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Meet the Apostles: Biblical and Legendary Accounts

Part Two – After the Twelve



Written by Robert C. Jones
Acworth, Georgia

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Christian Theology and History Adult Sunday School Courses

Robert Jones

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I've always been a strong believer in adult Sunday School classes and Bible studies in our churches. And many churches have quality, Biblically-based adult-focused programs. Unfortunately, just as many churches tend to downplay adult education, focusing on children's education (not a bad thing in itself), or focusing on the needs of the "unchurched", where topics such as church history and theology are often purposely ignored.

Yet there is a strong need for adult education focused on both the Bible and the basic tenets and history of the Faith. Among the reasons:

- Not all adults come from a strong childhood background in the church – adult Sunday School classes/Bible studies may be their first serious introduction to what Christianity is all about
- Christianity (and especially Evangelical Christianity) is under constant attack from the media and popular culture (movies, music, etc.). We need to give fellow Christians the tools to defend the Faith against attack (or to provide a "ready defense" as Peter says in 1 Peter 3:15)
- Even adult Christians that have a strong Biblical background often know little about the origins and history of their Faith

To better meet the needs of adult Christians (both those mature in their Faith, and those just starting out in the "School of Christ"), I've written a series of courses that focus on the history of the Christian Church (including the Jewish roots), as well as the development of doctrine in the Church. The topics represented in these courses are intended to both further the participant's walk in the Faith, as well as serve as a starting point for Christian apologetics.

While the primary purpose of these courses is for use in churches, they also may be useful for High School and College projects, especially the courses focused primarily on historical aspects.

One note: these courses are primarily written from an Evangelical Protestant viewpoint (I come from a Reformed Church background), but I hope I've given ample time to other points of view throughout the various courses.

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Introduction

Part One of this study focused on the original 12 apostles chosen by Jesus during his earthly ministry. Part Two of this study focuses on apostles named in the New Testament outside of the Gospels, including Paul, James (the brother of Jesus), Barnabas, Matthias, Andronicus and Junias.

This booklet will examine the post-twelve apostles from four primary sources:

1. **The New Testament**
2. **Church Tradition** – Represented herein primarily from the *Ecclesiastical History* written by Church Father Eusebius around the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Eusebius was the Bishop of Caesarea, and is best known for his list of “Accepted”, “Rejected/Disputed”, and “Impious/Absurd” New Testament-era books.
3. **Flavius Josephus** – from his *Jewish Antiquities* (written c. 93/94 A.D.)
4. **Apocryphal** – Much of the “Christian Apocrypha” is made up of dubious “Acts” of the various apostles. While these are considered to be of no authority, they do capture some legends about the apostles that are still known today – and they may capture at least some authentic second and third century traditions about the apostles, such as where they preached.

Interestingly enough, Eusebius in his Church History records some early traditions about the apostles that also show up in the apocryphal “Acts”.“ However, regarding the “Acts” themselves (and about apocryphal Gospels), Eusebius states:

“...we have felt compelled to give this catalogue in order that we might be able to know both these works [generally accepted works] and those that are cited by the heretics under the name of the apostles, including, for instance, such books as the Gospels of Peter, of Thomas, of Matthias, or of any others besides them, and the Acts of Andrew and John and the other apostles, which no one belonging to the succession of ecclesiastical writers has deemed worthy of mention in his writings. And further, the character of the style is at variance with apostolic usage, and both the thoughts and the purpose of the things that are related in them are so completely out of accord with true orthodoxy that they clearly show themselves to be the fictions of heretics. Wherefore they are not to be placed even among the rejected writings, but are all of them to be cast aside as absurd and impious.” (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 25)

Apostolic Quiz

1. T/F Church history records that James, the brother of Jesus, was the first bishop of Jerusalem
2. T/F Paul was a tentmaker by trade
3. T/F There is some evidence that there was a female apostle
4. T/F The Bible states that Silas was an apostle
5. T/F The New Testament describes the manner of death of Paul of Tarsus
6. T/F The New Testament never actually refers to Paul as an apostle
7. T/F Paul, like most of the “original Twelve” apostles, was a Galilean fisherman
8. T/F Barnabas and Paul parted company after an argument over John Mark
9. T/F About 25% of the New Testament is made up of Paul’s letters
10. T/F Barnabas was evidently so large that he was once mistaken for Zeus!
11. T/F Paul never plied a trade on his missionary journeys, as he felt that his position as “apostle to the Gentiles” meant that the churches he visited should provide him free room and board
12. T/F Paul and Peter were on opposite sides at the Council of Jerusalem in c. 49 A.D.
13. T/F Peter made the final decision at the Council of Jerusalem
14. T/F Barnabas may have written a letter that “almost made the New Testament”
15. T/F Paul was trained by Rabbi Gamaliel to be a Sadducee

Andronicus and Junias

Andronicus and Junias are mentioned in one verse in Romans, and may have been apostles. The verse in question is Romans 16:7:

⁷Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.” (NIV)

This seemingly innocent passage has generated some controversy over the years for two reasons. First, does “outstanding among the apostles” mean that they were “outstanding apostles”, or simply that they were well known among the apostles? If “outstanding apostles” is the correct interpretation, it leads into the second controversy - Junias is the feminine form of a Greek name. If this is the correct interpretation, then we have a female apostle.

The Revised Standard Version muddies the waters by stating, “they are men of note among the apostles”. However, Junias (*Iounias*) is clearly of the feminine form, as Thayer’s Greek Definitions states:

“1) a Christian woman at Rome, mentioned by Paul as one of his kinsfolk and fellow prisoners
Part of Speech: noun proper feminine”

St. John Chrysostom (c. 345-407), Patriarch of Constantinople, referred to Junias as a female apostle in one of his sermons:

“And indeed to be apostles at all is a great thing. But to be even amongst these of note, just consider what a great encomium this is! But they were of note owing to their works, to their achievements. Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!” (Homily 31, *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*)

So, there is some evidence that there was a female post-twelve apostle.

Regarding other aspects of the passage, Paul tells us:

- They are Paul’s relatives
- They spent time in prison with him (assumedly in Rome)
- They were “in Christ” before Paul was

Some commentators view that Andronicus and Junias were a married couple, similar to Priscilla and Aquila.

Barnabas

Barnabas was a “Levite from Cyprus”. We are told in Acts 4 that his name means “Son of Encouragement”:

³⁶Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles’ feet.” (NIV, Acts 4:36-37)

Barnabas was an early mentor and sponsor of Paul, introducing him to the apostles in Jerusalem after Paul’s conversion. Barnabas and Paul spent at least a year in Antioch (Syria), where the term “Christian”

was first used. Later, Barnabas would accompany Paul on his first missionary journey, and seems to have been in charge during at least some parts of the journey. He must have been a large man, because in Lystra, the people mistook him for Zeus!

Barnabas and Paul were key participants in the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. They represented the view that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised in order to be saved.

Later, Barnabas and Paul parted company in a dispute over John Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. John Mark had “deserted them in Pamphylia” according to Paul, and Paul did not want him to accompany them on his second missionary journey. It was a “sharp disagreement”, and Paul chose Silas instead of Barnabas to go with him on his second missionary journey.

Barnabas is identified as an apostle in Acts 14:14.

Reference	Verse(s)
“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas...”	Acts 4:36-37
“But Barnabas took him [Paul] and brought him to the apostles...”	Acts 9:27
Barnabas in Antioch	Acts 11:22-30
Barnabas, Saul and John Mark	Acts 12:25
Barnabas and Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, begin their missionary journey	Acts 13:1-13
Barnabas and Paul make both Jewish and Gentile converts	Acts 13:42-52
Barnabas and Paul narrowly escape stoning in Iconium	Acts 14:1-7
Barnabas is mistaken for Zeus!	Acts 14:12
Barnabas and Paul appoint elders in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch	Acts 14:21-28
Barnabas and Paul make their case at the Jerusalem Council	Acts 15:1-12
Barnabas and Paul are sent back to Antioch with the results of the Jerusalem Council	Acts 15:22-25
The great dispute between Barnabas and Paul	Acts 15:35-41
“Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living?”	1 Cor. 9:6
Barnabas led astray	Gal 2:13
“Mark, the cousin of Barnabas...”	Col 4:10

Church tradition

According to Eusebius, Barnabas was “one of the seventy” original disciples of Jesus:

“The names of the apostles of our Savior are known to every one from the Gospels. But there exists no catalogue of the seventy disciples. Barnabas, indeed, is said to have been one of them, of whom the Acts of the apostles makes mention in various places, and especially Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians.” (Eusebius, Book 1, Chapter 12)

Epistle of Barnabas

Barnabas may have been the author of a book that “almost” made the New Testament. The *Epistle of Barnabas* was deemed scripture by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Jerome. Eusebius branded it “rejected” in his *Ecclesiastical History*, but not heretical. It is also possibly written by a follower of Barnabas, perhaps at the end of the first century/beginning of the second.

A major theme of the *Epistle of Barnabas* concerns demonstrating that the messianic prophecies in the Old Testament did indeed refer to Jesus. After the New Testament canon was fixed in the fourth century, the Letter of Barnabas faded into obscurity.

Apocryphal

The *Acts of Barnabas: The Journeyings and Martyrdom of St. Barnabas the Apostle*, purportedly written by John Mark, describes a missionary journey by Barnabas and Mark after the break with Paul (Acts 15:35-41). According to this apocryphal Acts, Barnabas used the Gospel of Matthew in his teachings:

“And Barnabas had received documents from Matthew, a book of the word of God, and a narrative of miracles and doctrines. This Barnabas laid upon the sick in each place that we came to, and it immediately made a cure of their sufferings.”

According to this Acts, Barnabas met his fate in Salamis (Cyprus) at the hands of “Barjesus” (assumedly the same Bar-Jesus mentioned in Acts 13:6-12):

“And Barjesus, having arrived after two days, after not a few Jews had been instructed, was enraged, and brought together all the multitude of the Jews...the Jews...took Barnabas by night, and bound him with a rope by the neck; and having dragged him to the hippodrome from the synagogue, and having gone out of the city, standing round him, they burned him with fire, so that even his bones became dust.”

James the Just

James, brother of Jesus, plays almost no role in the earthly ministry of Jesus. However, after the Ascension of Jesus, James is present at the earliest meetings of the nascent church, and eventually assumes a leadership position in the Jerusalem Church, as can be seen by his seeming “first among equal” role at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). He is seemingly identified as an apostle in Galatians 1:19:

“I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother.” (NIV, Gal 1:19)

Church tradition says that James, brother of Jesus, wrote the book of James in the New Testament, although the author assignment in James 1:1 is ambiguous. (One of several places in the New Testament where it is difficult to ascertain which “James” is being referenced! – see also 1 Cor 15:7).

Reference	Verse(s)
“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary, and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?”	Mat 13:55, Mark 6:3
The brothers of Jesus join the apostles after the Ascension of Jesus	Acts 1:14
Peter says, “Tell James and the brothers about this” after being released from prison by an angel	Acts 12:17

Reference	Verse(s)
James makes the final decision at the Jerusalem Council	Acts 15:13
"The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present."	Acts 21:18
James as an apostle	Gal 1:19
"James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship..."	Gal 2:9
"Before certain men came from James..."	Gal 2:12

Church Tradition

James is mentioned by Josephus in his massive work *Jewish Antiquities*. We are told that James was sentenced by the Sanhedrin to be stoned:

"But this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned:" (*Jewish Antiquities*, 20.9.1)

Eusebius is quite verbose regarding James, and adds details such as:

- He was surnamed "the Just" on account of his virtue
- He was the first bishop of Jerusalem
- He was "thrown from the pinnacle of the Temple" and clubbed to death, because the Sanhedrin was frustrated by the escape of Paul to Rome
- Eusebius argues that James was the "son of Joseph" (but not necessarily the son of Mary)
- Quoting Hegesippus, it appears that James was a Nazorite from birth
- The siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian was a direct result of the murder of the righteous James. Assuming that the siege happened soon after the death of James, his death would have been c. 66 A.D.

"Then James, whom the ancients surnamed the Just on account of the excellence of his virtue, is recorded to have been the first to be made bishop of the church of Jerusalem. This James was called the brother of the Lord because he was known as a son of Joseph, and Joseph was supposed to be the father of Christ, because the Virgin, being betrothed to him, "was found with child by the Holy Ghost before they came together," as the account of the holy Gospels shows. But Clement in the sixth book of his Hypotyposes writes thus: "For they say that Peter and James and John after the ascension of our Savior, as if also preferred by our Lord, strove not after honor, but chose James the Just bishop of Jerusalem." But the same writer, in the seventh book of the same work, relates also the following things concerning him: "The Lord after his resurrection imparted knowledge to James the Just and to John and Peter, and they imparted it to the rest of the apostles, and the rest of the apostles to the seventy, of whom Barnabas was one. But there were two Jameses: one called the Just, who was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and was beaten to death with a club by a fuller, and another who was beheaded." Paul also makes mention of the same James the Just, where he writes, "Other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." (Eusebius, Book 2, Chapter 1)

“BUT after Paul, in consequence of his appeal to Caesar, had been sent to Rome by Festus, the Jews, being frustrated in their hope of entrapping him by the snares which they had laid for him, turned against James, the brother of the Lord, to whom the episcopal seat at Jerusalem had been entrusted by the apostles. The following daring measures were undertaken by them against him. Leading him into their midst they demanded of him that he should renounce faith in Christ in the presence of all the people.

But, contrary to the opinion of all, with a clear voice, and with greater boldness than they had anticipated, he spoke out before the whole multitude and confessed that our Savior and Lord Jesus is the Son of God. But they were unable to bear longer the testimony of the man who, on account of the excellence of ascetic virtue and of piety which he exhibited in his life, was esteemed by all as the most just of men, and consequently they slew him. Opportunity for this deed of violence was furnished by the prevailing anarchy, which was caused by the fact that Festus had died just at this time in Judea, and that the province was thus without a governor and head.

The manner of James’ death has been already indicated by the above-quoted words of Clement, who records that he was thrown from the pinnacle of the temple, and was beaten to death with a club. But Hegesippus, who lived immediately after the apostles, gives the most accurate account in the fifth book of his Memoirs. He writes as follows: “James, the brother of the Lord, succeeded to the government of the Church in conjunction with the apostles. He has been called the Just by all from the time of our Savior to the present day; for there were many that bore the name of James. He was holy from his mother’s womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath. He alone was permitted to enter into the holy place; for he wore not woolen but linen garments. And he was in the habit of entering alone into the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his constantly bending them in his worship of God, and asking forgiveness for the people. Because of his exceeding great justice he was called the Just, and Oblias, which signifies in Greek, Bulwark of the people’ and ‘Justice,’ in accordance with what the prophets declare concerning him....

So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just.’ And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, ‘I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, ‘Cease, what do ye? The just one prayeth for you. And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom. And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them.”

These things are related at length by Hegesippus, who is in agreement with Clement. James was so admirable a man and so celebrated among all for his justice, that the more sensible even of the Jews were of the opinion that this was the cause of the siege of Jerusalem, which happened to them immediately after his martyrdom for no other reason than their daring act against him”. (Eusebius, Book 2, Chapter 23)

Matthias

Matthias is the most elusive of all the apostles, as his name is mentioned only twice in the New Testament. Matthias was chosen by the Apostles to replace Judas Iscariot, after the death of Judas in the Field of Blood. Matthias was chosen partly by election, and partly by chance:

“So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.” (NIV, Acts 1:23-26)

About all we can say for sure about Matthias is that he was one of the disciples of Jesus from the beginning (probably one of the ‘Seventy’), according to the criteria for apostleship set forth by Peter:

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.” (NIV, Acts 1:21-22)

Church tradition

According to Hippolytus, Matthias preached in Jerusalem, and died there:

“And Matthias, who was one of the seventy, was numbered along with the eleven apostles, and preached in Jerusalem, and fell asleep and was buried there.”

Eusebius, in his Church History, numbers Matthias among the Seventy:

“Matthias, also, who was numbered with the apostles in the place of Judas, and the one who was honored by being made a candidate with him, are like-wise said to have been deemed worthy of the same calling with the seventy.” (Eusebius, Book 1, Chapter 12)

Eusebius, in a discussion regarding the Nicolaitans, records a tradition that Matthias was especially strong at combating the desires of the flesh:

“But they say that Matthias also taught in the same manner that we ought to fight against and abuse the flesh, and not give way to it for the sake of pleasure, but strengthen the soul by faith and knowledge.” (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 29)

Intriguingly, Eusebius lists Matthias as one of the 15 bishops of Jerusalem:

“The first, then, was James, the so-called brother of the Lord; the second, Symeon; the third, Justus; the fourth, Zacchaeus; the fifth, Tobias; the sixth, Benjamin; the seventh, John; the eighth, Matthias; the ninth, Philip; the tenth, Seneca; the eleventh, Justus; the twelfth, Levi; the thirteenth, Ephres; the fourteenth, Joseph; and finally the fifteenth, Judas. These are the bishops of Jerusalem that lived between the age of the apostles and the time referred to, all of them belonging to the circumcision. (Eusebius, Book 4, Chapter 4)

Apocryphal

Matthias appears in the apocryphal *Acts Of Andrew And Matthias In The City Of The Man-Eaters*. In this tale, he is chosen by lot for the dubious honor of being a missionary among a group of cannibals:

“About that time all the apostles had come together to the same place, and shared among themselves the countries, casting lots, in order that each might go away into the part that had fallen to him. By lot, then, it fell to Matthias to set out to the country of the man-eaters. And the men of that city used neither to eat bread nor drink wine; but they ate the flesh of men, and drank their blood. Every man, therefore, who came into their city they laid hold of, and digging they thrust out his eyes, and gave him a drug to drink, prepared by sorcery and magic; and from drinking the drug his heart was altered and his mind deranged.”

Matthias is captured and tortured by the cannibals, but receives a revelation from Jesus that the Apostle Andrew will rescue him in 27 days. Right on time, a reluctant Andrew rescues Matthias, and Matthias is miraculously transported into the presence of Peter:

“And there were in all two hundred and seventy men and forty-nine women whom Andrew released from the prison. And the men went as the blessed Andrew said to them; and he made Matthias go along with his disciples out of the eastern gate of the city. And Andrew commanded a cloud, and the cloud took up Matthias and the disciples of Andrew; and the cloud set them down on the mountain where Peter was teaching, and they remained beside him.”

Other traditions place Matthias in Ethiopia.

Paul

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.” (NIV, 2 Thess 4:6-8)



The greatest evangelist and theologian of the early church was Paul of Tarsus. Paul was a Hellenized Jew, growing up in a town in Cilicia (Acts 22:3 – Cilicia is in modern day Turkey). The Bible is silent on the year of his birth – various Bible scholars view that it was sometime in the 0-10 A.D. time frame.

Paul received his training under the pre-eminent Rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), and viewed himself as a “Hebrew of Hebrews”:

“...circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee...” (NIV, Phil 3:3)

Paul’s given Hebrew name, Saul, may have been after King Saul, also from the tribe of Benjamin.

It was probably because of the confluence of Greek, Roman and Hebrew influences that Paul experienced in the cosmopolitan city of Tarsus that made Paul such an effective evangelist in his lifetime charge – to bring the hope of Christ to the Gentiles. This charge is referred many times in the New Testament.

“...the grace God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” (NIV, Romans 15:15)

“I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.” (NIV, Rom 11:13-14)

However, Paul’s earliest relationship with Christians was in the role of a persecutor, and perhaps, even a hit man for the Sanhedrin. When Stephen is stoned to death, we are told, “And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.” (NIV, Acts 8:1) Two verses later, we’re told, “Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.” (NIV, Acts 9:3)

The journey of Paul from being a great persecutor of Christians to being their most staunch evangelist and supporter happened one day on the road to Damascus, Syria, where Paul had been sent by the Jerusalem high priests to persecute the nascent Christian congregation there. The story of Paul’s conversion is considered so important that it is repeated no less than three times in Acts! (Acts 9, 22, 26) It is probably the single most important event in the history of the early Christian Church, ranking with the conversion of Constantine in terms of its long-term consequences.

“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’” (NIV, Acts 26:12-18)

After this amazing conversion experience, Paul is ready to spread the word of Jesus throughout the world. However, knowing his reputation as a persecutor of Christians, the apostles in Jerusalem are slow to accept Paul as a convert. It takes the sponsorship of Barnabas (Acts 9:26-27) to eventually ameliorate the concerns of the apostles, although Paul remains the “odd man out” vis-à-vis the rest of the apostles throughout the rest of his ministry (see “Character and Characteristics” section.)

The stage is set for Paul’s missionary journeys.

The missionary journeys



Missionary journeys of Paul (Classic Maps, Ages Software)

The three missionary journeys of Paul (which combined, were over 6,000 miles in length!) effectively spread the word of Christianity throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Paul followed a general pattern when he'd go into a new town. First, he'd preach at the local Jewish synagogue – often to attract Gentile “God-fearers”, who believed in the God of Abraham, but hadn't accepted the rigors of Mosaic Law. Next, he would often try to create small churches in the homes of new followers (Lydia and her household, for example, are baptized in Lydia's home). Then in some instances, he would preach in more public arenas (Mars Hill in Athens, for example).

The following tables summarize the geography and key points of Paul's missionary journeys.

1st Missionary Journey c. 46-48 A.D. (with Barnabas)		
Reference	Notes	Verse(s)
Antioch (Syria), Selucia to Salamis (Cyprus)	Led by the Holy Spirit	Acts 13:1-3
On Cyprus to Paphos	Sorcerer Bar-Jesus blinded by Paul	Acts 13:6-12
Perga in Pamphilia	John Mark leaves	Acts 13:13
Antioch in Pisidia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In modern-day Turkey ▪ Paul & Barnabas expelled from the region 	Acts 13:14-50
Iconium	Plot to stone Paul & Barnabas	Acts 13:51-14:5
Lystra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paul heals a crippled man ▪ Paul mistaken for Hermes (!) ▪ Paul stoned and left for dead 	Acts 14:6-20
Derbe		Acts 14:20-21

1st Missionary Journey c. 46-48 A.D. (with Barnabas)		
Reference	Notes	Verse(s)
Lystra, Iconium, Antioch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elders appointed in the local churches 	Acts 14:21-23
Pisidia, Pamphylia, then Perga		Acts 14:24-25
Attalia		Acts 14:25-26
Antioch (Syria)		Acts 14:26-28

2nd Missionary Journey c. 49-52 (with Silas)		
Reference	Notes	Verse(s)
Syria and Cilicia		Acts 15:41
Derbe and Lystra	Timothy joins Paul	Acts 16:1-5
Phrygia and Galatia		Acts 16:6
Near Mysia, Bithynia	Prevented from entering by the Spirit of Jesus	Acts 16:7
Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis	Paul has a dream in Troas that leads him to Macedonia	Acts 16:8-11
Philippi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lydia baptized by Paul ▪ Paul exorcises a demon ▪ Paul and Silas imprisoned; an earthquake shakes the foundations of the jail 	Acts 16:12-40
Through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica	Paul's preaching incites mob violence	Acts 17:1-9
Berea		Acts 17:10-13
Athens	Paul debates with stoics and Epicureans at the Areopagus (Mars Hill)	Acts 17:14-34
Corinth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paul links up with Priscilla and Aquila; works as a tent-maker ▪ Stays for 1.5 years 	Acts 18:1-17
Cenchrea	Paul the Nazorite?	Acts 18:18
Ephesus		Acts 18:19-21
Caesarea, Jerusalem, & Antioch (Syria)		Acts 18:22



The Library at Ephesus (Photo courtesy Jan & Ted Lauer)



The Acropolis of Athens – Paul debated with Greek philosophers on nearby Mars Hill (Photo courtesy Jan & Ted Lauer)

3rd Missionary Journey c. 53-57 A.D.		
Reference	Notes	Verse(s)
Galatia and Phrygia		Acts 18:23
Ephesus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 year stay ▪ Paul heals the sick 	Acts 19:1-41
Macedonia		Acts 20:1-2
Greece, Macedonia, Philippi		Acts 20:3-6
Troas	Paul raises Eutychus from the dead	Acts 20:6-12
Assos		Acts 20:13-14
Mitylene, Kios, Samos, Miletus	Paul calls the Ephesian elders to Miletus	Acts 20:14-38
Cos, Rhodes, Patara		Acts 21:1-2
Tyre		Acts 21:3-6
Ptolemais		Acts 21:7
Caesarea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Paul stays with Philip the evangelist ▪ Paul warned not to go to Jerusalem 	Acts 21:9-15
Jerusalem	Paul arrested	Acts 21:16-25

After the completion of Paul’s three missionary journeys, the next four years of Paul’s life would be spent primarily in jail. First, Paul spent two years in jail in Caesarea under the control of Roman procurators Felix and Festus. Later, he would spend two years in a Roman jail, and write some of his most famous letters, including Colossians and Ephesians.

Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, where he was accused by “some Jews from the province of Asia” of defiling the temple by bringing Greeks (Gentiles) into it. While he briefly appeared before the Sanhedrin (where he skillfully separated the Pharisees and Sadducees by bringing up the doctrine of resurrection of the dead), Paul used his Roman citizenship to claim Roman protection. He was tried before Felix, and seemed to successfully refute the charge of defiling the Temple. However, he would remain in a Roman jail in Caesarea for two years, assumedly as a sop from Felix to the Sanhedrin.



The new pro-curator, Festus, was ready to try the case again, but Paul balked when Festus wanted him to return to Jerusalem for the trial. Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard by the emperor in Rome. During the long voyage to Rome, Paul would suffer a shipwreck off the coast of Crete.

When Paul arrived in Rome (c. 61 A.D.), according to Acts he interacted with a group of Jews who apparently had heard of Christians, but were not Christians themselves:

“But we want to hear what your [Paul’s] views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.” (NIV, Acts 28:18)

Thus, one could theorize that it was Paul, not Peter, who was the first apostle to reach Rome, and establish the subsequent church.

The account of Paul’s travel to Rome ends rather abruptly in Acts (in fact, some scholars believe that Acts was written as Paul’s defense before the emperor):

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” (NIV, Acts 28:30-31)

So, was Paul tried before Nero and acquitted? Or is this when he met his death? We can only surmise, based on brief references in some of Paul’s letters (see, for example, Philemon 1:22), and later church tradition. Most scholars believed that Paul was released from house arrest in Rome in c. 62 A.D., and that he may have made a fourth missionary journey, which may have gone as far as Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). Church tradition says that Nero executed Paul in Rome c. 67 A.D. (see “Church Tradition” section below). However, the New Testament is silent on the death of this great apostle.

Relationship of Peter with Paul

The New Testament records that Peter and Paul, the two greatest apostles of the Early Church, did have some interaction with each other. Galatians 1:18, for example, records that Paul stayed with Peter in Jerusalem for a period of 15 days. Peter supported Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. This is further supported in Galatians 2:7-10, when Peter (a “pillar”) is depicted as supporting Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles.

There were some disagreements between the two. In Galatians, 2:11-14 Paul describes an argument that he had with Peter in Antioch.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter describes that Paul's letters are "hard to understand", but ascribes to them the same authority as the Jewish Scriptures:

"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, **as they do the other Scriptures**, to their own destruction." (NIV, 2 Pet 3:15-16; emphasis added)

Character and characteristics

How does one describe Paul? Some words we might use would be dogged, indefatigable, brave, self-effacing, defensive, logical, persuasive, self-sufficient and (somewhat surprisingly) – humorous. We'll examine some of these strains below.

Dogged, indefatigable, brave

As Paul's description below of his own trials and tribulations as a missionary indicate, he faced remarkable obstacles to his ministry – and yet, he preached throughout the Roman world for three decades! Nothing could stop him, except death at the hands of Nero. Even being thrown in jail didn't stop him – he just used the time to convert his jailers, or to write great theological letters to the churches that he'd started.

"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (NIV, 2 Cor 11:23-29)

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body". (NIV, 2 Cor 4:8-10)



Self-effacing

Paul - in keeping with his basic theological message that no one is worthy of salvation, and can only be saved through the Grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ – was the first to admit that he himself was a wretched sinner. No “holier than though” expressions from Paul!

“So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.” (NIV, Rom 7:21-25)

Paul even admits in his letters that he has a particular “thorn in my flesh” with which he must constantly battle. What is the thorn? Paul never says. Malaria? Temptation? Epilepsy? Gluttony?

“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ^oThat is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong”. (NIV, 1 Cor 12:7-10)

Defensive

As mentioned in an earlier section, Paul was a bit of an “odd man out” vis-à-vis the other apostles. Paul had trouble being accepted for several reasons, including:

- He was not one of the original apostles chosen by Jesus during his earthly ministry
- He wasn’t a Galilean fisherman – he was from the more cosmopolitan Tarsus in Cilicia
- As a Hellenized Jew, he had been much more exposed to Greek philosophical thought than most of the other apostles
- He started out as a persecutor of the early Christians – perhaps even participating in the stoning of Stephen

As a result of Paul being “different” from the other apostles (“The Twelve”), he sometimes could be a little defensive in his letters:

- In the first sentence of nine of his letters, Paul identifies himself as an Apostle
- Twice in 2 Corinthians, he makes a statement that he is not inferior to so-called “super apostles” (2 Cor 11:5, 12:11)
- In a discussion of one of his trips to Jerusalem, he states, “As for those who seemed to be important—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance—those men added nothing to my message.” (NIV, Gal 2:6)
- In referring to James (probably the brother of Jesus), Peter and John, he calls them “reputed” to be pillars in the church:

“James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.” (NIV, Gal 2:9)

Logical

Until St. Augustine in the late 4th/early 5th century, Paul's letters (especially Romans) formed the most complete theology in the Christian faith. His letters are key source documents for Christian beliefs such as the total wickedness of man, justification by faith, salvation by the Grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and communion.

He was able to more than hold his own against various Greek philosophical adherents who debated with him at various points in his ministry (in Athens, for example).

Persuasive

Although Paul himself said that he had poor penmanship (Gal 6:11) and no training as a public speaker (2 Cor 11:6), he must have been remarkably persuasive, to have personally established so many churches through the Greco-Roman world in three decades of ministry.

Paul even shared (in 1 Corinthians) his basic plan for making converts. It sounds amazingly like a marketing plan that might be used by modern day corporations!

"Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 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. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (NIV, 1 Cor 9:19-23)

Self-sufficient

While Paul had great compassion for those that couldn't help themselves, he was strongly opposed to people who didn't take their fair share of the load. He even insisted on working to pay his fair share of room and board while he was establishing churches throughout the Mediterranean.

"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'" (NIV, 2 Thess 3:6-10)

Humor

While humor might be one of the more minor characteristics that we'd apply to Paul, it does show up from time to time. Perhaps the most famous example is in Galatians when Paul, who is fulminating against those that say that Gentile converts must be circumcised, says the following:

"As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (NIV, Gal 5:2-12)

Church Tradition

Some 25% of the New Testament is made up of letters from Paul to various churches (in Rome, Ephesus, etc.) and to various colleagues (Timothy, Titus, etc.). Pauline authorship was accepted for fourteen letters in the New Testament by the Early Church Fathers, with the possible exception of Hebrews (about which Origen said “God only knows” who wrote it).

“Paul’s fourteen epistles are well known and undisputed. It is not indeed right to overlook the fact that some have rejected the Epistle to the Hebrews, saying that it is disputed by the church of Rome, on the ground that it was not written by Paul. But what has been said concerning this epistle by those who lived before our time I shall quote in the proper place. In regard to the so-called Acts of Paul, I have not found them among the undisputed writings. (Eusebius, Book 3, Chapter 3)

Some modern Biblical scholars doubt that Paul actually wrote the Pastoral letters (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus).

Hippolytus records that Paul was beheaded in Rome by Nero, after preaching as far afield as Spain:

“And Paul entered into the apostleship a year after the assumption of Christ; and beginning at Jerusalem, he advanced as far as Illyricum, and Italy, and Spain, preaching the Gospel for thirty-five years. And in the time of Nero he was beheaded at Rome, and was buried there”. (Hippolytus)

Eusebius also records that Paul was put to death under Nero in Rome:

“It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero. This account of Peter and Paul is substantiated by the fact that their names are preserved in the cemeteries of that place even to the present day. It is confirmed likewise by Caius, a member of the Church, who arose under Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome. He, in a published disputation with Proclus, the leader of the Phrygian heresy, speaks as follows concerning the places where the sacred corpses of the aforesaid apostles are laid: “But I can show the trophies of the apostles. For if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church.” And that they both suffered martyrdom at the same time is stated by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, in his epistle to the Romans, in the following words: “You have thus by such an admonition bound together the planting of Peter and of Paul at Rome and Corinth. For both of them planted and likewise taught us in our Corinth. And they taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time.” I have quoted these things in order that the truth of the history might be still more confirmed.” (Eusebius, Book 2, Chapter 25)

Apocryphal

The apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (which is much more focused on Thecla than Paul) gives the only known early description of Paul’s appearance:

“And he saw Paul coming, a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well-built, with eyebrows meeting, rather long-nosed, full of grace. For sometimes he seemed like a man, and sometimes he had the countenance of an angel.”

The *Acts Of The Holy Apostles Peter And Paul* describes the battle in Rome between Paul (and Peter) and Simon the Magician. The battle eventually plays out in front of Nero, and all three (Peter, Paul, Simon) end up dying. The death and burial of Paul is described thus:

“Then both Peter and Paul were led away from the presence of Nero. And Paul was beheaded on the Osetian road.”

Finally, the *Revelation of Paul* builds on the reference in 2 Corinthians 12 to Paul’s experiences in the “third heaven”. In this apocryphal revelation, Paul is given a guided tour of heaven and hell by an angel, and meets many Old Testament luminaries, including Enoch, Elijah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Noah. He also meets the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Temeluch.

Among the characters Paul meets in hell are a presbyter (drunk during communion), a bishop (“the widow and orphan he did not pity”), and a deacon “who ate and drank, and ministered to God”. Parishioners don’t escape scrutiny either, as Paul finds in hell “they who in church speak against their neighbors”.

Jesus the apostle and high priest

For completeness sake, I should mention that there is one other apostle mentioned outside of the Gospels in the New Testament:

“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.” (NIV, Heb 3:1)

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Color photos in “Paul” section courtesy Jan & Ted Lauer

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Robert has also written several books on ghost towns in the Southwest, including in Death Valley, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, and Mojave National Preserve.

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Front cover: Paul on the road to Damascus