six or seven months after he sent over his first letter to that church. He covers many of the same topics that were in the first letter, but also introduces the “man of lawlessness” for the first time. Timothy [and maybe Silas] had picked up the first *epistle* from Paul [writing in Corinth] and hand-delivered it to the church. They have likely returned to Corinth and Paul sends one or both of them back with

this follow-up encouragement. The main doctrines emphasized by Paul in this second letter to Thessalonica include:

- Standing Firm in the face of intense Persecution
- Clarity about the Lord's Coming for His Church
- Apostacy comes before the "Man of Lawlessness"
- Remain Steadfast in the Work God gives you
- The Moral Imperative of Working for a Living
- Basics about the "Elect" and God's Calling
- How one's Service can be a Strong Testimony
- Remain Active and Diligent while Waiting for the Lord
- Hold Fast to Sound Doctrine Taught to You

There are not many of what might be referred to as "famous" Scripture passages within the second letter Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, as it focuses primarily on the persecution of the church in that city. Paul also spends time explaining the "man of lawlessness" – who he is, how he will be revealed, and deception [apostacy/delusion] to accompany his introduction to the world. There are a few encouraging verses that may not be as well-known by typical Christians, but consider these:

- **2nd Thessalonians 1:14**
We boast about your perseverance and faith in trials.
- **2nd Thessalonians 2:1-2**
We request with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure, or be disturbed by a spirit or a message or a letter – as if it was from us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has occurred.
- **2nd Thessalonians 3:4**
We have confidence you will continue in the Lord.

1st TIMOTHY

The Apostle Paul also wrote twice to the young pastor of the church in Ephesus. The first letter may have been written while Paul was in Macedonia in either 63 or 64 - or when he was freed in Rome - about eight years after Paul had stayed in Ephesus for an extended three-year period of time. He may have sent the letter by ship across the northern

Aegean Sea down to the port of Ephesus – or on a ship from Rome.

The primary doctrines Paul to Pastor Timotheus in Ephesus are:

- Connecting the Old Testament scriptures to Jesus
- Importance and “Mystery” of Godliness and Holiness
- Older Women are to Teach the Younger Women
- Qualifications for “Over-seers” and “Deacons”
- Apostasy is Coming to the Church / Be Prepared
- Instructions for Widows and Church Support of them
- Honor the Elders / Strategies for Ministry
- The Love of Money and False Teachers

These are fairly well-known verses in Paul’s first letter to Timothy:

- **1st Timothy 1:4**
In the latter days some will abandon their faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.
- **1st Timothy 2:5**
There is one God and one mediator, the man, Jesus.
- **1st Timothy 2:12**
I don’t allow women to teach or have authority over men.
- **1st Timothy 3:2**
Elders should be above reproach, faithful, respectable.
- **1st Timothy 4:12**
Let no one look down on you due to your youthfulness, but show yourself an example of those who believe.
- **1st Timothy 6:7**
We brought nothing into the world and take nothing out.
- **1st Timothy 6:10**
The love of money is the root of all evil – some who are eager for money have wandered away from their faith.
- **1st Timothy 6:12**
Fight the good fight of faith, hold onto the eternal life.

2nd TIMOTHY

Paul probably wrote his second letter to Timothy a few years later, probably in 64 [perhaps as late as 65 AD leading up to his execution] when he was in prison for the second time in Rome – this time in a cold dungeon, rather than “house-arrest”. Paul had been deserted by many,

and only Luke was with him at this time, so he emphasizes to Pastor Timotheus these key doctrines as he encourages him to come to Rome:

- Guard the Gospel Message
- Persevere in the Gospel during Difficult Times
- Always Preach the Gospel at ALL times
- What it means to Suffer for the Gospel message
- Be Aware of Foolish Controversies
- Standing Firm against the Last Days and Difficult Times
- Endurance [and Charge] in Preaching the Gospel

Paul's second letter to Timothy includes these favorite verses:

- **2nd Timothy 1:7**
God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but power, and love, and discipline.
- **2nd Timothy 1:13**
Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
- **2nd Timothy 2:2**
The things you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
- **2nd Timothy 3:12**
All who want to live godly in Christ will be persecuted.
- **2nd Timothy 3:16**
All scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness.
- **2nd Timothy 4:2**
Preach the Word, be prepared in season and out - correct rebuke, encourage with patience and careful instruction.
- **2nd Timothy 4:3**
Time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate teachers in accordance with their own desires.
- **2nd Timothy 4:7**
I fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith.

TITUS

When Paul was traveling back to Syrian-Antioch his ship stopped on the island of Crete, and there he left his fellow worker Titus to set up elders in each of the new churches along the southern coastline. Most agree

this letter was written by Paul from Macedonia [maybe Neapolis] after he was released from "house-arrest" – so in late 62 or early 63 AD. Paul wants to encourage Titus in his long and exhausting work on Crete:

- Not saved BY good works, but FOR good works
- Remind all of the amazing "Gift of Righteousness"
- Sound Instruction, Behavior, Conduct toward ALL
- Consider Everything God Did for Believers
- Be Built Up in the Righteousness of God

Paul's epistle to Titus has these memorable verses within:

- **Titus 1:2**
The hope of eternal life which God promised before time.
- **Titus 1:7**
God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power, And love, and discipline.
- **Titus 1:9**
Hold fast the faithful Word in accordance with teaching to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict.
- **Titus 2:13**
Looking for the Blessed Hope and appearing of glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.
- **Titus 3:1**
Be subject to authorities, obedient, ready to do good.
- **Titus 3:5**
He saved us not because of righteous things we did, but according to His mercy by the washing of the Spirit.

PHILEMON [*Prison Epistle*]

Paul wrote a personal letter to his friend and colleague, who was a wealthy businessman in Colossae, on behalf of a runaway Roman slave, Onesimus, who had served Philemon. This was most likely penned in 61 or 62 AD during his house arrest in Rome, and he probably sent the letter along with Onesimus and Tychicus as they carried his other letter to Colossae. The main doctrines Paul emphasized to Philemon are:

- True Forgiveness and Restoration in Christ
- Full Reconciliation as Brothers in Christ
- Reminders about Christian Faith and Agape Love
- Always be Thankful and Prayerful

Paul's short letter to Philemon is just one chapter [just like the book of Jude], and tends to not be as well-read. It provides a nice Christian framework for addressing wrongs, and the process for arriving at true forgiveness and restoration of a broken relationship. Paul's appeal to Philemon follows similar guidelines that Roman and Greek teacher-philosophers taught about how a broken relationship can be restored, including opening up rapport with the other party, persuading the intellect on the merits of fixing the matter, and then finally dealing with the emotions involved. Here are a few verses worth noting:

- **Philemon 1:4-5**
I always thank God for you, making mention of you in my prayers because I hear of your love and of the faith you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints.
- **Philemon 1:7**
I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by you.
- **Philemon 1:17**
If you regard me a partner, accept Onesimus as if me.
- **Philemon 1:21**
I have confidence you will do even more than I request.

HEBREWS

There remains continued controversy surrounding the authorship of this eloquent treatise to the nation of Israel. This letter is covered with much greater detail coming up in Chapter Twelve of this book.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

During my sophomore year of college I took a two-semester sequence of Christian Doctrine. The topics covered by my professors were broad in scope and deep in details. Creation, the Fall of Man and Promise of Messiah. The Problem of Sin. The Character of God. The Trinity. The Incarnation, Atonement, the Resurrection. Justification, Sanctification, and Glorification. Prophecy and the Rapture of the Church. Discipleship

and Church leaders. Fruit of the Spirit. Gifts from the Spirit. Faith vs. Works, Earthly Treasures and Tithing. We had over 100 file cards hole-punched on a metal ring with each doctrine written on the front, and verses written on the back about each. It is fascinating that those 700+ Bible verses of Christian doctrine came almost entirely from Paul's fourteen *epistles*. My professors pointed out the Greek word *didasko* [διδασκω] meaning "to teach exactly what was taught to you". The Greek *hetero-didasko* means "to teach *something different* than was taught you". That is so profound. Greek does not use *homo-didasko* to mean "teach the same". It was ***inherently understood*** in the word, that whenever ***you teach others***, it will be ***the same that was taught to you*** [already built in]. It is only when teaching something different that *hetero* is added. This is how false doctrine is defined.

Paul's letters have stood the test of time [2,000 years and counting]. God had a far-reaching vision for Saul's ministry - not only preaching and planting new churches throughout the Mediterranean region, but writing these fourteen definitive ***Letters of Christian Doctrine*** which literally define the core principles for daily living and church life. Bible commentaries from Chuck Missler, John MacArthur, Matthew Henry, Warren Wiersbe, J. Vernon McGee, Chuck Smith, John Walvoord, H.A. Ironside, John Newton, Joseph Hall, Chuck Swindoll, David Guzik, Bob Hoekstra, Arthur Robertson, and Clarence Larkin all find grounding in the letters of Paul the Apostle, as the best commentary on the Bible remains . . . THE BIBLE! Consider all the churches, home Bible studies, discipleship groups, college courses, and high school retreats that have been blessed by the inspired words penned by Saul of Tarsus. The next chapter examines Paul's thorn in the flesh.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Because of the greatness of the revelations I received, to keep me from exalting myself, I was given a *thorn in the flesh* - a messenger of Satan to hassle and mistreat me.

2nd Corinthians 12:7

Saul of Tarsus completed three missionary trips and penned fourteen commentaries about core Christian doctrine, so let me state clearly at the outset of this chapter that my clear opinion is that his Apostleship is never in question. However, he was also a regular person like you and me. God called him and gifted-equipped him for a specific ministry, even as the Holy Spirit continues to do with men and women today. But he mentions [2nd Corinthians 12:7] that he personally dealt with a "*thorn in the flesh*". It was bothersome, it discouraged him, and it was such a nuisance that THREE times Paul pleaded with the Lord to take it away. He says it was from "*the messenger of Satan to torment me lest I*

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should be exalted above measure". Commentators have for centuries speculated this "thorn" was poor eyesight, or carpal tunnel syndrome from all his writing, or even feeble knees. But the direct and broader contexts of Paul's entire life and teachings point to it being entirely a spiritual matter: "*Lest I should be exalted above measure [conceited] through the **abundance [greatness] of revelations**, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, **the messenger of Satan** to torment me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*" This statement comes AFTER he writes about himself [though in the third person singular] regarding a truly amazing experience he had from the Lord [2nd Corinthians 12:1-6]. This matter merits an entire chapter to do a full examination of this "thorn" that Paul dealt with. I propose that it involved two things: First, a matter of timing, and second, a matter of reputation. Before we get to those, it is important to understand the "thorn" metaphor.

GREEK METAPHOR

A "thorn in the flesh" is a classic Greek metaphor [Aesop's *fables*] that everyone in Corinth would immediately understand. When you get a splinter, you sometimes get it all out on the first attempt, but if a little is left, it is a bothersome nuisance – from which we get our colloquialism "This really gets **under my skin**". As a figure of speech, it is by definition not literally about physical flesh. It is an analogy, a metaphor. Paul wrote often about the tension between the spirit and the flesh. He wasn't talking about literal skin and bones "flesh", but the **natural man** who thinks and acts in a prideful, self-centered way that serves his own flesh, rather than the Holy Spirit. Such a man is "fleshly", in the ways of the world, and not living by the Spirit of God. As such, Paul would not use "*thorn in the flesh*" to speak literally about his own flesh, such as his eyesight, hands, or knees. No, Paul was speaking about a *spiritual* problem that affected his fleshly, natural man. This dealt with pride and

boasting, position and recognition - clearly deeds of the flesh, and from this world. There are clear reasons why Paul was not referring to a physical matter of near-sightedness, pre-arthritis hands, or his strained knee ligaments. The following sections examine these reasons.

GLORY IN INFIRMITIES

First, in 2nd Corinthians 11:23-27 Paul wrote about physical infirmities affecting his ministry, including: prisons, beatings, shipwrecked and in the ocean for a day and overnight, lashings, and being stoned. Why would he who endured such physical hardships - that must have left his body with bumps, bruises, pains, and weaknesses - describe squinting to read, aching joints, or sore knees as his "thorn in the flesh"? Paul's accounts of his physical trials counted it all JOY when persecuted for the Lord's sake [Acts 13:52] saying, "*I will boast in what pertains to my weaknesses*" [verse 30]. In Romans 5:3-4 Paul wrote that tribulations bring about perseverance, that builds proven character, to strengthen the hope within believers. It is not logical that Paul would ask the Lord THREE times to remove a bothersome "thorn in his flesh" if it was simply a physical issue in his body. That makes no sense. Paul "**rejoiced in his sufferings**" [Colossians 1:24], knowing that if he "**suffered for the Lord** he would be glorified with Him" [Romans 8:17], and know the Lord and the "**fellowship** [koinonia] **of His suffering**" [Philippians 3:10]. Recounting his "infirmities" then segues directly into Chapter Twelve of 2nd Corinthians as Paul clarifies more about his *spiritual* "thorn".

SPIRITUAL NOT PHYSICAL

Paul provides context [2nd Corinthians 12:1-6] that his "thorn" was there to keep him from **exalting himself too high - given the sheer volume of revelations given to him**, as he recounts his personal experience with the Lord [*whether in the body or in the spirit he is not sure*] as he went

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to the "Third Heaven", and in that "paradise" he heard inexpressible **words he is not permitted to repeat to anyone**. He keeps "that man" in the third person so as to not come right out and say, "It was ME". Paul finishes by saying [verse-6] that he did not want to appear to be foolish in his boasting of that amazing experience, for he is speaking truth, but he will refrain from a full disclosure so that *"no one will credit him with more than they see in him or hear from him"*. Having been given such a multitude of heavenly experience, he is even more assured that he was chosen by the Lord Jesus as the Twelfth Apostle. What happened in Damascus, and Arabia afterward, together solidified his true calling and spiritual gifting to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. But he is **not permitted** to repeat the details of what he saw and heard. As Paul steps out into his new role as an Apostle, he is going to be challenged about the authenticity of his calling - whether he is a true Apostle alongside Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Matthew and the others.

PAUL'S TIMING

The first *spiritual* challenge to Paul being a true Apostle is that he was not present with the other eleven Apostles during Jesus' ministry. While they could say, "We remember what it was like being with Jesus and hearing Him speak and seeing Him in person", Paul could not say that. People could point, whisper, gossip, or even openly confront Paul that he was not among Jesus' original disciples, so how could he claim to be one of the twelve Apostles? This would be a very difficult *spiritual* issue to deal with each time Paul preached or taught. That would surely get under his skin, just like a "thorn in the flesh". His credibility being publicly called into question sounds like the perfect plan for Satan's messenger to torment Saul. Paul states [1st Corinthians 15:8] he knows full well he was one *"born out of due season"*. People believed Paul had not been personally chosen, called, and discipled by Jesus. The

other eleven had, but not Saul of Tarsus. His "thorn" was that constant tugging on Paul's flesh - his pride and positioning, his self-worth - that while the other eleven had Apostolic authority because they were "eye-witnesses" of the Lord's ministry AND were each personally called by Jesus as Apostles, Paul would have to deal with his Apostolic authority being "suspect", called into question, and openly challenged. Even though **he was chosen directly by the Lord** near Damascus, his resumé lacked those 31 months the others had with Jesus. And he was chosen *AFTER* Jesus ascended into heaven, so he was not there when Jesus commissioned His other Apostles to *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"* [Mathew 28:19]. People would challenge his authority as an Apostle simply because his timing did not line up - and Satan probably used that to regularly - *spiritually* - torment Paul.

PAUL'S REPUTATION

The second *spiritual* challenge to Paul being a true Apostle is that he was previously hostile toward "The Way" and actively persecuted the church. Consider having that on your resumé. Luke noted [Acts 9:26] that just after Paul's conversion, believers in Jerusalem *"were afraid of him, not believing he was a disciple"*. His own testimony [Acts 22:3-4] recounts he *"persecuted the Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women"*. In Galatians 1:13 he says *"In my former of life in Judaism I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it"*, and so [1st Corinthians 15:9] *"I am the least of the Apostles, not even worthy to be called an Apostle, for I persecuted the church"*. The 23-year old Saul was present when they stoned Stephen [Acts 8:1] *"in hearty agreement with putting him to death"*. He said [Acts 26:9-11] *"I did many things hostile to the name of*

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Jesus, as I locked many of the saints in prisons, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them – I punished them in synagogues, forced them to blaspheme, and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities". Then he becomes an Apostle!

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Examining 2nd Corinthians 12:7 closer, Paul expressly stated the thorn was **sent to him by a messenger from Satan to torment him**, and by the logical flow of that verse, it was because Paul had surpassing greatness of revelations [from the Lord] that could tend for him to exalt himself. The personal discipleship Paul received from the Lord, starting with his three days sitting motionless in that house on Straight Street in Damascus, and then continuing with some two years in Arabia, clearly involved supernatural "special revelation" as Jesus personally prepared Paul to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. This would of course be something Paul would want to tell everyone about. But he **was not permitted** to tell the specifics of what he saw and heard from Jesus. That is why he can finish up his testimony [2nd Corinthians 12:9-10] by saying the Lord assured him that **grace would be sufficient** for Paul, and that the true power of God in him was perfected in his weakness. And so he said, "Gladly I will boast about my weakness so the power of Christ may dwell in me". He will be content with weaknesses, **insults, distress, persecution, and difficulty** for the Lord's sake, because when he is weak [*spiritually* tormented], that is when he is truly strong [*by God's Spirit*]. Does that fit with squinting eyes, arthritic fingers, or knees and legs that ache? Of course not. The spiritual thorn was to keep him in check **spiritually**, not physically. The Lord assured Paul with abundant personal revelations and experiences being discipled by Jesus. Those would be sufficient, even as Paul could not boast in them. The next chapter presents the case that Saul of Tarsus is the author of Hebrews.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Paul's Apologetic to the Nation of Israel

Take note *our brother Timothy*
with whom I will see you soon.
Greet all your leaders and saints,
Grace be with you all.

Hebrews 13:23-25

Chapter Ten reviewed Paul's *Letters of Christian Doctrine*, and the book of Hebrews is included with the other thirteen *epistles* attributed to him. This chapter focuses on the evidence that supports Paul as the author of Hebrews - this profound apologetic written specifically for the nation of Israel, laser-focused on making the case that everything in the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets was ultimately a foreshadow fulfilled literally in the person and work of Jesus from Nazareth - the Hebrew Messiah. The author is obviously an expert on Judaism and the Law of Moses. The Pharisee Saul of Tarsus fits that description perfectly. The

narrative style is clearly from a skilled rabbi who understands how to examine contractual terminology alongside cultural traditions and the foundational personalities in Israel's history. Once again, Saul of Tarsus has the educational background and experience to craft that compelling apologetic of how the Mosaic Law was always pointing God's people toward Mashiach – and that Jesus is that long-awaited 'Anointed One'. One excellent starting point is that the original King James Bible published in 1611 clearly stated this book as follows: "The Epistle Of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews" [see opening page below].



There is also strong content-evidence aside from traditional recognition through the centuries. The verse noted on the opening page of this chapter contains two great clues [in *italics*] supporting Saul of Tarsus as the author of Hebrews. The first is how the writer refers to "Our brother Timothy". The second is signing off, "Grace be with you all". Paul uses this exact same term: "Timothy our brother" in: 1st Corinthians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, 1st Thessalonians 3:2, and Philemon 1:1. Paul also includes in many of his letters his very familiar greeting, "Grace to you" in the following places: Romans 1:7, 1st Corinthians 1:3, Galatians 1:3,

2nd Corinthians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 1st Thessalonians 1:1, 2nd Thessalonians 1:2, and Philemon 1:3. He also uses the exact same statement: “*Grace be with you all*” in his closing salutations when signing off in: Titus 3:15, Romans 16:24, 2nd Corinthians 13:14, along with 2nd Thessalonians 3:18. Additional evidence continues well beyond these 17 overlapping Bible passages.

Early church historians such as Pantaenus, Clement, Eusebius, Origin, Tyrranius Rufinus, and Ambrose agreed that *The Epistle to the Hebrews* was from Paul - probably a sermon he preached - and either Barnabas or Luke was present to transcribe it. Clement wrote that Saul likely preached it in Hebrew-Aramaic to a Jewish audience [like he spoke on the steps of the Atonia Fortress in Acts 22] – and it was later translated into Greek. The Council of Hippo Regius [in North Africa, 393] and the Council of Carthage [also the African coast of the Mediterranean] both rejected any challenges to Paul being the author, and confirmed this Epistle was by Paul – and so it was included in the Biblical canon.

Paul uses similar terms and phrases with his letters, including Hebrews. He often inserts “therefore”, *dia touto* in Greek [διὰ τοῦτο], to resolve a position he advocates [in Hebrews 2:14, 2:17, 3:1, 3:7, 3:10, 4:1, 4:6, 4:11, 4:14, 4:16, 6:1, 7:25, 9:18, 9:23, 10:5, 10:19, 10:35, 11:12, 11:16, 12:1, 12:12, 12:28, and 13:12]. He uses “bear testimony” and “bearing testimony” from the perspective of a Rabbi-instructor. Paul writes the Christian life is “a race to run and finish”, God’s Word is a “sword”, and Christians are also Abraham’s seed. He often uses “atoning sacrifice” in Hebrews 10, as well as Romans 3, 1st Corinthians 5, 2nd Corinthians 5, Galatians 1, Ephesians 1 and 5, Philippians 2, Colossians 1, Titus 3, and 1st Timothy 2. He also states many times that Jesus dying on the cross ‘defeated powers, principalities, dark forces’ [Hebrews 2, Colossians 2].

Paul and Barnabas were in the synagogue of Pisidian-Antioch, Province of Galatia [Acts 13:16-41] and Paul gave a *"word of encouragement"* [word of *"exhortation"*, *logos paraklesis* in Greek]. The only other place in the New Testament that term is used is in Hebrews 13:22 as he once again addresses his Jewish audience. Hebrews 2:3-4 literally reads like Paul's personal testimony when he went to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles Peter and John bar-Zebedee, who were the ones ***who heard*** and confirmed that they had been empowered by Jesus through the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, and miracles as they preached the Gospel. *"After the Lord first spoke it, it was then confirmed to us by those who heard, God testifying in them by signs, and wonders, and miracles, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as He wills"*

While Paul was clearly called and supernaturally equipped to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, I believe the Lord gave him this opportunity to provide a detailed apologetic to his beloved brethren, tailored to the unique perspective a Hebrew audience would have regarding Messiah, the founding personalities in Israel's history, and how the Law of Moses is fulfilled in salvation through faith. That strong heart of conviction to bring the Good News to the nation of Israel is captured in Romans 9 as he says he has sorrow and grief inside, wishing the Israelites - who have *"the adoption as sons, the glory and the Covenants, the giving of the Law, the Temple service, and the Promises"* - would believe in Jesus. To those who argue his name is not in the letter, so he cannot be the author, this is actually strong evidence it is of Paul, as church fathers recognized its content as unique to Paul and accepted it as canon-Scripture *without* a name on the letter. THAT is profound. And if the *"style"* seems to be different from his other written epistles, this is likely because it is a sermon he preached, rather than something he penned.

This treatise to Paul's Hebrew brethren describes the finished work of Jesus on the cross as a *one-time* sacrifice to cover sin - able to perfect each person being sanctified by the literal fulfillment of the Passover Lamb. If there was ever a Jewish believer who wished to declare a profound apologetic about Jesus the Messiah, while using the Hebrew Scriptures to make an overwhelming case for righteousness, faith, and the perfect High Priest who fulfilled all the sacrifices when He offered Himself "once for all" – it was rabbi Saul of Tarsus. So while Paul was not called to preach to the circumcised [Galatians 2:7], as was Peter, the evidence supports the Lord allowing Paul to author this thoroughly Jewish apologetic covering these key doctrines:

- The Revelation about God Through His Son Jesus
- Jesus is Above all the Angels
- Old Testament Confirms the Eminence of Jesus
- Jesus was Made Like Us so He could Save Mankind
- Jesus the High Priest is above the Levitical Priests
- Jesus Our High Priest was also the Sacrificial Lamb
- Old Sanctuary, New Sanctuary, New Covenant
- Jesus is the "Better Sacrifice"
- Mankind can Confidently Enter Into the Sanctuary
- Holding Firm in Faith through all Circumstances
- Faith Clearly Defined and Multiple Examples of Faith
- The Crowning Motivation for all Believers
- Clear Contrast Between Mount Zion and Mount Sinai

Paul's apologetic to the Hebrews includes many famous verses:

- **Hebrews 1:1-2**
God, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things.
- **Hebrews 4:12**
The Word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing as far as the division of the soul and spirit, judging thoughts and intentions of the heart.
- **Hebrews 4:15**
We do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weakness, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

- **Hebrews 6:1**
Leave the elementary teachings and press on to maturity.
- **Hebrews 9:27**
It is appointed for men to die once, then the judgment.
- **Hebrews 11:1**
Now faith is the substance of those things hoped for, the evidence [conviction] of things not yet seen.
- **Hebrews 11:6**
Without faith it is impossible to please God, whomever comes to God must believe - He is a rewarder of those who seek after Him.
- **Hebrews 12:1**
Being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin that so easily entangles us, and run with endurance the race before us.
- **Hebrews 12:2**
Fix your eyes on Jesus the author-perfector of our faith.
- **Hebrews 13:8**
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
- **Hebrews 13:14**
We are seeking the eternal city that is to come.

It is perhaps the last epistle sent from his Roman Mamertine dungeon prior to Caesar Nero having Paul beheaded in 67 AD. His courier was Timotheus, whom he mentions as he closes the letter [Hebrews 13:23]. Some scholars try to attribute the book to Barnabas, others to Apollo, and many Bible scholars simply say they have "no idea" who wrote it. There are those who say it was written either late in the 1st Century or early in the 2nd Century AD, eliminating Paul from being the author. After more than 35 years of research, review, analysis of style and language, plus reading these core truths expounded by **an obvious Jewish scholar**, my position remains it was clearly written by Paul, so it pre-dates his execution. It also pre-dates the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus Vespasian in 70 AD, as it makes no mention of the Hebrew Temple being dismantled [Matthew 24:2 and Mark 13:2 - "not one stone left upon another"] which put an end to the Levitical sacrifices.

EPILOGUE

*Saul of Tarsus is
Paul the 12th Apostle*

For just as God worked through Peter
as an Apostle to the Jews, He worked
effectually through *Paul also as an
Apostle to the Gentiles*.

Galatians 2:8

The case has been presented that Saul is the Twelfth Apostle chosen by Jesus Christ. It is so provocative that God allowed Judas Iscariot [whom Jesus personally called] to fall away from the Lord through his own volition [selfish decision], as an example to all believers that being around the Lord did not [and still does not] guarantee true faith and belief, or a consistent relationship with Jesus. He who was right within the inner circle of the Lord's ministry ended up betraying Jesus and then took his own life in disgrace. Saul is the replacement Apostle, as God allowed a man who started far away from the Lord [by his own

choice to be hostile toward the Gospel message] to come to the Lord by his own decision, as an example to all believers that not being around the Lord does not necessarily keep someone from having faith and belief, that results in a consistent Christian walk with God. Judas reminds us that anyone can choose to walk away from God's truth. Saul reminds us that anyone can choose to accept and embrace God's truth.

Jesus personally chose each of His twelve Apostles. And while there were those referred to as *apostles* with a lower-case "a" [*ambassador* in the Greek], Jesus only called and equipped twelve as the foundational Apostles [with a capital "A"] for the initial venture of the Gospel "into all the world" [Acts 28]. We know there are ONLY these twelve because their foundational roles in preaching and teaching the Good News is distinctively noted by their unique recognition in the New Jerusalem [Revelation 21:14]. "*The **twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb** are the **twelve foundation stones** of the wall*". This amazing city has four walls made of jasper, laid out like a square, each with three entry gates made from a massive single pearl, and the street of the city is like pure gold - clear as glass. With three gates on each side of the four city walls [twelve total], perhaps the twelve foundation stones are each positioned at one of the twelve gates. What John bar-Zebedee saw revealed to him by Jesus [once again, the Lord dealing directly with one of His twelve Apostles] was all literal, a future place believers will have access to after this current universe is destroyed - replaced with new "*ouranos*" [the large overhead expanse of the aerial heavens or cosmos] above the new Earth [Revelation 21:21]. Jesus clearly showed John each of the twelve foundation stones had the names of one of the twelve Apostles. The twelfth Apostle is Saul of Tarsus, so it will be his name on one of those twelve foundation stones.

RESOURCES

There are numerous biographies, timelines, and doctrinal reviews in books, Bible commentaries, magazines, journals, conferences, online lectures, podcasts, seminary courses, theology seminars, and websites about the life of the Apostle Paul - including the following:

BiblicalArchaeology.org	BlueLetterBible.org
Christianity.com	Chuck Missler - Koinonia House
Eerdmans Commentaries	Expositors Bible Commentaries
History.com	John MacArthur - Grace To You
NationalGeographic.com	Journal of Evangelical Theology
Insight For Living - Chuck Swindoll	Through The Bible - J.V. McGee
Tyndale House Commentaries	Walk With The King - R.A. Cook
Westminster Theological Journal	Zondervan: Logos Bible Software
Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon [TheBereanCall.org]	



This **Resources** list could occupy several pages. It is worth examining other theories and perspectives about the life and ministry of Saul from Tarsus. The key is to find cogent explanations that fit with multiple layers of events recorded in the Bible, and do those views complement a realistic timeline in literal history, relative to the birth of Jesus, the crucifixion and resurrection, the subsequent Feast of Pentecost, the conversion of Saul, his eleven recorded years as a missionary during the actual-historical 1st Century Roman Empire, and his execution by Caesar – all prior to the benchmark of Titus Vespasian conquering Jerusalem and leveling the Temple in 70 AD. It is my position that the narrative presented in this book [though not definitive] meets the criteria.