

## THE LIFE OF ST. PAUL: APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

St. Paul is one of the most well-known figures of the first Christian generation and his fervent preaching continues to inspire us today. What we know of his life and of his passion for the Christian faith can be found in two major sources. First, his story and his journeys were chronicled by Luke in the *Acts of the Apostles* (written twenty years after his death). Second, Paul's letters to early Christian community are also preserved in the New Testament. While they cover only fifteen years of his life, they provide details of the Early Church (e.g., the Council of Jerusalem); Paul's rich theological instructions; and his missionary journeys. Paul traveled throughout parts of Asia Minor (currently Turkey), Syria and Arabia (now Jordan), all the way to Jerusalem, before reaching Europe, Greece and ultimately Rome. One can reasonably date his journeys to around 50-67 A.D.

### PAUL'S JEWISH HERITAGE

Saul was born (c. 8-10 A.D.) to a Jewish family from Tarsus, in Cilicia (now Eastern Turkey). He received the biblical name Saul and the Roman name Paul (his father, most likely having been granted Roman citizenship, wished to show his gratitude to the Pauli family). A tentmaker by profession, Paul was educated in Jerusalem -- "At the feet of Gamaliel I was educated strictly in our ancestral law and was zealous for God" (Acts 22:3) and again, "I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6), "circumcised on the eighth day" (Phil. 3:5-6).

During the martyrdom of Stephen, "the witnesses laid down their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58). On that day, a severe persecution of the Church broke out (Acts 8:1). Paul, who defended his "ancestral traditions" (Gal. 1:14), could have even been a Zealot (cf. Acts 22:3).

### PAUL'S CONVERSION

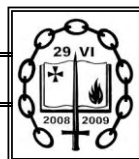
On his way to Damascus, where he planned to arrest the followers of Jesus in the synagogues, he was struck to the ground and heard the voice of the resurrected Jesus say to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He said "Who are you, sir?" The reply came. "I am Jesus, the one whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what you must do." (Acts 9:4-6). Since he was blinded by this encounter, his companions escorted him to Damascus. After three days, the Lord appeared to Ananias and sent him to Paul. "So Ananias went and entered the house; laying his hands on him, he said, 'Saul, my brother, the Lord has sent me, Jesus who appeared to you on the way by which you came, that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately things like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. He got up and was baptized and when he had eaten he recovered his strength" (Acts 9:17-19). The date of this important event is unknown, but the Letter to the Galatians seems to indicate that it might have been 33-35 AD, a short time after the establishment of the Church in Jerusalem with "Peter and the Eleven" (Acts 2:14).

### MEETINGS WITH PETER AND JAMES

Three years later, Saul went up to Jerusalem to speak with Cephas (from the word "Rock" in Greek), the name he always used for Peter, and "remained with him for fifteen days" (Gal. 1:18). It is certain that Peter taught him a great deal about Jesus (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-35), as well as a Christological interpretation of the prophets, just as Jesus had taught his disciples.

The only other Apostle of the Church whom Paul met was "James the brother of the Lord" (Gal. 1:19). He was sent on his way to Tarsus, where again he took up his work as a tentmaker, and continued to proclaim his faith in the synagogue (cf. Acts 18:3). These were the years of his personal growth.

THE YEAR OF ST. PAUL



JUNE 28, 2008 TO JUNE 29, 2009

## ANTIOCH: THE BEGINNING OF THE MISSIONARY ADVENTURE

At the beginning of the 40's A.D., Barnabas was sent from the Church of Jerusalem to Antioch of Syria in order to reclaim the Church established by the Hellenist missionaries who were expelled from Jerusalem. He went to Tarsus to seek Paul's help and became one of the leaders of the community, evangelizing with great success. This became the first separation from the synagogue environment, because Paul preached also to the Greeks. It was in Antioch that the term "Christian" was first used. During a prayer assembly, the voice of the Holy Spirit was heard saying: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2); then, the assembly prayed, fasted, laid hands on the two men and sent them on their mission. Barnabas and Paul sailed towards Cyprus. From this moment in time, Luke began to call Saul by his Roman name "Paul," underscoring his mission to "the nations".

## THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

### First Journey

Paul travels with Barnabas to Antioch, Cyprus, Perge, Antioch of Psidia. After a discouraging welcome from the Jews, he preaches to the Gentiles. Then he and Barnabas travel to Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. They return to Antioch of Syria. At Antioch, an issue arose about the circumcision of non-Jews who had converted to Christianity. The community decided to consult the elders of Jerusalem and send Paul, Barnabas and their Greek companion, Titus. The matters are resolved at the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD (Acts 15:1-34).

### Second Journey

Paul travels with Silas to southern Anatoly. In Lystra, they meet Timothy who accompanies them to Troas, then on to Greece. At Philippi, he baptizes Lydia and her entire household. Paul and Silas are arrested and while they could have escaped from jail after an earthquake, they do not. The jailer and his family are baptized (Acts 16:25-40).



Paul establishes Churches at Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth (where he meets Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple who had been expelled from Rome for their Christian belief). Paul stays at Corinth for eighteen months, then travels to Antioch and Ephesus.



### Third Journey

Paul revisits the churches he established in Anatoly and Greece, together with Timothy and Titus. He sails to Tyre, Caesarea and Jerusalem, where he is arrested in the Temple. He undergoes several trials and escapes a plot by Hebrew Zealots to kill him. As a Roman citizen, he finally appeals his case to Caesar, so he is taken to Rome.

### Fourth Journey: "The Journey in Captivity"

While travelling from Caesarea to Rome, the crew, passengers, and prisoners are shipwrecked on Malta. The natives greet them with great hospitality, Paul survives a snake bite, and the inhabitants of the island are converted to Christianity. The trip resumes to Rome.

## PAUL DIES IN ROME

The Christian community in Rome was described by Luke as being quite large and known for its faith and works. Hebrew merchants had brought Christianity here early on, but it remained isolated. Paul was not unknown to this community, since three years earlier they had received his great Letter to the Romans.



He reached Rome in the year 61 to undergo judgment. During his two years under house arrest, in the heart of the city close to the Tiber, Paul evangelized and wrote. The case against him dissolved for lack of accusers. But in 64, Nero set fire to the city of Rome, then accused the Christians of being responsible for it. Paul was arrested, bound in chains in the Mamertine Prison and condemned. He was beheaded outside the Aurelian Walls, along the Ostiense Way, around 67 AD.