

THE ODYSSEY of ST. PAUL

Travels in Israel, Turkey,
Greece, and Italy



A
VIDEO SERIES WITH **Dr. Paul L. Maier**



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Greece, and Italy




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INTRODUCTION

This study guide is intended for use with the video series, which is © 1998 by Paul L. Maier and produced by Tobias Communications. The eight segments run from 25 to 30 minutes each, leaving the balance of the hour for discussion. All eight parts of this study guide may be duplicated for use in discussion groups. A brief summary of the video segment is included on the top half of each page, with discussion questions and issues following. Group leaders may wish to select some questions from the list and omit others for purposes of discussion, or supply their own. A brief bibliography follows Part 8.

Aside from Jesus himself, no one has had a greater influence on the founding of Christianity than Paul of Tarsus. Among his many achievements, three are of prime importance: 1) as a powerful, tireless missionary, he spread the faith to Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy; 2) his letters, which form much of the New Testament, present a basic theology for Christianity; and 3) more than anyone else, he brought Gentiles into the early church, not only Jews, thus "universalizing" the faith.

Although we have the Gospel records but no writings from the pen of Jesus himself, in Paul's case we have both, in the sense that the second part of the Book of Acts serves as Luke's "gospel" about this greatest apostle. In addition to Paul's letters and the record in Acts, this series will also use geographical, archaeological, and secular literary evidence to provide a fully dimensional portrait of St. Paul, the man and his mission.





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WITH

DR. PAUL L. MAIER



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YOUNG SAUL

SUMMARY

Born in Tarsus, capital of the Roman province of Cilicia, Saul learned the art of tentmaking, probably from his father, whose Roman citizenship he had inherited. A gifted student, he went to Jerusalem and studied Phariseism under the great Rabbi Gamaliel, who urged moderation vis-a-vis the earliest Christians (Acts 5:34 ff.). But Saul, with all the fire of youth, bitterly opposed them, the deacon Stephen in particular, whose stoning he endorsed. Then, like a fanatic zealot, he persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and received credentials from the priests to do the same in Damascus.

Near Damascus, however, Saul was struck down on the roadway by a vision of the risen Christ which changed his life forever. Blinded by the experience and led by the hand into Damascus, Saul was soon cured of his blindness and baptized by a local church leader named Ananias. The "Straight Street" where this all took place is identifiable today in modern Damascus.

FOR DISCUSSION

1 Is calling St. Paul "the co-founder of Christianity" giving him too much credit? What would he himself say about such praise? (1 Tim. 1:15b)

2 Was the Roman Empire good or bad for the ancient world of Paul's day? Give some examples, positive and negative.

3 How could Tarsus, which soon converted to Christianity, become Islamic later on? And how could Asia Minor -- the strongest center of early Christianity -- become Muslim Turkey today? (Have someone explain the rise of Islam, and how God's blessings are not necessarily "locked in" to any culture.)

4 Why do we know so little about Saul's boyhood -- or Jesus', for that matter?

5 Would the later Paul ever use his tentmaking craft to support himself in the future? (See 1 Thess. 2:9, 2 Thess. 3:8, and Acts 18:3).

6 Why would Saul, as a good Pharisee, oppose the Christian movement?

7 Why didn't Saul learn moderation from Gamaliel? (Perhaps the same answer to the question: Why are Young Republicans more conservative than their parents, and Young Democrats more liberal?)

8 How could Stephen have been stoned to death when the Romans alone had the responsibility for capital punishment at the time?

9 Saul was certainly able to date his conversion in terms of time and place. Is this always the case with Christian conversions?

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THE NEW SAUL

PART 2

SUMMARY

Sunstroke, hallucination, epilepsy, and psychology have all been suggested as "natural" explanations for Saul's conversion, but none of them satisfies the historical evidence. This, the most dramatic conversion in history, became Saul's own witness of the resurrected Lord and his call to apostleship. Like Jesus, Saul also had his desert experience, probably in northern Arabia, where he rethought his theology over a three-year period.

Returning to Damascus, he boldly proclaimed Jesus as the promised Messiah in the synagogues of the city, provoking a plot to seize him at the city gates. But Saul was lowered in a basket from the city wall and escaped to Jerusalem, where he met the apostles Peter and James, the half-brother of Jesus, and convinced them of his conversion. He then sailed back to Tarsus, where he spent the next decade as a missionary in Cilicia and northern Syria.

Just as there were "silent years" in Jesus' youth, so these were the silent years in Saul's young ministry. It was probably during this time that he endured further persecution and other experiences listed in 2 Corinthians 11 and 12, among them: flogging, shipwreck, revelation, and his "thorn in the flesh." Meanwhile, a leader in the Jerusalem church, Joseph Barnabas, went up to Antioch to supervise the church that was growing dramatically there. At nearby Tarsus, he found Saul, who now assisted him at Antioch, and this was the pair summoned for higher service by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2).

FOR DISCUSSION

1 Saul had a life-changing experience on the Damascus Road, Augustine had one in his garden, and so did a German student named Luther when his friend was struck by lightning. Has anyone in your group also experienced a "life-changing episode" ?

2 Discuss the key to Saul's transformation from a Pharisaic Jew to a Christian missionary: belief in salvation by human works of the law to salvation by divine grace through faith in Christ.

3 Distinguish between James, brother of John and son of Zebedee, and James the Just, the first bishop of the church in Jerusalem. Did Jesus have half brothers and sisters? See Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3.

4 Do you have other suggestions as to what Paul's famous "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7 ff.) may have been?

5 What else do we know about Joseph Barnabas before the first mission journey? See Acts 4:36-37, 9:27, 11:19 ff.

6 Why did the Jews of Antioch seem to convert to Christianity more readily than the Jews of Jerusalem?

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THE FIRST MISSION JOURNEY

PART 3

SUMMARY

Barnabas, Saul, and Mark set sail from Syria to Cyprus on the first leg of their mission journey. During an interview with the island's Roman governor, Saul was interrupted by a Jewish renegade magician, Elymas, who was struck with temporary blindness. At this point, Acts introduces the famous name-change for Saul, who was "also known as Paul." The three missionaries sailed from Cyprus northward to Perga in southern Asia Minor, where John Mark left his colleagues.

Journeying northward to Antioch-in-Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas here set the pattern of first announcing the Good News in the synagogue to their fellow Jews -- with mixed results -- and then turning to the Gentiles, who responded more positively. This was the case also in Iconium (today the Turkish Konya) as well as Lystra. At Lystra, however, Paul and Barnabas were mistaken for the Greek gods Hermes and Zeus. Vehemently denying this, Paul was stoned, after which he and Barnabas moved on to Derbe, where they were well received.

Since they wanted to supervise the new congregations they had founded, the missionary pair returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch on their way home. A direct route back to Antioch in Syria would have been only one quarter as long.

FOR DISCUSSION

1

Where else in the Book of Acts is a magician encountered?
(8:9 ff., 19:19)

2

Was it wrong for Jews to practice magic and sorcery?
(See Lev. 20:6, Deut. 18:9-14).

3

On Cyprus, the leadership of the first mission journey seems to change. It had been "Barnabas and Saul," but from now on it will be "Paul and Barnabas." Is the order of names significant in the New Testament? Check the order of names among the twelve disciples in Matt. 10:2 ff., Mark 3:14 ff., and Luke 6:13 ff. Who is first and who is last on every list?

4

In the Book of Acts, why didn't Luke describe the magnificent scenery the missionaries saw on their first journey?

5

Why was it natural for Paul to preach "first to the Jews, and then the Gentiles"? Should it have been easier or more difficult for Jews to accept the Christian message?

6

Was it easier or more difficult for Gentiles to accept Christianity?

7

Is it significant that all geographical place names mentioned in the Book of Acts correspond exactly with the same cities or sites today? Do other world religions have such specific geographical tie-ins?



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QUARRRELS AND THE SECOND MISSION JOURNEY

PART 4

SUMMARY

Besides their successes, early Christians also had problems: squabbles, petty jealousies, economic hardship, and particularly a great doctrinal dispute. The "Judaizers" -- strict Jewish Christians who demanded that Gentiles had to become Jews en route to Christianity -- opposed Paul and Barnabas for admitting Gentiles into the church directly. The church at Antioch sent Paul, Barnabas, and Titus to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles on this issue.

Peter supported Paul admirably, and the Jerusalem (or Apostolic) Council came down on the side of the Gospel -- a decision that had enormous consequences for the future. Still the Judaizers did not give up, but sent a delegation to Antioch which polarized the church there and made even Peter and Barnabas stumble. After Paul set them straight, he and Barnabas had a row over whether to take Mark along on their contemplated second mission journey.

Choosing a new partner named Silas, Paul traveled into central Asia Minor through the famous mountain pass at the Cilician Gates, and then revisited the four Galatian churches he had founded on the first journey. At Lystra, Timothy joined their party, and they went on to the northwestern coast at Troas, where Paul had his celebrated dream and Luke joined their party also. The missionary foursome sailed across the Aegean to Philippi.

FOR DISCUSSION

1 Why were Jews so exclusive about their faith?
What was their attitude toward the Gentile world?

2 How did Gentiles at the time feel toward Jews?

3 Who was the earliest bishop of the church in Jerusalem? What else do we know about him?

4 You are attending the Council of Jerusalem: *you* defend the position of Paul and Barnabas rather than Peter.

5 If the Jerusalem Council had decided the other way, i.e., that conversion to full Judaism had to precede Christianity, how large do you think the Christian church would be today?
(Hint: there are about 14 million Jews in the world today and almost two billion Christians.)

6 Should disagreements in the early church not have been reported in Acts?

7 Paul versus Peter at Antioch: genuine dispute or morality play?

8 Consider: Luke was the only Gentile author in that library of 64 other Semitic books called The Bible. Did this affect the way he wrote his great accounts?



THE ODYSSEY of ST. PAUL



THE SECOND MISSION JOURNEY AND GREECE

PART 5

SUMMARY

Arriving in Philippi, Paul and his party met Lydia, who was baptized as Europe's first Christian convert. When a possessed slave girl bothered the missionaries, Paul exorcised the evil spirit inside her, which provoked her owners. They indicted Paul and Silas before the city authorities, who had them beaten and thrown into prison. Liberated by an earthquake, they baptized the prison warden and his family, and were escorted out of jail.

At Thessalonica, a Christian convert named Jason received the missionaries. He was indicted before the city magistrates, then released. Meanwhile, Paul and his party went on to Berea, where he received a sympathetic hearing in the synagogue -- until agitators made him take ship for Athens. There, Paul took in the city's cultural wonders but was depressed by its rampant pagan idolatry, which he decried in his famous address at the Areopagus, just below the Parthenon. His preaching on monotheism and the resurrection won several important converts prior to his moving on to Corinth.

Corinth, the Roman capital of Greece, witnessed Paul's ministry for the next eighteen months. His preaching in the synagogue was so successful that his opponents indicted him before the Roman governor, L. Junius Gallio. In this crucial first "test case" for Christianity, Gallio, famous also in Roman history, set Paul free. He sailed back to Syria, closing his second journey.

FOR DISCUSSION

1 The first European convert to Christianity was a woman. What was Paul's opinion of women? (See Galatians 3:28, Acts 18:2ff, Romans 16:1-2)

2 Why didn't Paul reveal his Roman citizenship before he was beaten at Philippi and thrown into prison?

3 How could the warden at Philippi respond so quickly to Paul's message?

4 In Thessalonica, Paul and his party were called people "who have been turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). What does this say about the spread of Christianity? Compare Acts 2:41; 4:4; and Colossians 1:6.

5 The Sopater of Acts 20:4 must have been one of Paul's converts at Berea. Might he be the same as the Sosipater of Romans 16:21?

6 Why did the Greeks on the Areopagus sneer at Paul's reference to the resurrection from the dead, while others were more open-minded? (Acts 17:32)

7 Had Paul been executed by Gallio at Corinth instead of set free, what might have happened to the Christian cause?

8 Does archaeology support or conflict with Paul's mission in Corinth?



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THE THIRD MISSION JOURNEY

PART 6

SUMMARY

Again Paul traveled through Asia Minor, this time directly westward to Ephesus, the city where the great Temple to Artemis was located. The cult capital of the ancient world, Ephesus saw the longest ministry of Paul in one place -- three years -- during which he attacked the city's occult practices, including the idolatry involved in the sale of silver statuettes of Artemis.

Demetrius, head of the silversmiths' guild, responded with a riot at the great theater of Ephesus, the crowd chanting deliriously: "GREAT IS ARTEMIS OF THE EPHESIANS!" The 24,000-seat theater still stands as the most imposing ruin in Asia Minor. Fortunately, Paul was prevented from entering the theater, and the city clerk was able to calm and dismiss the crowd. But Paul had other problems at Ephesus in battling paganism, witchcraft, magic, and the occult.

Meanwhile, after having written two letters to the Christians at Corinth, Paul traveled overland to visit that problematical church. His plans to sail back to Palestine with a collection he had gathered for the Jerusalem Christians were changed when a plot against him was discovered, and he returned overland to Asia Minor instead. At Troas, his long teaching caused Eutychus to fall asleep and plummet to earth, but Paul revived him. The missionaries sailed on to Miletus, where Paul bade farewell to the Ephesian elders, and then Patara, where they changed ships and sailed to Caesarea.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Who was Apollos of Alexandria? For more detail, check 1 Cor. 3:4 ff.; 16:12.
- 2 The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus was one of the fabled "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World." What were the other six?
- 3 What is exorcism? Why did so many presumed cases of demon possession suddenly show up after the motion picture, *The Exorcist*, appeared some years ago? Does interest in the occult continue today?
- 4 The statuettes of Artemis were idolatrous. In the great command against idolatry -- Exodus 20:4-5 -- does this mean that all art, painting, sculpture, or photography are forbidden? What part of those verses suggests otherwise?
- 5 In the great Letter to the Romans that Paul wrote during his second visit to Corinth, he mentioned his plans to visit Rome and even Spain. Where is this found in chapters 1 and 15 of Romans?
- 6 *Must* Paul's valedictory to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:25) mean that he would never return? (In fact, he probably did: only God can foresee the future perfectly. As for people, note Paul's statement in Acts 20:22).
- 7 Show from Acts 21:3, 7, and 8 that, by now, Christianity had reached the whole eastern coast of the Mediterranean from Phoenicia to Palestine.



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ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT

PART 7

SUMMARY

Paul and his party presented the collection they had gathered to James and the elders of the church in the Holy City. To counter the rumor that he had rejected Judaism, Paul underwrote the sacrifices of four Jewish Christians at the temple, where he was discovered by Jews from Ephesus and denounced as their antagonist. During the ensuing riot in the temple courtyard, Paul's life was saved by the Roman cohort stationed at the Tower Antonia, whose commander, Lysias, would have scourged Paul but for his Roman citizenship.

When the Jerusalem Sanhedrin also rejected Paul's claims and his nephew alerted Lysias to a plot against his uncle's life, the commander ordered Paul taken under guard to Caesarea, where the Roman governor, Felix, was in charge. Five days later, a priestly prosecution arrived from Jerusalem and presented their case against Paul as an agitator, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and a profaner of the temple. Paul countered all three charges effectively, but Felix failed to release him, not wishing to antagonize the Jewish authorities or awaiting a bribe in Paul's behalf.

For the next two years, Paul was in confinement at Caesarea. When the new governor Festus arrived, he gave Paul a second hearing, asking if he would stand trial before him in Jerusalem. Paul refused and appealed to the Roman emperor instead. Before sailing to Rome, he again dramatically defended himself before Herod Agrippa II, his sister Bernice, and Festus.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Why did Paul, the apostle of the freedom of the gospel, give in to Judaic legalism and pay for the temple sacrifices of the four Jewish Christians? (See 1 Cor. 9:20)
- 2 If time permits, check out the obscure details of the Nazarite vow the four Jews had taken on the basis of Numbers 6:1-21.
- 3 The temple crowd may have made an honest mistake in thinking Paul had taken a Gentile inside the temple barrier. Why was it easy to make such mistakes in the ancient world?
- 4 In his hearing before the Sanhedrin, Paul successfully pitted the Pharisees against the Sadducees. Which of the two parties was closer to Christianity? Which had the most political power in Jerusalem by controlling the temple?
- 5 Paul had a nephew in Jerusalem who reported the plot against his life. Was this the son of a sister or brother? See Acts 23:16.
- 6 Why would Paul have appealed to the notorious emperor Nero?
- 7 In view of Herod Agrippa II's statement, "If he had not appealed to Caesar, he could have been set free," should Paul have waited with his appeal?

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THE VOYAGE TO ROME

PART 8

SUMMARY

When Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus set sail for Rome, northwesterly winds made them sail along coastlines to the port of Myra, where they transferred to a freighter bound for Italy. Unable to face Aegean headwinds, their ship sailed under Crete to a roadstead called Fair Havens. Although Paul warned against sailing farther, the ship owner and captain decided otherwise. Soon, a dreadful nor'easter plunged them into a fourteen-day nightmare of frothy fury, causing the crew to jettison cargo and despair of life itself. But Paul declared that all passengers would survive, although the ship would be lost.

And so it happened. All 276 passengers were rescued on the beach at Malta, and they spent three winter months on the island. Paul healed the father of Publius, the governor of Malta, before setting sail the next spring for Puteoli on the Bay of Naples. Disembarking there, they traveled up the Appian Way to Rome, welcomed by two delegations from the Roman church that had come out to greet them.

Given "free custody" in Rome, Paul received Jewish leaders in his rented abode, converting some but turning again to the Gentiles after rejection by other Jews. After another two-year confinement, he was probably tried before Nero, acquitted, and then pursued a fourth mission journey to Spain and the eastern Mediterranean. There he was again arrested, sent to Rome, and executed along the Ostian Way after having "fought the good fight."

FOR DISCUSSION

1

Why did the ancients always prefer to sail by ship -- where and when possible -- rather than travel by land?

2

Does Luke's account of the Mediterranean storm appear to have been written by an eyewitness, or one who heard the story second-hand?

3

Since weather and wind systems have predictable patterns at various seasons of the year, do you recall another well-known occasion when a nor'easter again blew so hard late in the year at Malta that it interrupted a summit conference between President George Bush and Russia's Mikhail Gorbachev?

4

When Paul survived the snake bite on Malta, the natives there deemed him a god -- the second time he was thought divine. When was the first?

5

How come there were enough Christians at Rome so well organized that they could send out two welcoming delegations to greet Paul and his party? Who founded the church at Rome? Does Acts 2:10 apply?

6

Why do you think Luke ended his account as he did in Acts 28:30-31?

7

This series closes with Paul's great claim that nothing could ever separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Can you make the same statement?

For Further Reading...



The literature on Paul of Tarsus is vast. Following are only some of the general works on the apostle, who has also been the subject of countless scholarly articles.

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Josephus -- The Essential Works.
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