

Doctrine of Paul

1. Introduction

ACTS TIMELINE

All dates are approximate

Ascension & Pentecost A.D. 30 (Tiberius)
Stephen Killed A. D. 34-35 (Tiberius)
Great Persecution A.D. 35-36 (Tiberius)
Saul Conversion A. D. 38-40 (Caligula)
Cornelius Conversion A. D. 39-40 (Caligula)
Herod Agrippa I dies A. D. 44 (Claudius)
Paul's 1st Journey A. D. 47-48 (Claudius)
Jerusalem Council A. D. 48-50 (Claudius)
Paul's 2nd Journey Begins A. D. 51 (Claudius)
Paul's 3rd Journey A. D. 52-53 (Claudius)
Paul to Ephesus A. D. 53 (Claudius)
Paul to Greece A. D. 56 (Nero)
Paul Arrested in Jerusalem A. D. 58 (Nero)
Paul Imprisoned A. D. 58-60 (Nero)
Voyage to Rome A. D. 60-61
Paul in Rome A. D. 61-63 (Nero)
Paul Released A. D. 63 (Nero)
Paul Travels A. D. 63-65 (Nero)
Paul Martyred A. D. 67-68 (Nero)
Jerusalem Destroyed A. D. 70 (Vespasian)

A.D. 30 A.D. 40 A.D. 50 A.D. 60 A.D. 70

1.1 Paul was a circumcised Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, speaking the Aramaic language in his home, inheritor of the tradition of Pharisees and a "strict observer" of the requirements of the Torah. Let me give you several points concerning Paul's knowledge of the several languages spoken and written during Paul's ministry.

1.1.1 Since Paul wrote his letters in Greek, he probably spoke it as well. His written Greek demonstrates a knowledge of Greek rhetoric (of which we moderns tend to be completely oblivious). Also, when Paul quotes scripture, he does so from the Greek translation of the Septuagint (although he doesn't always get it word perfect, because he was relying on memory, or he may have known variant versions).

1.1.2 He comes from Tarsus in Cilicia (now southern Turkey, on the Mediterranean), which was a very Hellenized city.

1.1.3 He surely spoke Aramaic. He refers to Peter in his letters as "Cephas", which is the original Aramaic form of "Rock." In 1Co 16.12 he uses the word "Maranatha", which is Aramaic for "Come, Lord."

1.1.4 Paul describes himself as a Pharisee, a student of the Torah. This would require that he knew Hebrew, and probably Aramaic (the language in which the Talmud was ultimately written down).

1.1.5 He seemed to be able to travel around Jerusalem and Judea with ease, so he probably knew the languages spoken there, namely Hebrew and Aramaic. For most of the 20th century it was usually thought that Hebrew in the 1st century was a dormant language used mainly in Jewish liturgies and rabbinical disputes, but more recent scholarship (largely based on the evolution of Hebrew in the Dead Sea Scrolls) suggests that it was actually a living spoken language at the time.

1.1.6 Paul probably knew little Latin. Greek was the official language of the eastern Roman Empire, and there was an unusual gulf between Latin speakers and Greek speakers. Notably, when he wrote his Letter to the Romans he wrote in Greek, not Latin. Indeed, Greek remained the first language of the Church in Rome well into the 2nd century.

1.2 He advanced in Judaism beyond many of his contemporaries; he was first and foremost a Jew.

Phi 3:5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;
Phi 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Gal 1:14 And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

1.3 So deeply ingrained were these qualities, that even near the end of his life he spoke with an honest appreciation of that heritage.

1.4 More than 20 years after his Christian conversion he cried, "I am a Pharisee, a son of a Pharisee; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead."

Acts 23:6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."

1.5 Even some time after this he claimed that he served "the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Mosaic law, and that is written in the Prophets."

Acts 24:14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,

Acts 24:15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

1.6 Paul was a Jew of the dispersion, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, a place that he called "no ordinary city."

Acts 21:39 Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

1.7 As a child he lived in the midst of Greek culture, a place of education and commerce. It was "the city whose institutions best and most completely united the oriental and western character."

1.8 Such an environment would likely have posed certain problems for a Jew.

1.8.1 As a Jew, he would be a member of a minority, and to some, despised.

1.8.2 His tenacious loyalty to the ideas of his religion would invite the taunts of many of the Gentiles living in Tarsus.

1.8.3 A Jew would be faced with the problem of social relationships with Gentiles.

1.8.4 Pharisees were sensitive, although not by any means necessarily hostile, to such socializing.

1.9 Paul developed a spirit of kinship with these "outsiders." He learned to understand them and to "become all things to all men."

1Co 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

1.10 Paul grew to late adolescence in this environment before going to Jerusalem to be educated under Gamaliel.

Acts 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

1.11 After his conversion Paul spent a period of eight to ten years in Syria and Cilicia, a time during his adult years when he would become deeply aware of the world culture about him.

1.11.1 These were years of preparation for that ministry in which he was known as "the apostle to the Gentiles."

Gal 1:22 I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

Gal 1:23 They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."

Gal 1:24 And they praised God because of me.

Acts 9:27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.

Acts 9:28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

Acts 9:29 He talked and debated with the Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.

Acts 9:30 When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

1.12 In addition to these aspects of his life, one other is emphasized directly in Acts, and is implicit in his letters.

1.12.1 He was a Roman citizen. This was a prized possession.

Acts 16:38 The officers reported this to the magistrates, and when they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, they were alarmed.

Acts 22:25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

1.13 Paul recognized the value of his citizenship.

Acts 22:28 Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

1.13.1 Tarsus was made a city of Rome just before Paul's birth and therefore his dad and his dad's posterity would become Roman citizens as would all freemen of the city. Keep in mind it has been conservatively estimated that one-third of all of Rome's citizens at the time of Paul's birth were slaves.

1.14 Some of the privileges of Roman citizenship were

- the guarantee of a trial before Caesar if requested,
- legal immunity from scourging before condemnation
- immunity from crucifixion, the worst form of capital punishment, in case of condemnation

1.15 In his letters, Paul not only strongly advocated the maintenance of law and order (the very foundation of Roman government), but also referred frequently to citizenship.

2. Conversion

2.1 In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul referred to his "former manner of life in Judaism," and how he had persecuted the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it."

Gal 1:13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

2.2 At that time he had believed that in pursuing such a course he was serving God and maintaining the purity of the Mosaic law.

2.3 Paul's writings in the first chapter of the book of Galatians gave no indication of a break in his endeavor to please God at the time of his conversion.

Gal 1:15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased

Gal 1:16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man,

2.4 While the narratives in the book of Acts, as well as his letters to the churches, seem to indicate the "suddenness" of the conversion although clearly there were certain experiences that prepared him for that conversion.

2.5 The death of Stephen, at which Saul was in hearty agreement and the heat of his house-to-house campaign against those of the faith, could hardly leave him unaffected.

Acts 7:58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.

Acts 7:59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Acts 7:60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1 And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria ...

Acts 8:3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest

Acts 9:2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the faith, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

2.6 In any case, there are two elements in the story which are clear.

2.6.1 First, Paul was convinced that he had seen the risen Lord; and,

2.6.2 Second, his life was radically changed from that day forward. The basis of his claim to apostleship lay in that experience.

2.7 Once and again he insists upon it (see 1Co 9:1; 15:8-15; Gal 1:15-17; cf. Acts 9:3-8; 22:6-11; 26:12-18).

1Co 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?

1Co 15:8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.
1Co 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Acts 9:3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

Acts 9:4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

Acts 9:5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

2.7.1 Since he was not one of the Twelve, since he had no claim on Jesus, and since he had persecuted His followers, the necessity of the personal revelation of Christ to Paul seems apparent.

2.8 The change was first indicated by Paul's response to the heavenly voice: "What shall I do, Lord?"

Acts 22:10 "'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. "'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.'

2.9 In Gal 2:20 Paul shows that he had a new relationship with Christ.

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

2.9.1 Also notice His new attitude expressed with reference to Christ.

2Co 5:16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2.9.2 The change was also evidenced by the message preached in the synagogues of Damascus (the very place he intended to visit in order to arrest the disciples of Jesus),

Acts 9:1 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest

Acts 9:2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

- Compare Acts 9:1-2 with Acts 9:20-22

Acts 9:20 At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God ...

Acts 9:22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.

2.10 Only a short time before he had thought that he "had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," even attempting to force His followers to blaspheme.

Acts 26:9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 26:10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Acts 26:11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

2.11 There was a change in his sense of mission. He was convinced that God had called him to "preach Jesus [God's Son] among the Gentiles."

2.11.1 In Acts, Paul was convinced this was the means by which Israel would ultimately be restored and blessed of God.

Rom 11:25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Rom 11:26 And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

Rom 11:27 And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

2.12 Just as surely as Christ had appeared to others after His resurrection, He appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus.

1Co 15:5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

1Co 15:6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.

1Co 15:7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles,

1Co 15:8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

1Co 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

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