

# THE TRAINING OF PAUL

November 3, 2019  
20th Sunday after Pentecost  
Revision E

## Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Today's Epistle lesson is also used in the Eastern lectionary Sunday after Christmas. In the West, the Epistle text is sometimes used for the 5th Sunday of Trinity.

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The subject of today's Epistle is the early life of the Apostle Paul between his conversion and the beginning of his First Missionary Journey where the Church in Antioch sent him out. During this time, Paul also had a "flight to Egypt" experience where he had to escape from a garrison of soldiers (about 400 men, Acts 21:31, 23:23).

The context of the Epistle lesson is just how the Apostle Paul came to be an Apostle and how he got to know what he knew. To explain this, we need to go beyond just the Epistle text and cover Paul's life prior to 45 AD.

### Some Dates as References

Paul's life as an Apostle began in 45 AD when Barnabas went to Tarsus to get him and brought him to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas then taught in the Church in Antioch for a year (Acts 11:25-26) before being sent out by the Church on their First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-4) in about 46 AD. Upon their return, they went up to Jerusalem for the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD (Acts 15, Galatians 2:1-10).

There are three places in Paul's epistles that give us some dates prior to 45 AD. Two of them involve the context of the Epistle lesson:

- Galatians 2:1 - Paul's conversion occurred 14 years before the Council of Jerusalem or 34 AD<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The context is his going up to Jerusalem. He didn't go up to Jerusalem immediately following his conversion (Galatians 1:17), but he did three years later (Galatians 1:18) and 14 years later (Galatians 2:1).

- Galatians 1:18 - Paul went to see Peter and James in Jerusalem 3 years after his conversion or 37 AD
- 2 Corinthians 12:2 - Paul had a vision of heaven 14 years prior to writing 2 Corinthians. Since 2 Corinthians was written in 55 AD, his vision occurred in 41 AD

Let us look at these periods in the life of the Apostle Paul more closely.

### **Birth to 34 AD; Prior to Conversion**

Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia probably between 5 AD and 10 AD, and was a Pharisee along with his father (Acts 23:3, 23:6). His father was a Roman citizen, and thus Paul was also (Acts 22:27-28). As was customary, all Jewish boys learned a trade as part of their education. Paul's trade was tent making (Acts 18:1-3); this would prove very helpful later on (Acts 20:32-35, 1 Corinthians 9:6-12). Paul continued his education in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, the most respected Rabbi of that day (Acts 22:3, 5:34). This higher education usually began about age 16-17 for Jewish boys where some type of formal education usually began at age 6. Paul was an excellent student and advanced beyond many of his contemporaries, being "exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers" (Galatians 1:14). In the late 20's AD, it is possible that Paul came with other Pharisees to be baptized by John the Baptist. John refused to baptize the Pharisees (Luke 7:30) and called them a brood of vipers (Matthew 3:7).

In 30 AD, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Paul began to persecute the Church. Paul may have been a junior member of the Sanhedrin; he mentions that he cast his vote in favor of putting some Christians to death (Acts 26:10). In 31 AD (almost a year after Pentecost), Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 22:19-20, Acts 7:59-8:3).

The martyrdom of Stephen began as a dispute with the Synagogue of the Freedmen (people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia). They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spoke (Acts 6:9-10). Since Paul was from Cilicia, he may have been personally involved in this dispute. According to tradition<sup>2</sup>, Paul was also a relative of Stephen.

For the next three years, Paul "persecuted the Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). He "punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, he persecuted them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:11).

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>3</sup> some interesting contrasts in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul persecuted the Church out of ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13), but yet he was extremely knowledgeable in the Law. The Jewish leaders persecuted the Christians out of love for power, but Paul did it out of zeal for doctrine. Paul's teacher, Gamaliel, was not like the other Jewish leaders, and does not seem to have a love for power like them; perhaps he instilled this in Paul. Paul was given mercy because of his ignorance; the other Jewish leaders were not given mercy because they did things willfully.

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<sup>2</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, III, v. 13.

“But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief’. Why then did other Jews not obtain mercy? Because what they did, they didn’t do ignorantly, but willfully, well knowing what they did. For this we have the testimony of John, ‘Many of the Jews believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God’ (John 12:43). And Christ again said to them, ‘How can you believe, who receive honor one of another’ (John 5:44)? The parents of the blind man ‘said these things for fear of the Jews, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 9:22). The Jews themselves said, ‘Perceive you how we avail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after Him’ (John 12:19). Thus their love of power was everywhere in their way. When they admitted that no one can forgive sins but God only, and Christ immediately did that very thing, which they had confessed to be a sign of divinity, this could not be a case of ignorance. But where was Paul then? Perhaps one should say he was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, and took no part with the multitude who conspired against Jesus. For Gamaliel does not appear to have been an ambitious man. Then how is it that afterwards Paul was found joining with the multitude? He saw the doctrine growing, and on the point of prevailing, and being generally embraced. For in the lifetime of Christ, the disciples consorted with Him, and afterwards with their teachers, but when they were completely separated, Paul did not act as the other Jews did, from the love of power, but from zeal. For what was the motive of his journey to Damascus? He thought the doctrine was pernicious, and was afraid that the preaching of it would spread everywhere. But with the Jews it was no concern for the multitude, but the love of power, that influenced their actions. Hence they say, ‘The Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’ (John 11:48). What fear was this that agitated them, but that of man? But it is worthy of inquiry, how one so skillful in the Law as Paul could be ignorant? It is he who says, ‘which He had promised before by His holy prophets’ (Romans 1:2). How is it then that you know not, you who are zealous of the Law of their fathers, who were brought up at the feet of Gamaliel? Yet those who spent their days on lakes and rivers, and the publicans, have embraced the Gospel, while those that studied the Law are persecuting it! It is for this he condemns himself, saying, ‘I am not fit to be called an Apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:9). It is for this he confesses his ignorance, which was produced by unbelief. For this reason, he says, he obtained ‘mercy’ (1 Timothy 2:16). What then does he mean when he says, ‘He counted me faithful?’ (1 Timothy 1:12) He would give up no right of his Master’s; even his own part he ascribed to Him, and assumed nothing to himself, nor claimed for his own the glory which was due to God. Hence in another place we find him exclaiming, ‘Sirs, why do you these things to us? We also are men of like passions with you’ (Acts 14:15). So again, ‘He counted me faithful’. And again, ‘I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me’ (1 Corinthians 15:10). And again, ‘It is He that works in us both to will and to do’ (Philippians 2:13). In acknowledging that he ‘obtained mercy’, he admits that he deserved punishment, since mercy is for such. And again in another place he says of the Jews, ‘Blindness in part is happened to Israel’” (Romans 11:25).

Chrysostom noted<sup>4</sup> that even though Paul had done some great things as an Apostle, Paul himself emphasized his unworthiness since he had persecuted the Church. Paul ranked himself lower than all the Apostles, both the Twelve, the Seventy and those who came later.

“Paul, after the Cross, persecuted Christ, and stoned His martyr Stephen by those many hands (Acts 7:59-8:1); but he repented, and condemned his former sins, and ran to Him whom he had persecuted. Christ immediately enrolled him among His friends, and the chief of them, having appointed him a herald and teacher of all the world, who had been ‘a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man’ (1 Timothy 1:13). Paul rejoiced at the loving-kindness of God, proclaimed it aloud, and has not been ashamed, but having recorded in his writings, as on a pillar, the deeds formerly dared by him, and has exhibited them to all. Paul thought it better that his former life should be placarded in sight of all, so that the greatness of the free gift of God might appear. He didn’t want to obscure Christ’s ineffable and indescribable loving-kindness by hesitating to parade before all men his own error. Paul continually treats of his persecution, his plotting, his wars against the Church, at one time saying, ‘I am the least of the apostles<sup>5</sup>, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God’ (1 Corinthians 15:9); at another, ‘Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief’ (1 Timothy 1:15). And again, ‘You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it’” (Galatians 1:13).

“For making as it were a kind of return to Christ for His long-suffering towards him, by showing who it was, what a hater and enemy that He saved. Paul declared with much openness the warfare which at the first with all zeal he warred against Christ; and with this he holds forth good hopes to those who despaired of their condition. For he says, that Christ accepted him, in order that in him first ‘Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life’ (Timothy 1:16), and the abundant riches of His goodness.”

Paul said, “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:10-12). This suggests that Paul was saying that his earlier experience in Judaism was marked by childishness.

### **Paul’s Conversion**

Armed with letters from the high priest to the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:1-2), Paul headed north to seek out Christians that had scattered because of his persecution (Acts 8:4). On the road to Damascus, Paul met the Lord and was struck blind (Acts 9:3-8). In that encounter, the

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<sup>4</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, X, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Not the least of the Twelve, but the least of ALL the Apostles. See John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXVIII, 6. This is quite a statement, since most of the Seventy Apostles worked for Paul at some point on his various missionary journeys. For more details on who and when, see Mark Kern, The Life of the Apostle Paul, St Athanasius Press, 2014. This is available at <https://www.stathanasius.org/resources/e-books/>.

Lord told Paul to go into the city of Damascus where he would be told what to do. The Lord also told Paul that He would send him to the Gentiles that they also might have an inheritance among the faithful (Acts 26:16-18).

Meanwhile in Damascus, the Apostle Ananias also had a vision (Acts 9:10-12). Ananias was one of the original Seventy and was one of the people Paul was looking for, and Ananias knew it (Acts 9:13-14). The Lord told Ananias that Paul was coming and that:

- Paul had been told that a man named Ananias would lay hands on him to restore his sight (Acts 9:12).
- Paul would evangelize the Gentiles and proclaim Christ to kings and to Israel (Acts 9:15).
- The Lord would show Paul how much he needed to suffer for the Lord's Name's sake (Acts 9:16).

Ananias went right away to the house on the street called Straight where Paul was staying and laid hands on him, restored his sight and baptized him. Located at this address today is the Patriarchate of the Church of Antioch.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>6</sup> that God called Paul at just the right time on account of Paul's excellent capacity. However, Paul himself in his humility, always spoke of this as grace and the mercy of God towards someone who didn't deserve it.

“Paul's object is to show, that it was by some secret providence that he was left for a time to himself (Galatians 1:16). Paul he was set apart from his mother's womb to be an Apostle and to be called to that ministry (Galatians 1:15). Yet he was not actually called until that time on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-16), which summons he instantly obeyed. It is evident that God had some hidden reason for this delay.”

“God indeed says that He called him on account of his excellent capacity, as He said to Ananias, ‘He is a chosen vessel of Mine, to bear my name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel’ (Acts 9:15). That is to say, capable of service, and the accomplishment of great deeds. God gives this as the reason for Paul's call! But Paul himself everywhere ascribes it to grace, and to God's inexpressible mercy, as in the words, ‘However for this reason I obtained mercy’, not that I was sufficient or even serviceable, but ‘that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life’ (1 Timothy 1:16). Behold his overflowing humility; I obtained mercy, says he, that no one might despair, when the worst of men had shared His bounty. For this is the force of the words, ‘that Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him’”.

### **34 AD to 37 AD; Immediately after Conversion**

Paul spent some days with the disciples of Damascus after his baptism (Acts 9:19-20). Undoubtedly, Ananias and Paul talked about their visions: that Paul was a chosen vessel to evangelize the Gentiles and would suffer a lot. In our Epistle reading, Paul stated that he did not

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<sup>6</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, vv. 15-16.

immediately confer with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16), but he went to Arabia for a while (Galatians 1:17). The implication is that he spent the greater part of three years (34-37 AD) in Arabia (Galatians 1:18). See Figure 1 for a map of Paul's movement in and around Damascus and Arabia.

To a Jew in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century "Arabia" did not necessarily mean the entire Arabian Peninsula. Josephus wrote that Arabia could be seen to the East from a tower in Jerusalem. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century, the kingdom of Nabatea was established as generally to the East of Palestine. This area was generally referred to as Arabia by residents of Palestine (see map). Note that Nabatea includes both the area surrounding Damascus and the area of Decapolis evangelized by the healed demoniacs in Mark 5:20 (see also Matthew 8:28).

The politics of this area was somewhat in turmoil at the time of Paul's conversion. From an article<sup>7</sup> in Bible Review that gives a historical perspective to Nabatea:

"Although the mother of Herod the Great came from an eminent Nabatean family, he later fought the Nabateans in a war that he won only after suffering heavy losses. The Nabateans, in return, enthusiastically provided auxiliary troops to aid the Roman governor of Syria in brutally suppressing the Jewish revolt that followed Herod's death" (about 4 BC).

"In order to calm the tensions between the two peoples, one of Herod's sons, Herod Antipas, married the daughter of the Nabatean king, Aretas IV. However, in about 23 AD he divorced her in order to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. John the Baptist criticized this marriage, as reported both by Josephus and the Gospels, with the result that John was imprisoned and then beheaded (Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29, Luke 4:19-20). Using a disputed border as an excuse, the Nabatean king attacked Galilee to avenge the insult to his daughter."

"The Nabatean king knew from experience that Rome had little patience with warlike actions between the client kings who guarded the eastern frontier of the empire. He thus had every reason to feel anxious not only about Jewish reaction, but about Roman reaction to his attack on Galilee. The Roman emperor was perfectly capable of reacting quickly and decisively. All he had to do was to give an order to the governor of Syria, who had four legions at his disposition."

Just as the Nabatean King Aretas was expecting the reaction from Rome, Paul [a Jew, a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee] went to live in this area of Arabia.

Prior to leaving for Arabia, Paul had begun to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:20). Those who heard him were amazed since they knew that Paul tried to destroy Christians in Jerusalem, and had come to Damascus to do the same (Acts 9:21-22). After his return to Damascus from Arabia, the amazement and consternation turned into a murder plot against Paul. The Jews hatched the plot (Acts 9:24) and got the governor of Damascus under King Aretas to go along (2 Corinthians 11:32). With an Ethnarch<sup>8</sup> guarding the city looking for Paul, the Christians

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<sup>7</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "What Was Paul Doing in Arabia?" Bible Review, October 1994

<sup>8</sup> An Ethnarch was the ruler of an entire province. By contrast Herod Antipas and his brother Philip (Luke 3:1) were only tetrarchs, who governed a fourth of a province.

let Paul down in a basket through a window in the city wall (Acts 9:25, 2 Corinthians 11:32-33) and he escaped, heading for Jerusalem.

John Chrysostom noted<sup>9</sup> that the calling of Paul was a huge event in the history of the people of God. The enemy of the people of God just became their champion and chief spokesman!

“Paul alludes to the prediction addressed to Ananias concerning him at Damascus, when the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel’ (Acts 9:15). By ‘dispensation of the grace of God’ (Ephesians 3:2), Paul means the revelation made to him. As much as to say, ‘I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it’ (Galatians 1:12). God Himself said to Paul, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). ‘This dispensation was a mighty one; to call someone, uninfluenced from any other quarter, immediately from above, and to say, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ (Acts 9:4). At this time, Paul was struck blind with that ineffable light!”

Tertullian noted<sup>10</sup> that the Apostles in Jerusalem had heard of the remarkable things that occurred on Paul’s 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary Journey, and they welcomed him with open arms on his return. Even just 3 years after Paul’s conversion, when he went to see Peter, he was welcomed by the brethren in Jerusalem.

“Having been converted from a persecutor to a preacher, Paul was introduced as one of the brethren to brethren, by brethren — to them, indeed, by men who had put on faith from the Apostles’ hands. Afterwards, as Paul himself narrates, he ‘went up to Jerusalem to see Peter’ (Galatians 1:18), because of his office, no doubt, and by right of a common belief and preaching. Now they certainly would not have been surprised at Paul’s having become a preacher instead of a persecutor, if his preaching were of something contrary. They would not have ‘glorified the Lord’ (Galatians 1:24), because Paul had presented himself as an adversary to Christ. They accordingly even gave him ‘the right hand of fellowship’ (Galatians 2:9), as a sign of their agreement with him, and arranged among themselves a distribution of office, not a diversity of Gospel. The intent was that they should severally preach not a different Gospel, but the same Gospel, to different persons, Peter to the circumcision, Paul to the Gentiles.”

Paul said, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:15-16). We might ask, if God separated Paul already from his mother’s womb, why did He wait so long to call Paul?

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>11</sup> that Paul was in a similar place as the laborers in Christ’s parable of the landowner who called laborers at different hours of the day. Not all the laborers were willing to come at the first hour. But God waited until they were ready.

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<sup>9</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Tertullian, Prescription Against Heretics, 23.

<sup>11</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIV, 3.

“Why can it have been that the landowner (God) did not hire all the laborers at once? As far as concerned Him, He did hire all; but if all did not listen at once, the difference was made by the disposition of them that were called. For this reason, some are called early in the morning, some at the third hour, some at the sixth, some at the ninth, some at the eleventh, when they would obey (Matthew 20:1-16). Paul also declared this when he said, ‘When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles’ (Galatians 1:15-16). When did it please God? When Paul was ready to obey!! For God willed it even from the beginning, but because Paul would not have yielded, then it pleased Him, when Paul also was ready to obey. Thus, also did He call the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43); although He was able to have called him before, but the thief would not have obeyed. If Paul at the beginning would not have obeyed, much more the thief. And if someone says, ‘No one has hired us’ (Matthew 20:7), in the first place, we must not be curious about all the points in the parables. For that He called all, as far as lay in Him, from the first, even the parable shows, saying, that ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard’” (Matthew 20:1).

The Twelve had divided the world up into different regions, and then they drew lots to see who would go where. The Apostle John had drawn the region of Asia Minor<sup>12</sup>, but he couldn't go there until after the death of the Virgin Mary, since the Lord had directed him to care for her (John 19:25-27). On Paul's missionary journeys, he filled in for John in Asia Minor until John could get there. Paul did something similar during his first three years as a believer in Arabia. Timon, of the Seventy and of the first seven deacons, was later Bishop of Bostra in Arabia. Paul laid the groundwork for Timon. John Chrysostom noted<sup>13</sup> Paul's fervent, yet extremely humble, character, as he began his life as an Apostle. He desired to go to places that the Twelve and the Seventy hadn't taken up the preaching of the Word yet.

“Paul was a fervent soul! He desired to go to regions not yet cultivated, which were in a wild state. Had he remained with the Apostles, since he had nothing to learn, his preaching would have been limited, for they needed to spread the Word everywhere. Thus this blessed man, fervent in spirit, undertook to teach wild barbarians, choosing a life full of battle and labor. He said, ‘I went into Arabia’, and added, ‘and again I returned to Damascus’ (Galatians 1:17). Observe his humility; he doesn't speak of his successes, or whom or the many he instructed. Yet such was his zeal, immediately after his baptism, that he confounded the Jews, and so exasperated them, that they and the Greeks lay in wait for him to kill him. This would not have been the case, had he not greatly added to the numbers of the faithful. Since the Jews were defeated in doctrine, they resorted to murder, which was a clear sign of Paul's superiority. But Christ did not allow him to be put to death, preserving him for his mission. Of these successes, however, Paul says nothing. In all his writings, his motive is not ambition, nor to be honored more highly than the Apostles, nor because he is embarrassed at being taken lightly. He

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<sup>12</sup> We can see this from Revelation 2 and 3, where John addresses some of the Churches in this region.

<sup>13</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, v. 17



calls himself, ‘one born<sup>14</sup> out of due time’, and, ‘the first of sinners’, and ‘the last of the Apostles’, and, ‘not fit to be called an Apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:8). The one who said this had labored more than all of them; which is real humility. For he, who is conscious of no excellence, and speaks humbly of himself, is candid but not humble; but for Paul to say so after such accomplishments, is to be practiced in self-control.”

“What great things did he achieve in the city of Damascus? He tells us that the governor<sup>15</sup> under Aretas the king set guards about the whole city, hoping to trap this blessed man. This is a proof of the strongest kind that he was violently persecuted by the Jews. He says nothing of this, but, mentioning his arrival and departure, is silent concerning the events which occurred, nor would he have mentioned them (2 Corinthians 11:32) had not circumstances required it.”

“He said that after three years he went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas’ (Galatians 1:18). What can be lowlier than such a soul? After such successes, lacking nothing of Peter, not even his assent, but being of equal dignity with him, he went to him as his elder and superior. The only object of this journey was to visit Peter; thus he pays due respect to the Apostles, and regards himself as not even their equal. Which is plain from this journey, for Paul visited Peter for the same reason many of our brethren today visit with holy men. Or rather by a humbler feeling, for today they do so for their own benefit, but Paul, not for his own instruction or correction, but merely for the sake of honoring Peter by his presence. He says, ‘to visit Peter’; he does not say to see (Greek: *ideio*), but to inquire about, (Greek: *istoresai*) a word, which those, who seek to become acquainted with great and splendid cities, apply to themselves. Worthy of such trouble did he consider the very sight of Peter. Paul did this again on his arrival at Jerusalem, after having converted many Gentiles; having reformed and brought to Christ Pamphylia, Lycaonia, Cilicia, and all nations in that quarter of the world, he first addressed himself with great humility to James, as to his elder and superior (Acts 21:17-19). Next he submitted to his counsel, and that counsel contrary to this Epistle. ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those which have believed; therefore shave your head, and purify yourself’ (Acts 21:20-24). Accordingly he shaved his head, and observed all the Jewish ceremonies; for where the Gospel was not affected, he was the humblest of all men. But where by such humility he saw any injured, he gave it up, for that was no longer being humble, but that could destroy the disciples.”

Chrysostom continued<sup>16</sup> to say that Paul, in his humility, referred to himself as “less than the least of all the saints” (Ephesians 3:8). In spite of being a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man (1 Timothy 1:13), he was given the grace to communicate the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles. Paul didn’t call himself the least of the Apostles, but less than the least of all the saints. In his humility, Paul mourned his former sins, even though they were blotted out.

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<sup>14</sup> The Greek word *ektroma* means literally “an abortion”.

<sup>15</sup> The “governor” under Aretas was an Ethnarch. Archelaus (Matthew 2:22) was an Ethnarch, which is a higher position than a Tetrarch, such as Herod Antipas, Philip and Lysanias (Luke 3:1). Thus it was a higher ranking official who was after Paul, trying to kill him, than was after Peter (Acts 12:3).

<sup>16</sup> John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VII.

### **37 AD to 45 AD; in Tarsus, Before Missionary Journeys**

Arriving in Jerusalem, Paul met with Peter and James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:18-19). This was his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion and he only stayed 15 days. At first, the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him and didn't believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas, who had also studied<sup>17</sup> under Gamaliel, took Paul in, introduced him to the Apostles, and declared to them concerning Paul's conversion (Acts 9:26-27). When Paul spoke boldly in the Name of Jesus and disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews, they also hatched a murder plot (Acts 9:29). This is why he only stayed 15 days in Jerusalem. When the brethren in Jerusalem found out about the murder plot, they hustled Paul down to Caesarea and off to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30). With Paul out of the way and no longer organizing the persecution of the Church, Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and multiplied considerably (Acts 9:31). This peace lasted until about 44 AD when Herod (Agrippa) killed James, the son of Zebedee, and tried to kill Peter also (Acts 12:1ff) because it pleased the Jews.

Before leaving Jerusalem, Paul had another vision from the Lord that confirmed the one he had at his conversion (Acts 22:17-21). In this vision, which occurred while Paul was praying in the Temple, the Lord warned him to get out of Jerusalem quickly because:

- They will not receive your testimony in Jerusalem
- The Lord would send him far from there to the Gentiles.

Paul spent the next 8 years in Tarsus (37 AD - 45 AD). During this time Paul had at least one other vision, this one greater than all the others. This vision occurred in 41 AD (14 years before the writing of 2 Corinthians in 55 AD). In this vision Paul was caught up into Paradise and heard things that he couldn't even speak about (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). This vision prepared Paul for his role as an Apostle since the Churches on earth are modeled after the Assembly of the Saints in heaven just as the Tabernacle in the wilderness was modeled after the Tabernacle in heaven (Exodus 25:9, 20; 26:30, Acts 7:44, Hebrews 8:5).

There was other foundational work that Paul did while he was in Tarsus that we don't notice until later. A number of the members of Paul's immediate family either came to know the Lord; or if they already did, the breach between them and Paul was repaired. According to tradition<sup>18</sup>, Stephen, one of the first seven deacons was a kinsman of Paul and therefore some repair work on family relationships may have been necessary.

Some of Paul's kinsmen that are mentioned in the Scriptures are Herodian (Romans 16:11), Andronicus and Junius (Romans 16:7), Lucius, Jason and Sosipater (Romans 16:21). Herodian, Andronicus<sup>19</sup>, both members of the Seventy, and Junius were in Rome in 55 AD when Paul wrote Romans. According to tradition, they had been sent there by Peter and Paul to help get the Church started, and Paul addressed them by name in Romans 16. Herodian was later Bishop of Neoparthia and Andronicus was later Bishop of Pannonia (North of Dalmatia).

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<sup>17</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 11.

<sup>18</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

<sup>19</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 8, May 17.

When Paul wrote Romans, he was in the middle of his Third Missionary Journey and was staying in Corinth at the time. With him in Corinth were Lucius, Jason and Sosipater (Romans 16:21), all members of the original Seventy and now doing apostolic work with Paul. Jason is also mentioned as working with Paul on Paul's Second Missionary Journey in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-7). According to tradition<sup>20</sup>, Jason was later Bishop of Tarsus; Lucius, Bishop of Laodicea; and Sosipater, Bishop of Iconium. Jason and Sosipater later teamed up as apostles and evangelized the Island of Corfu (West coast of Greece).

After spending about 8 years in Tarsus, Barnabas arrived in 45 AD looking for Paul (Acts 11:25). The Church in Antioch had gotten started recently by some men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20). The men we know from the Scripture that were from Cyprus are Barnabas (Acts 4:36) and his brother Aristobulus (Romans 16:10). According to tradition<sup>21</sup>, Aristobulus was also Peter's father-in-law and later Bishop of Britain. Those from Cyrene were Simon of Cyrene and his sons Rufus and Alexander (Mark 15:21). Simon was pressed into service to carry Jesus' cross at the crucifixion. Rufus worked with the apostle Paul, was in Rome when Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13), and was later Bishop of Thebes<sup>22</sup>. Simon's other son, Alexander, became a traitor to the Faith and was largely responsible for Paul's martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:14, 1 Timothy 1:20). Another man from Cyrene was Lucius of Cyrene who was one of the prophets and teachers at the Church of Antioch (Acts 13:1).

When Barnabas found Paul in Tarsus, he brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:26). Along with the others, Paul and Barnabas taught at the Church in Antioch for a year before they went off on their First Missionary Journey. During this one-year period, Agabus, a prophet and one of the Seventy, predicted that there would be a great famine. During the famine, Barnabas and Paul hand-carried alms from Antioch to the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).

As one can see from this brief history of the Apostle Paul's early life, there was considerable preparation and training he went through prior to his being sent out as an Apostle. He didn't have the opportunity to follow Jesus for three years like the Twelve and the Seventy. However, the Lord did speak to him personally and specifically in directing him what to do. When he said in Galatians, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:16) following his conversion, he is not putting down the Twelve, nor is he saying one shouldn't confer with one's elders. He is simply referring to the visions he had that were necessary for him to be able to do what he had done.

John Chrysostom pointed out<sup>23</sup>: when Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the Church of Antioch on their 1<sup>st</sup> Missionary, they did not immediately confer with flesh and blood in Jerusalem.

"The Apostles came to the Gentiles teaching them that with good reason they had been ordained by the Spirit. They did not say what they themselves thought, but 'what God had done with them' (Acts 14:26). It seems to me, that they mean their trials. It was not for nothing that they came, but providentially guided by the Spirit, that the preaching to the Gentiles might be firmly established. Notice

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<sup>20</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 28, September 10.

<sup>21</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, March 16.

<sup>22</sup> Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 8.

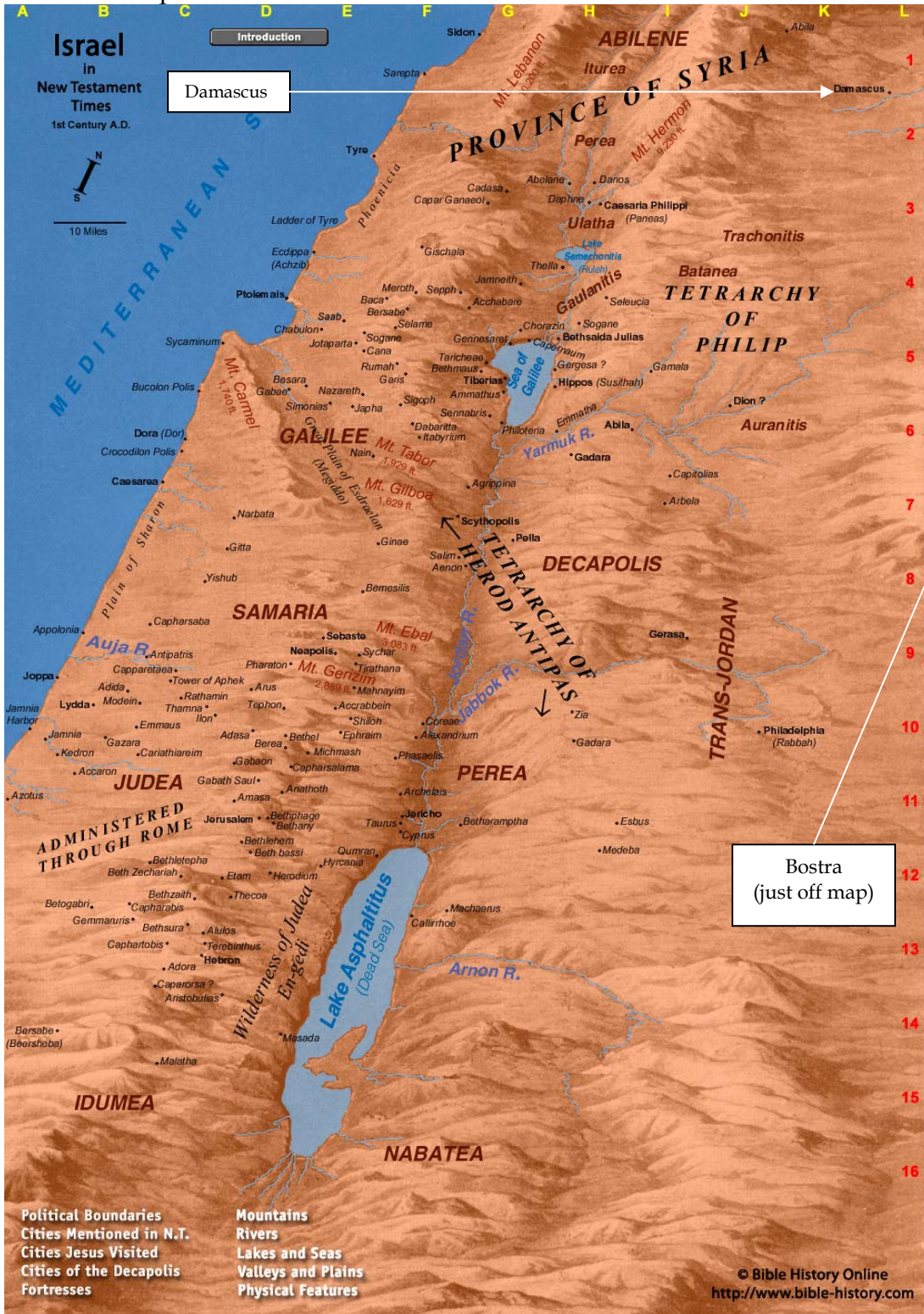
<sup>23</sup> John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXI, v. 27.

Paul's ardor. He does not ask whether it is right to speak to Gentiles, but he straightway speaks<sup>24</sup>. Therefore, Paul says, 'When God revealed His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood' (Galatians 1:16). For it is indeed a great thing, a great, a generous soul (like this)! How many have since believed, and none of them all has shone like Paul! What we want is earnestness, exceeding ardor, a soul ready to encounter death."

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<sup>24</sup> We might note that Paul had had an earlier vision in the Temple in Jerusalem where the Lord stated that He would send Paul to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21). That occurred in 37 AD, three years after Paul's conversion. But Paul didn't do anything about that vision until he was sent out as an Apostle by the Church in Antioch in 46 AD.

**Figure 1**  
 Map<sup>25</sup> of Paul's Movement Around Arabia and Damascus



<sup>25</sup> © Bible History Online <http://www.bible-history.com>. Other maps also available.

