



THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

SESSION ONE: MEETING SAUL OF TARSUS

(Painting is “The Philosopher” or “Saint Paul” by Vincenzo Gemito, 1917.)

QUESTIONS:

- 1) Saul was a native of “Tarsus.” In what contemporary country is that ancient city located today?
- 2) Paul was the student of a famous first century rabbi: Who was Paul’s teacher?
- 3) Making your best estimate, how many total miles did the Apostle Paul travel as a missionary in the first century?
- 4) How much time passed between Paul’s conversion and his first missionary journey?
- 5) Paul was incarcerated - behind bars or put under house arrest in how many different cities?
- 6) The Apostle Paul is traditionally credited with writing how many books in the New Testament?
- 7) Of the books traditionally ascribed to Paul as the author, how many are “disputed” as possibly being written by someone else?
- 8) How many long-distance missionary journeys did Paul make in his lifetime?
- 9) Paul was present - and an enthusiastic supporter - at the execution of which early Christian martyr?
- 10) In addition to his work as a missionary, Paul often worked for himself and self-supported his travels and ventures. In what trade was Paul proficiently trained?

INTRODUCTION

- January 11: Session 1 - Meeting Saul of Tarsus
- January 18: Session 2 - Damascus and the Desert
- January 25: Session 3 - The Barnabas Connection
- February 1: Session 4 - A European Entryway
- February 8: Session 5 - The Third Time's a Charm
- February 15: Session 6 - When in Rome...or was it Ephesus?
- February 22: Session 7 - Go West, Old Man!
- March 1: Session 8 - Paul the Apostle: A Living Legacy

THE EARLY YEARS



Tarsus was a town in the southeast corner of Asia Minor, a hub for the textile business; a philosophical center; and incubated a thriving Jewish community. This community formed Saul's earliest beliefs and fueled his zeal for the Mosaic Law (See Philippians 3).

Of the four major cultural groups in first century Judaism, Paul was a Pharisee with an inclination toward the Zealots (See Acts 8 and 9; Galatians 1; and Philippians 3):

“Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison...Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord’s followers. So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them - both men and women - back to Jerusalem in chains...I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church...You know what I was like when I followed the Jewish religion - how I violently persecuted God’s church. I did my best to destroy it. I was far ahead of my fellow Jews in my zeal for the traditions of my ancestors.”

A TIMELINE OF PAUL’S LIFE (Approximate)

AD 5	Birth of Saul of Tarsus
30	Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus
33	Saul’s Conversion
33-36	Paul in Arabia and makes first visit to Jerusalem as a believer
36-46	Paul returns to Tarsus
46-48	Barnabas brings Paul to Jerusalem; first missionary journey
48	Great Jerusalem Conference and Paul writes Galatians
49	Second missionary journey; Paul with Silas
50-51	Paul writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians
52-53	Third missionary journey
53-56	Paul in Ephesus and Corinth; Paul writes Philippians, Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Corinthians, and Romans
57	Paul returns to Jerusalem

57-59	Paul imprisoned at Jerusalem and Caesarea
59-60	The journey to, and eventual arrival in Rome
60-62	Roman imprisonment (House arrest); the book of Acts ends
62-64	Paul's further travels westward
64	Rome burns, the Neronian persecution of Christians begins
65	Death of Paul
66	Beginning of First Roman-Jewish War
68	Death of Nero
70	End of First Roman-Jewish War and Fall of Jerusalem

ASSUMPTIONS FOR THIS STUDY

- 1) Paul's main theological argument is not justification by faith; it is the creation of a new humanity.
- 2) Paul was more of a mystic than he was a theologian.
- 3) Paul's Pro-Christ position was very much an Anti-Roman Imperialism position.

Below are some books to consider. They range from conservative and devotional to controversial and academic:

Paul: 90 Days on His Journey of Faith, by Beth Moore

Paul, A Biography, by N.T. Wright

St Paul: The Misunderstood Apostle, by Karen Armstrong

Paul the Apostle: Missionary, Martyr, Theologian, by Robert E. Picirilli

The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, by Albert Schweitzer

Four Views on the Apostle Paul, by Michael F. Bird

Peter, Paul, and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History and Legend, by Bart Ehrman