

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 47: The Apostle Paul & His Times

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## The Apostle Paul and His Times: Did You Know?

Little-known and remarkable facts about Paul and his times.

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Tarsus, Paul's birthplace, is at least 4,000 years old. In 41 B.C., Antony and Cleopatra held a celebrated meeting there.

At least seven of Paul's relatives are mentioned in the New Testament. At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul greets as "relatives" Andronicus and Junia, Jason, Sosipater, and Lucius. In addition, Acts mentions Paul's sister and his nephew, who helped Paul in prison (Acts 23:16–22).

It is possible that Paul's "relative" Lucius is Luke, the author of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles. On his second missionary journey, Paul may have gone to Troas (where Luke lived—or at least where he joined Paul) because he knew a relative he could stay with there (Acts 16:8, 11).

What type of fish did Paul eat? Probably not catfish. Catfish was the largest native fish of the Sea of Galilee (sometimes weighing up to 20 pounds), but Jewish dietary laws would have prevented at least the early Paul from eating fish without scales (Deut. 14:10).

It's not clear exactly how Paul supported himself on his missionary journeys. Luke calls him a "tent-maker" (*skenopoios*), which suggests Paul was a weaver of tent cloth from goats' hair. The term, however, can also mean "leatherworker." Other early translations of Luke's term mean "maker of leather thongs" and "shoemaker."

Paul, the "Apostle to the Gentiles," had plenty of opportunity to preach to Jews in his travels. There were some four to five million Jews living abroad in the first century. Every major city had at least one synagogue, and Rome had at least eleven. The Jewish population of Rome alone was 40,000–50,000.

Wine was a common drink of Paul's day, but it was not the wine of our day. In the Greco-Roman world, pure wine was considered strong and unpleasant, so some Greeks diluted wine with seawater. In cold weather, city snack shops in Italy sold hot wine.

Paul read pagan poets. In his writings, he quotes Epimenides of Crete (Tit. 1:12), Aratus of Cilicia (Acts 17:28) and Menander, author of the Greek comedy *Thais* (1 Cor. 15:33).

Many Roman men of Paul's day curled their hair. Men also applied oil and grease to their hair; it was one way people de-loused themselves. These concoctions were made from such substances as the marrow of deer bones, the fat of bears and sheep, and the excrement of rats.

Demand for wild animals for entertainment in Paul's day turned hunting into a major business. Gladiatorial shows usually included animal hunts or fights with leopards, panthers, bears, lions, tigers, elephants, ostriches, and gazelles. In 55 B.C. at Pompeii's games, 400 leopards and 600 lions were killed. In A.D. 80, at the dedication of the Colosseum by Emperor Titus, 9,000 animals were killed in a hundred days.

Paul may have recorded some of the New Testament church's hymns. Many scholars think Paul is quoting hymns in passages like 1 Corinthians 13 and Philippians 2:1–11.

Paul's letters, not the Gospels, give us the earliest information we have about Jesus. All his letters were probably written before the first Gospel was penned. The earliest reference to the sayings of Jesus come from 1 Thessalonians, which Paul wrote about A.D. 50.

He may have not been as old as the Rembrandt painting on cover implies, but Paul lived a relatively long life. He was probably born about A.D. 6 and probably died about A.D. 64—which means he may have died at about age 58, an old age given the times and the hard life he lived.

In later art, Paul is often depicted with a sword and book, which is said to symbolize the manner of his death (beheading by sword), and his writings, which became "the sword of the Spirit."

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## **The Apostle Paul and His Times: From the Editor - Putting Paul in His Place**

Mark Galli

You will find not one article on Paul's theology in this edition, and here's the reason.

Each year hundreds of books worldwide are published on Paul and his writings. His every word—literally—is put under the microscope of critical study; his every thought, ruminated over by theologians and preached on by pastors. The question facing us as we prepared this issue was this: What can we say about Paul that hasn't already been said?

What has been said over and over concerns Paul the theologian, the thinker whose teachings are the basis of Christian doctrine. This is the Paul we hear about each Sunday and read about so many books.

But what about Paul the man? What about his times? What about his culture? Thankfully, more and more is being published on this dimension, what historians call social history. So we thought it would be helpful to do an issue that would help set Paul in his times.

So in the edition, you'll find articles on what it was like to be with Paul in prison, to travel with Paul, to be in the cities he lived in, to read the pagan religious writings he fought, to be with him as he wrote his letters—and on it goes.

Besides consulting the usual array of books and scholars to prepare this issue, editorial coordinator Mary Ann Jeffreys and I hosted the 1995 Christian History Study Tour, "In the Footsteps of Paul." Guided by professor Walter Elwell and his wife, Barbara, and accompanied by 31 CH readers, we visited sites in Greece, Ephesus, and Rome to get a better feel for Paul's life and times.

As you can imagine, much, much more could be said about the era, but we've tried to give you a taste of the first century Mediterranean world. And that, we trust, will help you understand Paul the theologian that much better.

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## Boundary Breaker

**Paul of Tarsus crossed all types of barriers to gain followers for Jesus of Nazareth.**

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During the closing years of Caesar Augustus's reign, a boy was born to a Jewish family in Tarsus, capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (in modern-day Turkey). The family traced its descent from the tribe of Benjamin, and they named their son after the most illustrious member in their family's history: Saul, the first king of Israel. As a Roman citizen, the boy had three names, by one of which he became famous: ***Paulus***.

Tarsus was ancient and prosperous; Saul described it as "no ordinary city." Industries in Tarsus included weaving and tentmaking—a craft Saul would use later to subsidize his travels.

His Roman citizenship implied that his family owned property. It also carried with it privileges—the right to a fair trial, exemption from degrading punishments like whipping, and the right of appeal.

Early on Saul learned a trait that would stand him in good stead in later life: how to cross cultural boundaries. Though born in a center of Greek culture, Saul was sent to school in Jerusalem, where he studied the Jewish scriptures and religious law under renowned rabbi Gamaliel "the Elder."

Gamaliel was a member of the Jewish ruling council (the Sanhedrin) and grandson of the famous rabbi Hillel. Gamaliel was gracious. When the Sanhedrin raged against members of a local sect who taught that Jesus of Nazareth, recently executed, was Messiah, he counseled forbearance. The council demanded the death penalty; Gamaliel convinced them to enforce a lesser punishment and let the cult members go.

Saul, however, did not adopt his teacher's moderation, especially toward members of this messianic sect. Saul joined the growing number of Jewish leaders who steadily harassed and even killed followers of "The Way," as it was called.

Saul could not help but be passionate—a great deal was at stake. He was devoted to his Jewish heritage and traditions, and his sharp intellect quickly perceived that this new sect threatened everything he stood for. So he joined wholeheartedly in restraining measures against The Way.

During one meeting of the Sanhedrin, a follower of the Way, Stephen, appeared before the council. His replies infuriated the members, who began taking off their cloaks and picking up rocks. Saul volunteered to watch their cloaks as they pummeled the radical to death.

Harassment of The Way now intensified, and Saul secured official papers from Jerusalem's high priest requesting that Damascus synagogues extradite members of The Way to Jerusalem for trial. On his way to Damascus, however, Saul's plans, and life, were changed.

## Thunderous About-Face

At about noon as Saul and his group neared Damascus, a bright light flashed around them. Saul fell to the ground stunned, and he heard a voice: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

He was mystified: "Who are you, lord?" he asked, not knowing what had thrown him to the ground.

Then he heard, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Saul's traveling companions had seen the light, and they heard noises afterward, but they couldn't make sense of it. As they helped Saul up, they discovered he couldn't see at all. They had to lead him by the hand the rest of the way to Damascus.

Saul didn't eat or drink for three days, though it's not clear whether this was a self-imposed fast or the result of trauma. On one of those days, he experienced another vision, in which a man came to him and laid hands on him in prayer. Then the vision came true: a man named Ananias came and prayed for Saul. That's when, as the historian Luke put it, "Something like scales fell from Saul's eyes."

Saul gained not only eyesight but a new religious outlook. He was convinced that Jesus, the executed Nazarene itinerant, was alive and calling him to special service. Astonishingly, Saul—a devout, ethnocentric Jew—now believed his life mission was to talk about Jesus to non-Jews.

Saul submitted to baptism, the rite of initiation for followers of The Way. He then disappeared into Arabia for three years, from about A.D. 33 to 36. Where he went and what he did remains a mystery, but during this time, he received revelations. He said Jesus came to him and taught him a message of forgiveness and salvation through faith.

Saul decided to visit the leaders of the The Way in Jerusalem, especially Peter and James. They taught him about the emerging movement, the details of Jesus' life and teachings, and their own encounters with the resurrected Jesus.

Still, Saul would later make it clear that nobody taught him anything about the gospel, the fundamental message of Christ. His message and calling, he argued, came by direct revelation from Christ, negating any contribution of even key figures like Peter and James. Saul's type-A personality and his love of personal superlatives (e.g., he once called himself the "chief of sinners") remained characteristics throughout his life.

During these years, Saul's life was in danger. On two occasions, devout Jews—perhaps former colleagues—tried to murder him. And despite his dramatic turnaround, Saul remained unknown and distrusted by The Way's adherents in Judea. Rumors circulated that Saul's conversion was a fake, a clever ruse to ferret out more members to put in jail. Joseph of Cyprus (known as Barnabas) gained a welcome for Saul by introducing him to churches. Still, Saul seems to have felt more comfortable in his home town, and he stayed in and around Tarsus for the next decade.

## **Outward Bound**

By the mid-40s, The Way had spread north to Antioch in Syria. Its members, many of whom were "Greeks" (i.e., non-Jewish), had become known as "Christians." Barnabas, one of the leaders, traveled to Tarsus to get Saul. Together they spent a year teaching converts in Antioch.

The leaders, apparently impressed with Paul and Barnabas's work with Greek converts, determined that these two should take the Christian message to Cyprus and Asia Minor. So they departed on what has become known as Paul's first missionary journey.

Several aspects of this trip deserve notice. First, Saul began using his Roman name, Paulus. Second, early

on, perhaps on Cyprus, Paul became the leader of the mission—Luke, who chronicled their journey, no longer writes of “Barnabas and Paul” but of “Paul and Barnabas.” Finally, on this journey Paul’s missionary style blossomed, particularly his drive to win followers for Jesus Christ and his willingness to cross political, cultural, and religious barriers to do so.

His experience in Pisidian Antioch (in Asia Minor) would become typical. “On the Sabbath,” Luke records, “they [Paul and Barnabas] entered the synagogue.” After the Hebrew scriptures were read, the leaders of the synagogue, as was customary, turned to the guests and said, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.”

Paul rose and said, “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!” Then he reviewed the history of the Jewish people, finally coming to the point that the long-awaited Messiah had come: “We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled in us, their children, raising up Jesus. ... Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”

Throughout the town, word spread of the unusual visitors, and on the next Sabbath, “almost the whole city” turned out to hear Paul. This time, though, some Jews argued abusively with him. He abruptly halted the debate and revealed his strategy.

“We had to speak the word of God to you first,” he said. “Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.” Paul believed that although he was called to spread the message of grace among Greeks, he was still obligated, as a Jew, to offer it first to his countrymen.

Many of the Greeks joined the fledgling Christian church there. Still, Jewish dissidents convinced city authorities to run Paul and Barnabas out of town.

In the next city they visited, Iconium, a plot was hatched to kill them. In Lystra, Paul was stoned till his attackers thought he was dead. Still, Paul and Barnabas established a number of churches in Asia Minor, filled with both Jews and Greeks. By A.D. 48, Paul and Barnabas were back home in Antioch and spent a lengthy time recuperating.

## **Breaking the Law**

About this time, some Jewish Christians arrived in Antioch and insisted that Christians had to obey the laws of Moses, including the injunction that males be circumcised. Greek converts naturally balked.

Paul and Barnabas were furious—to them, the requirement sabotaged their message of grace. So the church of Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas, among others, to go to Jerusalem to settle the matter.

After Peter, James, and the Jerusalem elders gathered, a heated discussion ensued. Peter made an impassioned speech against the advocates of circumcision, concluding, “Why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

Then Paul and Barnabas talked about the many Greek conversions they had witnessed. This had a powerful effect on the assembly.

Then James concluded, “It is my judgment that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.” He limited the requirements on Gentile converts to just four areas of abstinence: food

sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, meat from strangled animals, and meat juices. Two Jerusalem delegates, Judas and Silas, were sent with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the ruling to the Antioch church.

Though the issue was formally settled, Paul would battle it for the rest of his life. (At one point, he had to confront Peter when he temporarily retreated from the council's decision).

### **Sermon of a Lifetime**

With this issue settled, Paul invited Barnabas on another journey to see how their new converts were faring. Barnabas insisted on taking John Mark, an early companion of their first journey. But Paul balked. John Mark had deserted them after their first stop, and that, insisted Paul, disqualified him.

Paul and Barnabas argued so sharply, they parted ways. Barnabas and John Mark sailed for Cyprus; Paul took a new partner, Silas, and went through Syria and Cilicia, delivering the results of the Jerusalem Council.

Along the way, Paul picked up a convert named Timothy, whom Paul circumcised! Why the seeming turnabout? Apparently, Paul didn't see this as a requirement for salvation, but he didn't want to offend local Jewish Christians who were still uncomfortable with the Council's decision. Later Luke, a Greek physician who wrote a history of the movement, also joined the group.

Perhaps the most significant incident of this journey occurred when Paul was mysteriously prevented from further travel in Asia Minor. Luke says obliquely, "The Spirit of Jesus would not allow them" to go further. This revelation or circumstance was accompanied by a dream in which Paul saw a man from Macedonia (modern northern Greece) who said, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Paul concluded he was called to preach there and sailed for Macedonia. The Christian message had crossed another boundary, moving out of the Middle East and into Europe.

On this leg of the journey, Paul founded churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, among other places. Paul's longest stay was in the large commercial city of Corinth, where derisive treatment by the synagogue again led him to begin work among Greeks. During his more than eighteen months there (from A.D. 50 to 52), a charismatic and volatile church was born.

One city where he failed to establish a church became, ironically, the scene of his most famous sermon. Athens was the cradle of democracy, the home of philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno the Stoic, and was graced by magnificent architecture and sculpture.

Paul must have been deeply disturbed by Athens's pagan temples, altars, and images. Yet, as he preached on Mars Hill, he decided to enter the intellectual world of Athens. He affirmed the traditions of the Athenians: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious," and quoted Greek poets and philosophers approvingly.

Then he gently but firmly called his audience to Christian faith: "The God who made the world and everything in it ... does not live in temples built by human hands.... We should not think the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead!"

At the mention of a resurrection, some listeners sneered, and Paul's speech came to an end. Only a few Athenians became Christians.

Still, this speech better than any other illustrates Paul's ability to cross all sorts of boundaries to get his message across. Historian Henry Chadwick wrote, "Paul's genius as an apologist is his astonishing ability to reduce to an apparent vanishing point the gulf between himself and his converts and yet to 'gain' them for the [authentic] Christian gospel."

## **Death Threats**

Paul returned to Antioch, then revisited churches in Asia Minor and settled down in Ephesus for more than two years (from about A.D. 52 to 54). Then he was off to Jerusalem. In part, he wanted to deliver a famine-relief fund he had been collecting from Gentile churches for Jerusalem Christians, to show them the solidarity of Christians elsewhere.

But Paul was a realist, and he recognized his reputation among Jews in Judea would likely lead to more persecution and perhaps arrest. When his friends tearfully tried to dissuade him, he forged ahead. He said he felt "compelled by the Spirit" to go so that he could "complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."

After a delay—due mostly to another plot against his life—Paul and companions arrived in Jerusalem in about A.D. 57. Since his reputation was shaky among many Jewish Christians, the Jerusalem elders asked Paul and his companions to partake in Jewish purification rites. As with Timothy's circumcision, though it was against Paul's principles, he complied for the sake of harmony.

He may have accomplished harmony in the church, but within a week, the city was in an uproar. Some Jews recognized Paul in the temple area one day, and they began shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place." People came running from all directions. They seized Paul and dragged him from the temple. They were about to kill him when Roman troops showed up and arrested Paul and chained him. When it was discovered that Jerusalem Jews were still plotting Paul's murder, Paul was transferred secretly by night to Caesarea.

The main charge, disturbing the peace, was enough to keep him jailed for three years as Roman authorities tried to figure out what to do with this troublemaker. Paul used the time to meet with Christians who visited him in prison, and to write letters to churches he had founded.

For the next few years, he was dragged before one Roman official after another. On such occasions, he often described his conversion and called those present to repent and believe in Christ. With deft use of his rights as a Roman citizen, he avoided being whipped.

When Paul stood trial before Festus, Roman governor of Judea, Jewish leaders were unable to prove the accusations they were making. Paul said, "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." Festus, anxious to please the Jews, tried to get the trial moved to Jerusalem, which was under Jewish jurisdiction. Such a move would certainly end in Paul's death. So Paul pulled out his trump card.

"I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried," he said. "If the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

With that, Festus's hands were tied. As a Roman citizen on trial for a capital offense, Paul had the right to a hearing before the Emperor. "You have appealed to Caesar," said Festus. "To Caesar you will go." The appeal helped Paul accomplish one of his long-term goals: a visit to Rome.

## **Fighting the Good Fight**

As with most incidents in Paul's life, even the journey to Rome could not be uneventful. The Alexandrian grain ship that carried Paul encountered a hurricane that wrecked the vessel. Passengers, clinging to planks or pieces of the ship, swam to the nearest island, Malta. After a delay of three months, in the spring of A.D. 60, Paul and his guard finally reached Italy.

In Rome, Paul was put under house arrest, but he invited Jews to come to his rented home, and he debated with them. As usual, when they stopped giving him an ear, Paul turned his message to the Romans. For two years, he continued teaching any who visited.

We do not know the results of Paul's legal hearing, which probably took place in A.D. 62. Early tradition says he was martyred by sword during Nero's persecution in July 64. It is highly possible, however, that he was released, and after further missionary work (perhaps in Spain), was imprisoned again in Rome before being executed.

In this case, his final confinement would have been harsh. This may well be when he wrote his letters to Titus and Timothy: in them, he referred to being deserted by former companions and wrote, "I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

To keep the faith is to put it mildly. Paul had done so in the face of jailings, floggings, death threats, murder attempts, and the constant anxiety for the churches he founded—not to mention what Paul called his "thorn in the flesh"—a chronic and debilitating weakness.

Still, Paul had carried his message to people of many religions and cultures. Preacher P.T. Forsyth once said, "You must live with people to know their problems and live with God in order to solve them." Paul networked an entire empire in life and letter, sharing his soul and Christ's message with Jew and Greek, bond and free, male and female. He once said, "I have become all things to all men, that I might win some." It's clear that nobody's done it better.

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## **Stench, Pain, and Misery**

**Life in a Roman Prison.**

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Paul may have spent as much as 25 percent of his time as a missionary in prison. We know of his brief lock-up in Philippi, two years' incarceration in Caesarea, and at least another two in Rome. Yet Paul says he experienced "far more imprisonments," than his opponents. To understand Paul, we need to understand where he spent so much time.

### **Bloody Ordeal**

Roman imprisonment was preceded by being stripped naked and then flogged, a humiliating, painful, and bloody ordeal. The bleeding wounds went untreated; prisoners sat in painful leg or wrist chains. Mutilated, blood-stained clothing was not replaced, even in the cold of winter. In his final imprisonment, Paul asked for a cloak, presumably because of the cold.

Most cells were dark, especially the inner cells of a prison, like the one Paul and Silas inhabited in Philippi. Unbearable cold, lack of water, cramped quarters, and sickening stench from few toilets made sleeping difficult and waking hours miserable.

Male and female prisoners were sometimes incarcerated together, which led to sexual immorality and abuse.

Prison food, when available, was poor. Most prisoners had to provide their own food from outside sources. When Paul was in prison in Caesarea, Felix, the procurator, gave orders to the centurion that "none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs."

Because of the miserable conditions, many prisoners begged for a speedy death. Others simply committed suicide.

### **The Privileged Few**

All of this could be mitigated to some extent if the prisoner was important or paid a bribe (as Governor Felix hoped to receive from Paul in Caesarea).

A prominent individual, or one expected to be released, might be kept under house arrest if he or she could afford the rent. In Rome, where housing prisoners was excessively expensive, Paul was given the privilege of house arrest, and he paid the rent himself (exactly how, we don't know). He probably lived in a third-floor apartment; first floors were used for shops, and the second floor was expensive.

In his final imprisonment in Rome, though, Paul's life came to an end in the woeful conditions of a Roman prison.

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## On the Road With Paul

The ease—and dangers—of travel in ancient world.

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The first two centuries of the Christian era were great days for a traveler, writes historian Lionel Casson: "He could make his way from the shores of the Euphrates to the border between England and Scotland without crossing a foreign frontier.... He could sail through any waters without fear of pirates, thanks to the emperor's patrol squadrons. A planned network of good roads gave him access to all major centers, and the through routes were policed well enough for him to ride them with relatively little fear of bandits."

Because of the ***Pax Romana*** (Roman Peace) of Emperor Augustus (27 B.C. – A.D. 14), such conditions prevailed when Paul traveled the Roman world. The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (d. about 135) declared, "There are neither wars nor battles, nor great robberies nor piracies, but we may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west."

New Testament archaeologist W.M. Ramsay concludes, "The Roman roads were probably at their best during the first century after Augustus had put an end to war and disorder.... Thus St. Paul traveled in the best and safest period."

What would it have been like to travel with Paul during this unique era of ancient history?

### Roads Built to Last

By the time of Emperor Diocletian (c. A.D. 300), the Romans had built a marvelous network of over 53,000 miles of roads throughout the Empire, primarily for military purposes. They were generally 10 to 12 feet wide and models of road construction. Plutarch writes about one official's work:

"The roads were carried through the country in a perfectly straight line, and were paved with hewn stone and reinforced with banks of tight-rammed sand. Depressions were filled up, all intersecting torrents or ravines were bridged, and both sides were of equal and corresponding height, so that the work presented everywhere an even and beautiful appearance. Besides all this, he measured off all the roads by miles ... and planted stone pillars as distance markers."

The Roman mile (a word derived from ***mille passus***, "thousand paces") was one thousand five-foot paces, or about 95 yards shorter than our mile. Mile markers—inscribed stone columns five to six feet tall—marked distances.

During his first missionary journey, after he crossed inland from the southern coast of Turkey, Paul used the Via Sebaste, a road built under Augustus in 6 B.C., which connected six military colonies, including Antioch in Pisidia. Much of his other travels in Galatia and Phrygia, however, were on unpaved tracks.

During his second missionary journey, after landing at Neapolis, Paul took the Via Egnatia from Philippi to Thessalonica. This major highway was built by the Romans after they had taken over Macedonia in 148 B.C. It spanned Greece and was eventually extended east beyond Philippi to Byzantium. Paul left this road when he went south to Berea, but he must have taken it later when he evangelized Illyricum (Yugoslavia);

see Rom. 15:19).

After landing at Puteoli, Italy, Paul traveled the most famous Roman road, the Via Appia, the road from Rome to points south, which had been built in the third century B.C.

On such sturdy roads, soldiers could march four miles per hour, and on forced marches, five miles per hour. The average traveler walked three miles per hour for about seven hours a day—or about 20 miles per day. For example, Peter's trip from Joppa to Caesarea, a distance of 40 miles, took two days (Acts 10:23–24). Paul traveled from Troas to Assos on foot, a distance of about 20 miles (Acts 20:13–14), so it probably took him a day.

Even with sound roads, travelers did well to wear heavy shoes or sandals, to have capes and broad-brimmed hats, and to carry bedding, tents, and provisions. Though traveling during the winter was possible, snows sometimes blocked high passes, and rains in October and May flooded the rivers and made them difficult to cross. In some isolated areas, travelers faced dangers from robbers, as well as from wild animals such as bears, wolves, and boars.

Paul no doubt had some of these problems in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians, "I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits ... in danger in the country" (2 Cor. 11:26).

### Highway Speeds

Some extraordinary records were accomplished by determined travelers on horseback. Julius Caesar covered 800 miles from the Rhone River in France to Rome in eight days. Tiberius raced 500 miles in three days to reach his mortally wounded brother Drusus.

The official messenger system, the *Cursus Publicus*, used couriers who changed horses at *stationes* every 10 miles, or at *mansiones* every 20 to 30 miles. They were expected to cover 50 miles per day. The same messenger (rather than a relay of messengers) carried such important tidings as the death or accession of an emperor. A courier could travel from Rome to Palestine in 46 days, from Rome to Egypt in 64 days.

Those who traveled by carriage could cover between 25 and 50 miles per day. Roman vehicles had no springs, so the passengers felt every bump on the road. The Romans had such vehicles as the *carpentum*, a two-wheeled deluxe carriage, the *redda*, a four-wheeled wagon, and the *carruca*, a covered wagon. Wealthy individuals, like the Ethiopian treasurer of Queen Candace of Meroe, could afford a chauffeur-driven chariot (see Acts 8:28, 38).

For the most part, only military personnel and government officials traveled by horse. The one time that Paul used a horse was when he was escorted by soldiers from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23:23–24).

### Inns of Ill-Repute

After a long-day's journey, where did travelers lodge? Well-to-do Romans avoided inns if possible, and either set up their own tents or stayed with friends. Roman writers (such as Horace and Apuleius) uniformly criticized inns for their adulterated wine, filthy sleeping quarters, extortionate innkeepers, gamblers, thieves, and prostitutes. The apocryphal *Acts of John* relates the amusing story of the apostle who, coming to a bed infested with bugs, ordered the insects to depart for the night.

In literary texts we learn of rather comfortable inns in Asia Minor, and less reputable ones in Greece, though the New Testament never mentions Paul's staying in one. Christians from Rome traveled 40 miles south to meet Paul and his party coming from Puteoli at a place known as the Forum of Appius and the

Three Taverns (Acts 28:15), but it is not likely the party stayed in any of these tavern-inns.

That's because Christians were urged to practice hospitality for traveling believers. The elder John, for example, commended his friend Gaius for opening his home to traveling preachers: "You are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers even though they are strangers to you.... You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God" (3 John 5, 6).

An early Christian document, the *Didache*, indicates, though, that this hospitality could be abused:

"Let every apostle who comes to you be welcomed as if he were the Lord. But he is not to stay for more than one day, unless there is need, in which case he may stay another. But if he stays three days, he is a false prophet. And when the apostle leaves, he is to take nothing except bread until he finds his next night's lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet."

On his journeys, Paul enjoyed the hospitality of Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15), of Jason in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), and of Gaius in Corinth (Rom. 16:23)—to name three of his hosts.

### **Dangers on the Seas**

By far the fastest form of long-distance travel was to go by ship—at least in one direction. It is significant that Paul sailed from the Aegean to Palestine but always went overland from Palestine to the Aegean. The one time he sailed west was as a Roman prisoner.

The reason for eastward sailing is simple: the prevailing winds during the summer, the sailing season, generally blew from the northwest. This greatly eased an eastward voyage, which could be made directly from Rome to Alexandria in from 10 to 20 days. By the same token, these same winds would hinder the westward journey, which could take from 40 to 65 days or even more. This had to be accomplished by sailing from Egypt northward along the coast of Palestine and then west along the southern coast of Turkey. Ancient ships generally had but one main square sail, so their ability to tack against the wind was limited.

There were no passenger ships as such. Passengers sailed on cargo ships as space was available. The ships left when the winds and omens were favorable. The expense for passage was not high; it cost a family but two drachma (about two-days' wages) to sail from Alexandria to Athens. The fare included the provision of water but not of food and of cabins.

Alexandrian grain ships, upon one of which Paul traveled to Rome, played a key role in the ancient world. The wheat of Egypt supplied at least a third of the grain necessary to feed the population of Rome. Rome needed to import annually between 200,000 and 400,000 tons to feed its population of about a million. Lucian (second century A.D.) gave a vivid description of an Alexandrian grain ship, the *Isis*, which was blown off its course into Piraeus, the harbor of Athens: the ship was huge, 180 feet long, with a beam about 45 feet, and a depth also about 45 feet. Such ships could carry 1,200 tons of grain.

The safe sailing season was from May 27 to September 14. Risky seasons were from March 10 to May 26 and from September 15 to November 11. The winter season, from November 12 to March 9, was avoided except for emergencies or military campaigns.

Even travel on land was avoided during winter—hence Paul's plan to spend one winter at Corinth (1 Cor. 16:5–6) and another at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12), as well as his urgent plea to Timothy, "Do your best to come before winter" (2 Tim. 4:21).

The greatest danger of winter sailing, of course, was shipwrecks. In his second letter to Corinth, Paul

mentions being shipwrecked three times, and on one of these occasions, spending a night and a day floating in the open sea. Yet we know of another shipwreck still, and Luke's description of it (in Acts 27) is one of the most vivid narratives in all of ancient literature.

At Caesarea Paul was placed on board a ship from Adramyttium; at Myra, in southern Turkey, he was transferred to an Alexandrian grain ship headed to Rome. (One ancient manuscript of Acts says the trip to Myra took 15 days.) Luke's reference to the Day of Atonement (about October 5) indicates that this ship was sailing late in the season.

After reaching the southern coast of Crete, the captain wished to get to the larger harbor at Phoenix to winter, but a ferocious northeasterner, the Euroclydon, cast the ship helplessly adrift westward for many days without sight of sun or stars. The ship took such a battering it had to be abandoned. Ancient ships carried small boats for the transfer of passengers to the shore but no life rafts or life vests. It was miraculous that all 276 passengers and crew survived.

Paul and the others found themselves shipwrecked at Malta, where they were forced to stay for three months. Underwater archaeological surveys have plotted 538 Roman shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, 142 from A.D. 1 to 150—eight of these are known from the island of Malta. After spending the winter there, Paul was transferred to another Alexandrian grain ship, which, Luke notes, had the figureheads of the twin gods, Castor and Pollux, whom pagans believed provided protection in storms! After short stops in Syracuse and Rhegium, Paul and his guard arrived safely at Puteoli, Italy.

All in all, especially compared to previous centuries, Paul's travel conditions were ideal. As Irenaeus, the second century bishop of Lyons, put it, "The Romans have given the world peace, and we travel without fear along the roads and across the sea wherever we will." And Paul the missionary eagerly took advantage of such conditions.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 47: The Apostle Paul & His Times

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## Into the Heart of Paganism

**Why did Paul, the traveling missionary, set down roots in Corinth and Ephesus?**

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On his first two journeys, Paul and his traveling companions—first Barnabas and then Silas—set fairly rigorous itineraries. They headed for the capital cities of districts or provinces, preached in the local synagogues, gathered those who responded—both Jews and Gentiles—into new church units, and then moved on. Their purpose was to remain only long enough to help a new church get established.

When Paul reached Corinth, however, he broke this pattern dramatically. Despite the sense of urgency he felt about the imminence of a judgment day, he decided to “take up residence” at Corinth (and later, as we shall see, at Ephesus). Why?

Is it simply that these were large, tradition-rich cities? Paul had passed through other cities impressive in size, such as Thessalonica, or rich in tradition, such as Troas. Athens had both impressive buildings and a rich classical heritage. Yet Paul did little more than pause there.

In fact, Corinth and Ephesus had special features that help explain Paul’s decision to abandon his frenetic travel schedule and establish residency.

### The World at His Doorstep

Corinth’s strategic location was perhaps of prime importance. It was a hub city for travel between the eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire. The narrow isthmus separating the Gulf of Corinth and the Saronic Gulf had been spanned as early as the sixth century B.C. by a stone-paved roadway (the *diolkos*), making it relatively easy to pull most ships across the low, three-mile land strip without even unloading them.

The *diolkos* saved some 200 miles of extra sea travel, and the sheltered waters of the Saronic and Corinthian Gulfs were far safer for sea-going ships than the treacherous winds around Cape Malea at the Peloponnese’s southeastern tip.

Corinth, therefore, was a natural funnel for traffic, receiving a steady and lively flow of travelers to and from all the Roman provinces along the northern shore of the Mediterranean.

At Corinth Paul continued to spread the gospel to many new areas by preaching to sailors, traveling merchants, and others who passed through the city. In Corinth Paul literally could spread his gospel more efficiently by staying in one place. Initially, he probably intended to move westward from Corinth as soon as a church was firmly established there, but after he arrived at Corinth, he seems to have decided that he could send the gospel on through others. He later claimed that he preached the gospel “from Jerusalem as far round as Illyricum” (western Yugoslavia; Romans 15:19), perhaps reflecting that through his preaching at Corinth he already had extended it this far.

### Pagan Pilgrims

Corinth was also a destination for two types of pilgrims. The first included people suffering from all kinds

of maladies who came to Corinth's *asklepieion*, a healing shrine dedicated to the deified Greek physician Asclepius. By the fourth century B.C., Asclepius had several other healing shrines; the one at Corinth remained popular well into the Roman Age. Supplicants would stay in Corinth, often with family members, for weeks or months, in the hope of receiving a cure.

The second type of pilgrim came to Corinth to attend the Isthmian Games, which were held every two years, including the summer of A.D. 51, while Paul was there. The games were held about ten miles from Corinth at a shrine of Poseidon, the sea god. Like the better known games at Olympia, the Isthmian Games were "panhellenic," attracting athletes and spectators from Greek settlements throughout the Mediterranean.

The Isthmian Games and the health spa at Corinth may also have provided Paul, who was a tentmaker by trade, with a special opportunity to support himself. We know from Paul's own statements that he was anxious to be independent of support from the churches he founded, lest he be mistaken for one of the professional itinerant philosophers of his day (1 Thess. 2:9). We also learn from Acts that when Paul came to Corinth he sought out a Jewish couple, Aquila and Priscilla, "and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them, and they worked, for by trade they were tentmakers" (Acts 18:2–3).

Most of the people who flocked to the Corinthian *asklepieion* and the Isthmian Games stayed in tent encampments. Paul thus found a ready means of supporting himself among the very people who provided promising audiences for his preaching.

### **Paul's Attraction to Immorality**

Paradoxically, Corinth offered another attractive feature for Paul: its long-standing reputation for immorality and licentiousness. The Greeks—who had a name for everything—coined the term *corinthiazesthai* to mean "immorality"; literally, the word means "to live a Corinthian life." To call a girl a "Corinthian lass" was to cast aspersions on her virtue.

Corinth's reputation was as notorious in Paul's day as it had been in the Classical Age five centuries before. The account by the Roman geographer Strabo that a thousand cult prostitutes once served the temple to Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth, overlooking the city, may have been exaggerated. But the steady stream of sailors, traveling salesmen, and the ancient equivalent of soccer fans doubtless kept a good number of the cult prostitutes' secular counterparts busy.

This is the reality that lay behind Paul's reference, in his second letter to the Corinthians, to the "impurity, immorality, and licentiousness" that characterized the behavior of some church members before their conversions (2 Cor. 12:21). Paul knew what he was talking about when he referred to the "immoral," the "idolaters," the "adulterers," the "homosexuals," the "thieves," the "greedy," the "drunkards," the "revilers" and the "robbers" of Corinth. "Such," he writes to the church at Corinth, "were some of you" (1 Cor. 6).

Corinth also had strong associations with "pagan" religions. We have already referred to the worship of Asclepius, Poseidon, and Aphrodite. The city also had a venerable connection with Apollo. A Roman-period shrine to Apollo was located prominently on the main street leading from the forum to Corinth's western port. Altars and temples to other traditional Greek gods—Athena, Hera, Hermes—lined the edges of the forum. One temple was even dedicated to "all the gods."

On the road leading up to Acrocorinth was a shrine to the Egyptian gods Isis and Serapis. A shrine to Octavia, the deified sister of Emperor Augustus, was located at the west end of the forum. Some of the newest "mystery" religions also flourished in Corinth; these offered their special kinds of personal salvation and communion with savior gods.

For Paul all this represented a special challenge—and a special opportunity. Paul had been preaching throughout his missionary journeys that Gentile converts to Christianity did not need to undertake circumcision and all the obligations of Jewish law. Now, in Corinth of all places, if Paul could establish a church of Gentile converts who were morally upright without relying on the constraints of Torah, then the Christian gospel could take root anywhere—even in the most hostile soil the Gentile world could offer.

Paul's letters, later sent back to the Corinthian Christians, reflect his special zeal that their behavior be morally elevated. The church at Corinth was a "showcase" congregation for Paul; with it he hoped at last to convince the most skeptical among the Jewish Christian leaders in Jerusalem that Torah was not necessary for salvation.

## **World Wonder**

Paul also found himself drawn to Ephesus because it had the same "attractions" that had detained him in Corinth—but to an even greater extent, so that he stayed in Ephesus two-and-a-half years.

The modern visitor to Ephesus is immediately struck by the extent and opulence of the archaeological remains, and only the center of the city has been exposed (although Austrian excavators have been working at the site since 1895). Ephesus was one of the three or four largest cities in the Roman world. Population estimates for Ephesus in Paul's time range up to a quarter of a million people. Moreover, the city's wealth was reflected everywhere, from its marble-paved main street to recently excavated mosaic floors in aristocratic homes.

Like Corinth, Ephesus was strategically located, and this surely accounts at least in part for its enormous size and wealth in Paul's day. As the Roman Empire stretched eastward across the Mediterranean, Ephesus's large and sheltered harbor became a major communication hub. Sea traffic from the Aegean Sea to the west, from the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to the north and from Palestine to the east, stopped at Ephesus. Ephesus also served as a convenient collection point on the coast for agricultural products brought down the Maeander River Valley from the interior of Asia Minor. It's not surprising that Ephesus was designated the capital of the rich Roman province of Asia.

Ephesus also boasted one of the most popular shrines in antiquity: the nature/fertility/mother goddess Artemis, who was worshiped by the Romans as Diana. From all over the Mediterranean, pilgrims flocked to the great Artemisium on the shore of the Kaystros River, adjacent to Ephesus. This great temple was four times the size of the Athens Parthenon and was considered one of the seven wonders of the world.

The shrine to Artemis would have been one of the special challenges that attracted Paul to Ephesus. Acts records that the most hostile opposition to Paul's preaching came from adherents to this cult and from local entrepreneurs whose livelihood depended upon it. Near the end of Paul's stay at Ephesus, a local silversmith named Demetrius, who made votive shrines of the Ephesian Artemis for the pilgrim trade, organized a near-riot against Paul and his associates, filling the 24,500-seat theater of Ephesus with devotees of the goddess chanting repeatedly "Great is Artemis of Ephesus!" (Acts 19).

## **Do You Believe in Magic?**

Local magicians and exorcists also presented a challenge for Paul. Magic practitioners and their texts had proliferated during the Roman Age, particularly out of Egypt and even from some esoteric circles within Judaism. In 13 B.C., the Emperor Augustus unsuccessfully attempted to suppress the use of magical books. The practice of the magical arts was so closely associated with Ephesus that books of magic recipes and incantations were often referred to as "Ephesian books." According to Acts, Paul was so successful in converting Ephesians from a belief in magic that many of them threw their magic books onto a public bonfire (Acts 19:13–19).

Paul was a pugnacious warrior, and we can be sure that he was attracted rather than deterred by the presence at Ephesus of the Artemis devotees and magicians. They gave him greater opportunities to do battle for the Christian gospel. As he wrote to the Corinthians, explaining to them why he was staying so long in Ephesus, "I will stay at Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9).

Ephesus also had a strong tradition of scholarship and intellectual inquiry. This is most dramatically suggested by the recently re-erected facade of the magnificent three-story Library of Celsus, an important scholarly archive and meeting place for intellectuals in Ephesus. Although this library was not built until A. D. 110, a half-century after Paul's time, the tradition of scholarly inquiry and activity in the region surrounding Ephesus went back to pre-Classical times. The founder of both philosophy and mathematics came from Ionia in the sixth century B.C. Such giants as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes all came from Miletus, only a few miles south of Ephesus. Herodotus, the first historian, was born a few miles farther south, at Halicarnossos (present-day Bodrum). Hippocrates, the first physician, established his famous medical center on the nearby island of Cos. At Ephesus Paul could work in an atmosphere of genuine inquiry. There he could find learned scholars who were proud of a centuries-old tradition of open-minded exploration of new ideas.

Moreover, the intellectual climate of Ephesus reflected its geographical location on the threshold between East and West. More so than Corinth, which had been on thoroughly Greco-Roman soil, Ephesus provided a meeting place for ideas from both eastern and western cultural traditions. For Paul, who had labored hard to dissolve the barriers between east and west in the Christian fellowship and to unite Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian, Ephesus provided a comfortably eclectic atmosphere and a symbolic middle ground from which to preach both toward Rome and toward Jerusalem.

At Ephesus, then, Paul unpacked his traveling rucksack for the second time. The features that had led him to remain so long in Corinth were even more insistent at Ephesus. The city's strategic location, the flow of pilgrims, a famous pagan cult, infamous magicians—all provided rich opportunities and worthy challenges for Paul's preaching.

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## From Child-Killing to Mysticism

Four examples of the pluralistic challenge that Paul faced

The Editors

### **Magic**

*From a papyrus containing magical incantations:*

For those possessed by demons, an approved charm by Pibechis:

Take oil made from unripe olives, together with the plant mastigia and lotus pith, and boil it with marjoram (very colorless), saying, "Joel, Ossarthiomi, Emori, Theochipsoith, Sithemeoch, Sothe, Joe, Mimipsothiooph, Phersothi, Aeeioyo, Joe, Eochariphtha: Come out of such a one"—and the other usual formulae.

But write this phylactery upon a little sheet of tin: "Jaeo, Abraothioch, Phtha, Mesentiniao, Pheoch, Jaeo, Charsoc," and hang it round the sufferer. It is of every demon a thing to be trembled at, which he fears.

### **Ethics**

*A letter from husband to wife:*

Hilarion to his sister [=wife] Alis, very many greetings; likewise to my lady Berous, and Apollonarian:

Know that we are still in Alexandria. Do not be anxious; if they really go home, I will remain in Alexandria. I beg and entreat you, take care of the little one, and as soon as we receive our pay, I will send it up to you. If by chance you bear a child, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, cast it out.

You have said to Aphrodisias, "Do not forget me." How can I forget you? I beg you, then, not to be anxious.

### **Greek Mysticism**

*A notable man of letters (Aelius Aristides) describes his encounter with the god Asclepius:*

For there was a feeling as if taking hold of him [the god] and of clearly perceiving that he himself had come, of being midway between sleeping and waking, of wanting to look, of struggling against his departure too soon, of having applied one's ears and of hearing some things as in a dream ... hair stood straight; tears flowed in joy; the burden of understanding seemed light.

What man is able to put these things into words? Yet if he is one of those who have undergone initiation [into a Greek religion], he knows and is familiar with them.

### **Nature Religion**

*From a letter by the stoic philosopher Seneca (died A.D. 41):*

If you have ever come on a dense wood of ancient trees that have risen to an exceptional height, shutting out all sight of the sky with one thick screen of branches upon another—the loftiness of the forest, the seclusion of the spot, your sense of wonderment at finding so deep

and unbroken a gloom out of doors, will persuade you of the presence of a deity.

Any cave in which the rocks have been eroded deep into the mountain resting on it, its hollowing out into a cavern of impressive extent not produced by the labors of men but the result of processes of nature, will strike into your soul some inkling of the divine.

We venerate the sources of important streams. Places where a mighty river bursts suddenly from hiding are provided with altars. Hot springs are objects of worship. The darkness or unfathomable depth of pools has made their waters sacred.

And if you come across a man who is never alarmed by dangers, never affected by cravings, happy in adversity, calm in the midst of storm, viewing mankind from a higher level and the gods from their own—is it not likely that a feeling will find its way into you, [a feeling] of veneration for him?... Into that body there has descended a divine power.

# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 47: The Apostle Paul & His Times

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## The Apostle Paul and His Times: A Gallery of Paul's Inner Circle

What happened to the people who worked most closely with him?

Mary Ann Jeffreys is editorial coordinator for Christian History.

### **Priscilla and Aquila** (died c. 80?) *Tri-city tentmakers*

What the Roman emperor Claudius meant for evil turned out for good for Priscilla and Aquila. They were living in Rome in 49 when Claudius expelled all the Jews because of a riot over a certain "Chrestus," probably an allusion to Jewish arguments over Christ. Jewish Christians like Priscilla and Aquila were also forced to leave.

So the couple moved to Corinth, where they set up their tentmaking business. When Paul arrived, Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to him and invited him to work with them. The trio later worked and ministered together in Ephesus, which may be where Priscilla and Aquila "risked their necks" for Paul, possibly when he "fought with beasts at Ephesus." Priscilla is sometimes pictured with two lions who refuse to attack her, lending credence to this tradition.

When Claudius died in 55, Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome and again hosted a church in their home, to whom Paul sent greetings in his letter to the Romans. A tradition of the sixth century claims that the Roman church "Prisca" on the Aventine Hill stands over their original house-church.

### **Silas** (died c. 75?) *Co-author of three New Testament books?*

Silas is first mentioned at the Council of Jerusalem (49). As "one of the leading men among the brethren," he was chosen as diplomatic envoy to the Antioch church to announce the council's decisions (specifically, the requirements for non-Jews to join The Way).

For some reason, he remained in Antioch, so that when Paul was looking for replacements for Barnabas and Mark, who had broken with him, Silas was available. On their three-year journey, he preached, was stoned, and was jailed with Paul. They made their way, with Timothy and Luke, through Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. Silas found his niche in Corinth and remained there, preaching and teaching, after Paul departed for Ephesus. He may have helped compose Paul's letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 2:1).

Also called Silvanus, Silas later joined Peter in Rome and may have served as Peter's secretary and co-authored 1 Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Legend has him returning to Corinth, where he became the city's first bishop. He reportedly died in northern Greece.

### **Luke** (died c. 90?) *Paul's biographer*

"Only Luke is with me." So wrote Paul late in life from a Roman prison, just one evidence of their close

relationship.

Early tradition suggests that Luke was born a Greek in Antioch and became a physician before being converted and joining Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Troas on Paul's second missionary journey (early 50s). Luke was later shipwrecked with Paul on Malta and jailed with Paul in Rome.

He went to Greece around the time of Paul's death and from there wrote his two-volume history of Jesus and the early church. The second volume, *The Acts of the Apostles*, is mostly about Paul's missionary journeys, and in four passages, Luke includes himself in the story, using the pronoun "we" to narrate various events.

One second-century prologue to the Gospel of Luke claims:

"Having neither wife nor child, [Luke] served the Lord without distraction. He fell asleep in Boeotia, at the age of 84, full of the Holy Spirit."

Constantine the Great transported Luke's remains to Constantinople in 356, where they are said to be preserved in the Church of the Apostles.

**Timothy**  
**(died 97)**  
***Trusted confidant***

Despite his youth, Timothy quickly gained Paul's confidence and served as his trusted companion and emissary for 17 years.

Timothy was born in Lystra in Asia Minor to a Greek father and a Jewish mother, Eunice. He, his mother, and grandmother probably became Christians when Paul and Barnabas preached in Lystra during their first missionary journey. When Paul returned a year or so later, he invited Timothy to join him and Silas.

Somehow, he managed to stay out of harm's way—he was not jailed with Paul and Silas in Philippi, and he avoided the riot in Thessalonica. But when Paul needed an envoy to return to Thessalonica to encourage the new believers there, he sent young Timothy. Later, Paul sent Timothy as emissary to Corinth, where he preached for some time.

Paul called Timothy his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord." When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, it's Timothy he asked to "come before winter" to comfort him.

Eusebius, the fourth century historian, says that after Paul's death, Timothy became the first bishop of Ephesus, probably at around age 40. He outlived Paul by 30 years, and according to one tradition, was present at the death of the Virgin Mary, whose tomb is said to be near Ephesus.

This tradition also says that because he protested festivities honoring Artemis, he was stoned to death in 97. His relics were brought to Constantinople in 356.

**Barnabas**  
**(died 61)**  
***Advocate for the despised***

"Barnabas" was actually his nickname, given him by the apostles. It meant "Son of Encouragement," and it was most appropriate.

He was actually born Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. He was probably one of many Jews who migrated back to Jerusalem, where he became one of the earliest converts to Christianity. He sold a field shortly afterwards and gave the money to the Jerusalem church.

Unlike most Christians, Barnabas believed Paul's conversion story, and he smoothed the way for the former persecutor to be accepted by the Jerusalem church.

Barnabas then went to pastor the growing church in Antioch, and Paul returned to Tarsus. Barnabas later invited Paul to come and co-pastor the Antioch church.

In 48, Barnabas set off with his cousin Mark and Paul to evangelize cities in Asia Minor. Though Mark deserted the party early on, Barnabas and Paul preached, performed miracles, and endured persecution together.

One early tradition, recorded by Clement of Alexandria, says Barnabas worked briefly with Jesus, being one of the 70 sent out to evangelize Palestine. Another tradition says he preached in Alexandria and Rome after leaving Paul, founded the church on Cyprus, and was finally stoned and then burned to death in about 61 in Syria. Though three early church works claim his name—The *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Gospel of Barnabas*, and the *Acts of Barnabas*—none are considered to be written by him.

**John Mark**  
(died c. 80)  
*First Gospel writer*

Was Mark one of the first people in history to be raised in a Christian home? His mother's home in Jerusalem, where Mark was likely born and raised, was a gathering place for early Christians; it was the house to which Peter fled after he miraculously escaped from prison. A Byzantine tradition says the house was also used for the Last Supper, and the Church of John Mark in Jerusalem is said to mark the site.

Sometime after Pentecost, Mark moved to Antioch, and when the church there commissioned Paul and Barnabas to carry the gospel to Asia Minor, Mark was invited to assist them. For some reason, at Perga, Mark left the mission and returned to Jerusalem—a move that eroded Paul's confidence in Mark.

When plans were laid for the next missionary journey, Paul argued vehemently with Barnabas against taking Mark again. The disagreement was so sharp, the group split up, and Mark went with Barnabas to Cyprus.

Later, Mark and Paul must have resolved their rift, for Paul calls Mark his "fellow-worker" and tells the Colossians: "If [Mark] comes to you, welcome him."

Mark eventually made his way to Rome, where he became a companion to Peter—indeed, Peter calls him "my son Mark." Early Christian writers Papias and Irenaeus say Mark "handed down to us in writing the things that Peter had proclaimed" about Jesus. This Gospel of Mark was the first published account of the life of Jesus.

Church historian Eusebius says Mark eventually went to Alexandria to become its first bishop. Tradition claims Mark was martyred there; in the ninth century, his relics were carried off as war booty to Venice, where they are said to rest in the Cathedral of St. Mark.

**Titus**  
(died 96)

## ***Paul's troubleshooter***

Titus probably gets the Pauline service award with 20 years as Paul's co-worker.

Titus was born a Gentile, and when he became a Christian he did not get circumcised. When Titus accompanied Paul on a visit to Jerusalem, some Jewish Christians insisted Paul's companion be circumcised according to Jewish law. As Paul put it, he "did not yield submission even for a moment," and Titus remained uncircumcised. Titus thus served as a powerful symbol of justification by grace, not by law.

Titus served with Paul during his extended stay in Ephesus as a "partner and fellow-worker," and from there Titus tackled his toughest assignment: to combat grave immorality in the Corinthian church and mediate their reconciliation with Paul.

Titus put his pastoral skills to work and reported back to a nervously-waiting Paul that Paul's severe third Corinthian letter (lost or possibly contained in 2 Corinthians 10–13) had led to their repentance.

Titus was later appointed the first bishop of the troubled church at Crete, where Paul wrote him about the qualities of a good bishop. Eusebius reports that Titus died there in 96 and was buried in the ancient capital, Gortyna. His head was supposedly removed in 823 by Saracens and later enshrined at St. Mark's Cathedral, Venice.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## The Real Writer of Romans

The important but little-known figure behind the apostle.

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A quick look at the closing verses of Paul's letter to Rome makes it clear that Paul did not pen the epistle: "Timothy, my co-worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my relatives. I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord" (NRSV). Of course, Romans 1:1 indicates that Paul was the author. So who was this "Tertius," and what was his role in the producing this letter?

### Word Processors

In Paul's day most letters were written by a professional scribe called an *amanuensis*. Sometimes the sender was illiterate, but generally an amanuensis was used to guarantee letters would be grammatically sound and legible. Tertius was Paul's scribe, and he inserted his own greeting at the close of the letter.

As a professional, Tertius collected the necessary materials for writing. This was not always easy since bulk paper production was unknown. Although vellum or parchment (processed polished animal skins) were available, they were expensive.

Papyrus from Egypt, however, worked best. The cut plant was pressed in layers and became as tough as today's paper. It was produced in scrolls by gluing together sheets and rolling them end-to-end on a stick. One roll was called a volume (from the Latin *volumen*, "something rolled up") and was generally 35 feet long.

Ancient authors wrote to fit volumes, and like Luke, sometimes produced two-volume works (the Gospel and Acts). Obviously, length was a problem. Callimachus, a famous cataloguer at the great library of Alexandria, liked to say "A big book is a big nuisance."

When Tertius began working on Romans, he had in hand a fresh scroll and a pen with brown or black ink. Scribes wrote on the side of the papyrus where the fibers ran horizontally, the fiber lines serving as a guide. Tertius would then organize the roll into three-inch wide columns for text.

As he worked, he likely wrote entirely in capital letters, giving the text a splendid dignity. And, remarkably, he never left spaces between words, letting one word spill into the next. The final effect gave a block text with straight margins on both right and left sides.

### Who Wrote That?

Trusted scribes were given great freedom to shape the form, style, and even the content of the author's letter. This broad role for an amanuensis must be kept in mind when scholars compare the vocabulary and stylistic differences among Paul's letters to determine questions of authorship. Sometimes a minor word choice belonged to Paul. Sometimes it may have belonged to someone like Tertius.

In any event, occasionally Paul liked to take the pen and close the letter in his own handwriting. For

example, at the end of 1 Corinthians, he writes, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand." He probably used his handwriting as a signature since forgeries of letters using Paul's name were known. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul concludes, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write."

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 47: The Apostle Paul & His Times

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## The Apostle Paul and His Times: Christian History Timeline

Janet Meyer Everts is associate professor of religion, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

### ***Birth & Education***

c. **A.D. 6** Born a Roman citizen to Jewish parents in Tarsus (in modern eastern Turkey)

c. **20–30** Studies Torah in Jerusalem with Gamaliel; becomes a Pharisee

c. **30–33** Persecutes followers of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem and Judea

### ***Conversion***

c. **33–36** Converted on the way to Damascus; spends three years in Arabia; returns to Damascus to preach Jesus as Messiah

c. **36** Flees Damascus because of persecution; visits Jerusalem and meets with the apostles

**36–44** Preaches in Tarsus and surrounding region

**44–46** Invited by Barnabas to teach in Antioch

**46** With Barnabas visits Jerusalem to bring a famine relief offering

### ***Mission Trips***

**47–48** First missionary journey with Barnabas, to Cyprus and Galatia

**49** At the Council of Jerusalem, Paul argues successfully that Gentile Christians need not follow Jewish law; returns to Antioch; confronts Peter over question of Jewish law

**49–52** Second missionary journey with Silas, through Asia Minor and Greece; settles in Corinth; writes letters to Thessalonians

**52** Visits Jerusalem and Antioch briefly; begins third missionary journey

**52–55** Stays in Ephesus; writes the letters to Galatians and Corinthians

**55–57** Travels through Greece and possibly Illyricum (modern Yugoslavia); writes letter to Romans

### ***Arrest & Death***

**57–59** Returns to Jerusalem and arrested; imprisoned at Caesarea

**59–60** Appears before Festus and appeals to Caesar; voyage to Rome

**60–62** Under house arrest at Rome; writes letters to Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon

**62–64** Released; journeys to Spain?; writes letters to Timothy and Titus

**64** Returns to Rome; martyred during perse

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Dates to Debate

### Why it's difficult to date Paul's life

Janet Meyer Everts is associate professor of religion, Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

Consult five Bible dictionaries, and you'll discover five different timelines for Paul. The differences in dates are relatively minor—except for the dating of Paul's visits to Jerusalem. Why?

Luke, in his Acts of the Apostles, records five visits of Paul to Jerusalem:

- (1). Acts 9:26, 'just after his conversion.
- (2). Acts 11:29–30, to provide famine relief.
- (3). Acts 15:2–4, to attend a conference.
- (4). Acts 18:22 (implied), after his second missionary journey.
- (5). Acts 21:17, final visit and arrest.

But Paul's letters mention only three Jerusalem visits:

- (1). Galatians 1:18, just after his conversion.
- (2). Galatians 2:1, to attend a conference.
- (3). Romans 15:25/1 Corinthians 16:3, final visit and arrest.

The dating of the middle of Paul's life hinges on which Acts visit is mentioned in Galatians 2:1–10.

The accompanying timeline assumes Paul is referring to the Acts 15 Council of Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1–10.

Other scholars think Galatians 2:1–10 refers to the famine relief visit of Acts 11:29–30, during which, they say, an informal Jerusalem conference took place. Thus they place Peter and Paul's Antioch confrontation (and Paul's letter to the Galatians, which describes the argument), before the formal Council of Jerusalem in A.D. 49.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Bald, Blind & Single?

Answers to some of the most puzzling questions about Paul

### 1. What Did Paul Look Like?

He was a bald-headed, bowlegged short man with a big nose, and an unbroken eyebrow that lay across his forehead like a dead caterpillar.

That's a paraphrase.

It's from the only physical description of Paul, in an early Christian document, the *Acts of Paul*. (Its author, a second-century church leader, was fired over the book because he attributed to Paul some unorthodox teachings such as sexual abstinence in marriage.)

A more literal translation of the description of Paul in Greek reads, "A man of middling size, and his hair was scanty, and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were far apart; he had large eyes, and his eyebrows met, and his nose was somewhat long."

This may be little more than imaginative writing from a century after Paul died, but it does not clash with the way Paul's critics described him: "His letters are weighty and forceful, but in person he is unimpressive" (2 Cor. 10:10).

### 2. Was He Married?

Probably not. But because Paul said almost nothing about this, there's plenty of room to debate the matter.

When counseling singles and widows at Corinth, he wrote, "It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am" (1 Cor. 7:8).

But when listing the rights of an apostle and arguing on behalf of himself and Barnabas, he said, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" (1 Cor. 9:5).

In interpreting this statement, some scholars say Paul's question, taken with his statement that he was unmarried, suggests he was a widower who had at least occasionally traveled with his wife. Others see Paul using this question to emphasize that he and Barnabas, as single men, were not burdening the church with the added, though legitimate, expenses of caring for their wives.

### 3. What Was His "Thorn in the Flesh"

We can only guess, but Paul gives two clues. He believed the purpose of the thorn was (1) "to keep me from becoming conceited" and (2) "to torment me" (2 Cor. 12:7). Whatever the thorn was, it humbled him persistently.

Scholars have diagnosed a full chart of physical diseases, psychological problems, and spiritual struggles—hysteria, migraines, epilepsy, and obnoxious Christians, to name a few.

A view from the Middle Ages said Paul couldn't get sex off his mind. But that doesn't fit with his words in 1 Corinthians: "I wish that all men were as I am.... But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (7:7, 9).

Some scholars today suggest Paul's thorn was his audience, the troublesome Corinthian church itself. In a word study of Paul's statement, scholars point out that every time the New Testament uses *angel/messenger*, *torment*, and *take it away*, the words refer to people. *Thorn* doesn't show up anywhere else in the New Testament, but a version of it appears in the Greek translation of Numbers 33:55 and describes what the Canaanites are to the Jews: "thorns in your sides."

Most scholars today take literally Paul's reference to the "flesh." They see the thorn as a physical problem.

Some of them point out that Paul used the same Greek word when writing about the unspecified illness that kept him in Galatia. They speculate that in both cases Paul was talking about an eye disease—bad enough, perhaps, to make him today legally blind. For after mentioning the illness, Paul added, "If you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me" (Gal. 4:15). And at the end of the letter, Paul took the work from his scribe and added a personal postscript: "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand" (Gal. 6:11).

Malaria is another possibility, suggested in the 1800s by archaeologist William Ramsay. What happened, Ramsay guessed, is that Paul caught malaria while traveling through the coastal plains of Pamphylia (western Turkey) during his first missionary journey. This coast's marshes bred malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The tendency for malaria to recur with alternating bouts of sweating and shivering seems to fit well with Paul's choice of the word *torment*, which refers to something that continually or often battered him.

Given the growing list of theories about Paul's thorn in the flesh, the one thing we can be sure about is that we can't be sure about any of them.

#### **4. What Happened to Him During the Unreported Gaps in His Life?**

Twice Paul dropped out of New Testament history. He went to the Arabian desert for about three years, almost immediately after his conversion. Then following a two-week visit to Jerusalem, he was escorted out of town by some Christians who apparently feared for his life. They took him to the port city of Caesarea, put him on a ship, and "sent him off to Tarsus" (Acts 9:30), his boyhood home in western Turkey. There Paul stayed for the next half-dozen years or so, until Barnabas in the early 40s invited him to help lead the church in Antioch, Syria.

What Paul did during these missing years is uncertain. Raised to support himself as a tentmaker, he probably made a few tents. His years in the Arabian desert kingdom of the Nabateans, south of Damascus in what is today Jordan, were perhaps given to private reflection and ministry to Gentiles. And in Tarsus he probably remained true to his tendency to speak his mind. Perhaps his success there is why Barnabas called on him.

Paul's account of these mysterious years is succinct but suggests he told others what he knew about Jesus, for the report circulated that "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy" (Gal. 1:23).

#### **5. How and When Did He Die?**

The New Testament doesn't tell us. Acts ends with the cliffhanger: Paul under house arrest in Rome while

awaiting trial. What happened next, the writer didn't say. Perhaps he figured his readers knew.

Christians, in fact, did know. Early Christian writers agree that Paul was martyred in Rome. The first person we know of who said this was a Roman bishop, Clement, writing to the Corinthians in 96, roughly 30 years after Paul's execution. Gaius, a second-century church leader in Rome, said he could point out the grave monuments of Paul and Peter on Vatican Hill (later leveled to build St. Peter's Basilica).

Paul was probably beheaded with a sword. That was the quick method of execution granted to Roman citizens found guilty of a capital offense. Non-citizens often faced the lingering death of crucifixion.

The most vexing question about Paul's death is when it took place. Many scholars argue it happened in about 62, at the end of Paul's two-year house arrest in Rome. Luke's abrupt ending in Acts could imply this.

Other scholars say the Romans released Paul, who briefly visited some churches he had planted and then turned west to evangelize Spain, a long-standing dream of his. Paul's letter to Philemon, written when he was under house arrest, shows he expected acquittal: "Prepare a guest room for me because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers" (Philem. 22). And in Clement's letter to the Corinthians, he said that Paul "went to the limit of the West." This points to Spain. If this is what happened, Paul was probably arrested a second time and executed at Rome in about 66.

More certain than the time of Paul's death is the manner in which he faced it. In his last recorded words, he told Timothy, "I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:6-7).

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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## Subversive Conservative

**How could Paul communicate his radical message to those threatened by it?**

Craig Keener is professor of New Testament at Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina. He is author of *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Hendrickson, 1992), and *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (InterVarsity, 1993).

Paul had a seemingly insurmountable task: to make intelligible to a conservative, establishment Roman Empire the good news of a Palestinian Jewish end-time figure who had inaugurated a secret, alternative kingdom.

So Paul had to be both a conservative and radical. He was conservative for strategic reasons; to reach his culture, he learned how to communicate Christ's message in the most intelligible forms (without compromising its content).

At the same time, Paul was radical: he inherited from Jesus a radical gospel and took the implications of that gospel to its radical conclusions.

### Judaism at Its Best

Much of the aristocracy of the first-century Empire, especially in Rome, was threatened by changes in the status of women, former slaves, and foreigners. Leaders were disturbed that "Eastern cults," like Judaism and the cult of Isis, were making converts among Roman aristocrats, especially among women. So they felt it was essential to preserve traditional religion and other elements of society if social order was to be preserved.

What was an early Christian missionary to do in such a setting? Since Christianity was born out of Judaism, one approach was to appeal to Gentiles who already appreciated Judaism. Sometimes Paul, therefore, explained that Jesus was the hope of Jewish history and prophecy; faith in Jesus constituted the right form of Judaism (Acts 13:16–49, Rom. 4, 9–11).

### Paganism at Its Best

But many Romans and Greeks confused Judaism with the cults of Dionysus and Isis, which they accused of being immoral. Other Greeks and Romans detested circumcision as a form of mutilation, ridiculed the Sabbath as an excuse for laziness, and mocked Jewish food laws as utter foolishness.

So another strategy of Jewish apologists was to appeal to the highest standards of pagan philosophers (who, they often claimed, must have plagiarized Moses to get their ideas!). Jewish thinkers appealed to the popular Stoic notion of a supreme and universal God; other gods could be disposed of as merely guardian angels.

Most of what Paul says in Acts 17:24–29 and Romans 1:18–23 corresponds perfectly not only with the Bible but with Stoic thought: "The God who made the world and everything in it ... does not live in temples built by human hands" would have been heartily affirmed by a follower of Stoicism. In this, Paul simply followed the lead of earlier Jewish thinkers, first establishing common ground by appealing to the best in Greek philosophy.

Over the years, Paul grew increasingly adept at interpreting his message in pagan categories yet clarifying and sticking to the essentials of the faith. The Greeks who read his first letter to Thessalonica probably misinterpreted his teaching on the end-time and death because it contrasted so starkly with their world-view. In his later letters, Paul shows more sensitivity to the way his Greek audience thought.

Paul even adapts the language of Plato to describe the soul's state after death: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven" (2 Cor. 4:18–5:1). But neither Paul nor Judaism found the soul's immortality incompatible with the doctrine of the future resurrection of the body (e.g., 1 Cor. 15; Phil. 3:20–21).

Also notice Paul's cultural sensitivity regarding his teaching about the Lord's Supper. Paul had not forgotten the significance of the Old Testament Passover for understanding Jesus' mission (1 Cor. 5:7), but he also understood how outsiders would see the Lord's Supper in Corinth. Business guilds, like many religious associations, would meet once a month (often in homes) to eat a meal whose meat had been offered to their patron deity. To outsiders, there was little difference between the meal of cult associations and the meal of house churches, except that the Christians' patron god claimed to be the only true God. Paul readily adapted the language of the outsiders: instead of the "table of Serapis," the Christians celebrated at the "table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:20).

### **Drawing the Line**

Then again, accommodating oneself to one's audience could go too far. How could Christian evangelists avoid compromising the message in order to gain a hearing?

For Paul, it was important to draw the line at key places. In regard to Christians and "the table of the Lord," for example, the tables of other gods were clearly off-limits. And like many other Jews, Paul regarded the gods behind pagan idols as demons (1 Cor. 10:20). On other moral and theological issues, Paul fought to keep the gospel message central.

Paul held the line on some social issues as well, for to him they represented the center of Jesus' radical message. In Judaism, for example, Gentile seekers were welcome, and most Jewish people expected these righteous Gentiles to share in the world to come, but they did not reckon them as part of God's people since they weren't circumcised. Many Jewish Christians simply adopted this attitude, but Paul's thinking on this matter was much more radical.

He started with the key implication of the message Christ had commissioned him to preach: faith in Jesus is the decisive issue in one's relationship with God. Therefore, faith rather than ethnic allegiance (or other issues) should determine membership in the people of God.

This was not an issue Paul thought peripheral. In Antioch, he publicly confronted Peter and other Christians who separated themselves at meal time from Gentile Christians (Gal. 2:11–14). Paul so strongly felt the gospel was at stake, he called Peter on the carpet in front of everyone. This public confrontation showed the matter was urgent: both Jesus and Jewish tradition normally insisted on private reproof first. If Jew and Gentile come to God on the same terms—through Christ—then racial or cultural separatism violates the very gospel of Christ.

Paul develops this same thought in his letter to Roman Christians, who appear to have become divided along Jewish-Gentile lines. Paul argues that Jew and Gentile are equally damned (Rom. 1–3), that both must approach God on the same terms (Rom. 4–8), and that history reveals God's desire to save both (Rom. 9–11).

Therefore Jewish Christians should not despise Gentile Christians whose background did not include the

law or designation as the "chosen people" (Rom. 4, 7, 9); Gentile Christians should not despise Jewish Christians for observing special food laws and holy days (Rom. 14), always remembering that the gospel sprang out of Judaism (Rom. 11, 15).

### **Social Leveler**

Paul also challenged class divisions of the ancient world.

Some well-to-do Christians in Corinth, who owned the homes in which the churches met, were embarrassed by Paul's weak rhetoric and his work as an artisan. Their social class preferred teachers of a "higher" caliber, and they despised common labor.

Well-to-do patrons often invited those of lower social status to eat in their homes, but they segregated them in a poorer dining area, providing them inferior food and wine. Paul confronted this problem, which was typical of broader Corinthian society, on a solid theological basis: Christ's body cannot have class divisions any more than racial ones (1 Cor. 10:17; 11:23, 29).

### **Subversive Conservative**

The message Paul inherited from Jesus radically challenged the social structures of the day. Paul had to consider how to commend this message to the broadest cross-section of Roman society.

Therefore, he adapted the philosophers' traditional household codes (which had also been adopted by Jews and other groups) to prove that Christians were not social subversives. Paul sought to prove that Christians were good citizens and upheld traditional Roman family values: namely, the submission of wives, children, and slaves.

While employing the codes, Paul nevertheless went beyond them. Wives were to submit to husbands (5:22) but only in the same way that all Christians submit to one another (5:21). Rather than exhorting husbands how to rule, as was customary, he exhorted them on how to love (5:25).

When viewed in the context of the times, most of Paul's words concerning women's roles advanced rather than inhibited their social position.

Likewise, household slaves were to serve their masters "wholeheartedly," and then to masters he said, "Treat your slaves in the same way" (6:9)—suggesting mutual submission between masters and slaves! Paul's few words to masters in Ephesians undercut Aristotle's whole basis for slavery (that Nature approves of it) and placed Paul among the most progressive ancient writers on the subject.

Paul's radical thinking and tactical conservatism stand side by side, testifying to the tightrope the early Christians were forced to walk—and the strategic brilliance of one of their most outstanding missionary thinkers.

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## Legacy of Liberty

Paul's teachings on grace and freedom have shaken the church in every age.

F.F. Bruce was professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester, England, until his death in 1990.

***"Time and again, when the gospel has been in danger of being fettered and disabled in the bonds of legalism or outworn tradition," wrote the late F.F. Bruce, "it has been the words of Paul that have broken the bonds and set the gospel free to exert its emancipating power once more in the life of mankind."***

***At the end of his Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, Bruce discusses Paul's influence on four key individuals, and therefore his continuing impact on the church age after age.***

### Augustine and the Middle Ages

***Augustine is the author of Confessions and City of God, two of the most read works in Christian history. He was the church's most influential theologian through the thirteenth century, and some say beyond.***

In the summer of A.D. 386, 32-year-old Augustine sat weeping in the garden of his friend Alypius at Milan. He had been for two years professor of rhetoric in that city and had every reason to be satisfied with his professional career thus far, yet he was conscious of a deep inner dissatisfaction. He was almost persuaded to begin a new life, but lacked the resolution to break with the old.

As he sat, he heard a child singing in a neighboring house, ***Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!*** ("Take up and read! Take up and read!") Taking up the scroll that lay at his friend's side—a copy of Paul's letters, as it happened—he let his eye fall on what we know as the closing words of Romans 13: "... not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

"No further would I read," he says, "nor had I any need; instantly, at the end of this sentence, a clear light flooded my heart, and all the darkness of doubt vanished away."

The colossal influence which Augustine, "the greatest Christian since New Testament times" (as one patristic scholar has called him) has exercised on the thought of succeeding ages can be traced directly to the light which flooded into his mind as he read the words of Paul.

### Martin Luther and the Reformation

***Luther began the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, which reasserted the primacy of faith and Scripture.***

In 1513 Martin Luther, Augustinian monk and professor of sacred theology in the University of Wittenberg in Saxony, endeavored to prepare a course of lectures on the Psalms while his mind was preoccupied with the agonizing endeavor to "find a gracious God." He was struck by the prayer of Psalm 31:1, "In thy righteousness deliver me." But how could God's ***righteousness*** deliver him? The righteousness of God was surely calculated rather to condemn the sinner than to save him.

As he thought about the meaning of the words, his attention was more and more directed to Paul's statement in Romans 1:17 that in the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'He who through faith is righteous shall live.'" The result of his study is best told in his own words:

"I had greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, 'the righteousness of God,' because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous and acts righteously in punishing the unrighteous.... Night and day I pondered until ... I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby, through grace and sheer mercy, he justifies us by faith.

"Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before 'the righteousness of God' had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gateway into heaven."

The consequences of Luther's grasp of the liberating gospel according to Paul are writ large in history.

#### **John Wesley and the Evangelical Revival**

*Wesley was the founder of Methodism and an early leader of church renewal in the eighteenth century, a movement that spanned the Atlantic.*

In John Wesley's well-known account of the event that is usually called his conversion—but which he himself later described (in Pauline language) as the occasion when he exchanged "the faith of a **servant**" for "the faith of a **son**"—he tells how, in the evening of Wednesday, May 24, 1738, he "went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street [London], where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans."

"About a quarter before nine," he goes on, "while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away **my** sins, even **mine**, and saved **me** from the law of sin and death."

If there is one event more than another that marked the birth of the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century, it was that. But similar awakenings were being experienced by others around the same time, and it is remarkable in how many of them Paul had a determinant part to play.

A week before John's awakening, his brother Charles came for the first time upon Luther's commentary on Galatians, and "found him nobly full of faith." Later in the same day, he records, "I spent some hours this evening in private with Martin Luther, who was greatly blessed to me, especially his conclusion of the second chapter. I labored, waited, and prayed to feel 'who loved **me** and gave himself for **me**.'" Four days later, his prayer was answered.

#### **Karl Barth and the Revival of Orthodoxy**

*By rediscovering the Bible and the theology of Calvin and Luther, Barth did more than anyone else to topple the moralistic Christianity that dominated the late nineteenth century.*

One of the most epoch-making theological publications of the twentieth century was Karl Barth's exposition of the Epistle to the Romans, first issued in August 1918 when he was pastor of Safenwil in Canton Aargau, Switzerland.

"The reader," he said in his preface, "will detect for himself that it has been written with a joyful sense of discovery. The mighty voice of Paul was new to me, and if to me, no doubt to many others also. And yet, now that my work is finished, I perceive that much remains which I have not yet heard."

But what he had heard he wrote down, and others heard it too. He compared himself to a man who, clutching in the dark at a rope for guidance, finds that he has pulled on a bell rope, making a sound fit to wake the dead. The Catholic theologian Karl Adam said that the first edition of

Barth's Romerbrief fell "like a bombshell on the theologians' playground." The repercussions of that explosion are with us still.

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## The Natural Supernatural

To Paul and the early church, religious experiences were commonplace.

An interview with Gordon Fee

***Would Paul be a leader in the current signs-and-wonders movement? In some ways, yes, says Gordon Fee, professor of New Testament at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. In his recent book, God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul (Hendrickson, 1994), he argues that the Holy Spirit is the key to Paul's life and thought. Christian History talked with Fee about the role spiritual experience played in the church of Paul's day.***

**Christian History: Many Christians don't naturally think of Paul as someone who had a regular and active "Spirit-life." Why is that?**

Gordon Fee: By and large, Protestants think theologically, and then almost completely in terms of soteriology—what does it mean to be saved? We've read Paul through the lens of his letters to Galatia and Rome, where the issue was justification by faith. We've read these texts so often we tend to understand Paul only as a theologian.

But Paul was a person of prayer before he was a theologian. His desire was not to be a precise theologian but to know Christ personally. That was the passion of his life. Any reading of Paul that doesn't take that seriously, doesn't understand Paul.

If you had asked Paul to define what a Christian is, he would not have said, "A Christian is a person who believes X and Y doctrines about Christ," but "A Christian is a person who walks in the Spirit, who knows Christ." He wouldn't have denied the importance of doctrine, but it would not have been the first thing he would have mentioned.

**Christian History: What religious experiences were most important to Paul?**

For Paul, everything began on the Damascus Road. About that experience, he said, "I saw the Lord." He considered that a resurrection appearance of the same quality others had. That experience determined everything for Paul.

If we turn to Paul's letters, it's clear that the Spirit, whom he considered the Spirit of Christ, was an ongoing, dynamic reality in his life. In addition to receiving visions, he performed healings and spoke in tongues.

**Christian History: Was Paul's experience of the Spirit unusual?**

Not at all. In the first century, it was assumed Christians would experience these things. For example, when Paul scolded the Galatians, he began a sentence, "He who richly supplies you with the Spirit and performs miracles in your midst...." Paul spoke in the present tense—the Spirit was dynamically active, doing extraordinary things in Galatia, and the Galatians were well aware of it. He assumed the same common experience when he wrote the church at Corinth.

Now, Paul did have some unusual experiences of the Spirit, but he never made an issue of them. In 2 Corinthians 12, for instance, he mentions having been "caught up to the third heaven," and he seems to be validating his ministry by mentioning this experience.

But he was really playing the role of the fool in a Greek play. In the end, he didn't even know whether he was transported out of the body, and he couldn't report what exactly happened—some validation! The point is that he downplayed this incredible experience in a playful way. This type of experience was unusual, but it was private for Paul.

But this wasn't the case with the usual supernatural experiences of early Christians—prophecy, miracles, and tongues.

**Christian History: What did Paul mean by "prophecy"?**

This experience is mentioned throughout early Christian literature; it was a common denominator in all churches. Prophecy was understood by Paul as the spontaneous Spirit utterance of the faithful. There was a synergy between the Spirit and the speaker; the Spirit prompted the speaker to say things. Prophecy wasn't a trance; it wasn't a matter of an individual's wanting to speak his

or her mind. Something supernatural was going on that pushed a person to speak.

**Christian History: What type of miracles did the early church experience? How common were they?**

Miracles included everything from answers to prayer to dreams and visions. But it certainly included healings. In many instances, we don't know exactly what happened, but we do know there was a kind of commonness about them.

These people were not gullible. They understood the difference between ordinary experiences, which could be explained in human terms, and miracles, which required a supernatural agent. They lived in an age that respected things of the Spirit—versus our materialistic age that trusts only empirical proof. When things happened by the power of the Holy Spirit, early Christians didn't try to explain them away.

It's equally clear that these sorts of things didn't happen every time they prayed. Then again, they happened enough that Paul could write about them as if every Christian had experienced signs and wonders.

**Christian History: In Paul's day was speaking in tongues similar to that of today?**

Probably. Tongues was like prophecy: the Spirit prayed through the person's spirit. The speech, however, usually was not in an intelligible human tongue—not a foreign language but a supernatural one.

Again, it was a common experience of the early church. For example, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I speak in tongues more than all of you." In Romans he talked about groanings that were inarticulate—I think he meant speaking in tongues. The way he wrote these churches, he assumed they knew what he was talking about, that it was a common experience of the church.

**Christian History: Were such religious experiences known in other ancient religions?**

Yes. We have to remember that the ancient world believed in spiritual realities. At the shrines at Delphi, for example, pagans experienced miracles and prophecy and extraordinary bodily manifestations. Some of it may have been due to psychedelic drugs, and we can't rule out demonic activity. But to first-century people, the supernatural was not all that unusual.

Today, Emerging World peoples, who still believe in the spiritual world, have been attracted to Pentecostalism because Pentecostalism is comfortable with this spiritual world. Emerging World Christians know that what they experience in the Spirit is similar to their earlier experiences of the demonic—though their Christian experience is redemptive, not destructive. That's the type of environment in which Paul lived and ministered.

**Christian History: Why are some modern Christians reluctant to embrace this aspect of Paul's life and teaching?**

As products of the Reformation, we are also products of the Enlightenment. Many of my fellow evangelicals are rationalistic in their approach to Christian faith—we love God with our minds, and we often neglect loving God with our hearts; we don't have a full experience of God's Spirit. We're afraid to experience the Spirit.

That's partly because of what we've read about the Corinthian church! When they experienced God, there were excesses. Some people lost control, and it's important for post-Enlightenment Christians to be in control. So we shy away from spiritual experiences.

**Christian History: Some would say there's a danger to Christianity that emphasizes emotion at the expense of the mind.**

That's a false dichotomy to Paul. For Paul the rational and the emotional go hand in hand: "I will pray with my mind, and I will pray with my spirit. I will sing with my mind; I will sing with my spirit."

He did both. When it was a matter of public edification, he insisted that people under the Spirit's influence retain some control, remembering to do everything "decently and in order." On the other hand, he allowed more freedom of expression when it came to private prayer, especially tongues.

Many of us in the Western church, however, have neglected the emotional part of faith and the role the Spirit plays in that. In Paul's world, it wasn't a matter of either spirit or mind, but both.

**Christian History: What would Paul make of devout congregations today in which few people, if any, experience prophecies, tongues, or miracles?**

He would probably sit in amazement. He would wonder where and how this one-sided Christianity had developed: "Who bewitched you? When did you leave the Spirit?" It's not that he wouldn't recognize the truth of the preaching. He would just wonder what had happened.

**Christian History: What would Paul and the early church, then, think of the "holy laughter" in some churches today?**

That sort of thing was not common in the first century, and I'm cautious about speaking of phenomena I've not experienced or witnessed. But my guess is that the early church would see it as a work of the Spirit—whether it's a human response to the Spirit's triggering, or the Spirit himself who produces the laughter. Laughter is certainly something the Spirit could produce!

As far as other signs and wonders, like animal sounds, I have my doubts.

**Christian History: What has most impressed you in your studies of Paul and the Spirit?**

That Paul was a passionate lover of Christ, and that passion meant that he prayed before he did theology; he experienced the reality before he taught it. The longer I'm in the church, the more I'm convinced that a Christianity that doesn't have a passion for praise and worship just isn't Pauline. Paul couldn't imagine theology that didn't begin and end with the Spirit.

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# CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 47: The Apostle Paul & His Times

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## The Apostle Paul and His Times: Recommended Resources

Editor's Choice

Mark Galli

Nearly two thousand years after Paul's death, books about the apostle continue to proliferate at an astonishing rate. Where does one begin exploring the life of the most important person (aside from Jesus) in the history of the church?

### Reference Points

Aside from the New Testament itself, the place to begin is F.F. Bruce's now classic *Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Eerdmans, 1977)—the most readable and engaging biography of Paul. A classic from a previous era that still gives insights is William Ramsay's *St. Paul, the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (18th ed., 1935).

Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid have edited the definitive reference on Paul's writings in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (InterVarsity, 1993). Though mostly about Paul's thought, it contains enough history to justify a recommendation!

In addition, any one of the many Bible dictionaries on the market are a gold mine of information on Paul and his times.

### Exploring the Era

We live in the best of times in terms of books about Paul's times. Specialized studies on nearly every aspect of first-century life are now available. A few I like are these:

Everett Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, second edition (Eerdmans, 1993) is perhaps the most accessible and thorough overview of the era, covering history, religion, and culture.

Joachim Jeremias's detailed *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (Fortress, 1969) rewards the patient reader with numerous insights into the city and culture in which Paul was raised.

Westminster Press has recently (1986) published an 8-volume Library of Early Christianity (Wayne Meeks, general editor) that explores various aspects of first-century Christianity. For example, Robert M. Grant examines the religious and philosophical world in *Gods and the One God*, and Joseph E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch look at everyday life in *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*.

F.F. Bruce's *New Testament History* (Anchor, 1972) is a painless way to get introduced to the political history of the times.

Paul spent most of his time in cities, and Wayne Meeks's already classic, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (Yale 1983), explores that setting.

Two atlases that help one get some geographical bearings are Yohanan Aharoni's and Michael Avi-Yonah's, ***The Macmillan Bible Atlas*** (Macmillan, 1977) and Tim Cornell's and John Matthews's, ***Atlas of the Roman World*** (Facts on File, 1982).

### **In the Original**

Paul is an unusual historical figure because all his writings and the earliest accounts of his life are readily available in modern English! Luke's Acts of the Apostles and Paul's New Testament letters are by far and away the principle sources of the thousands of books on Paul's life and thought. Reading especially Romans, Galatians, and 1 & 2 Corinthians with a commentary in hand will reward the diligent reader. Check with your pastor, local bookstore, or librarian to sort through the dizzying array of commentaries available.

Finally, C.K. Barrett's ***The New Testament Background: Selected Documents***, revised and expanded edition (Harper & Row, 1987) is my favorite resource to scan writings that give a feel for the first-century Mediterranean world.

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## The Apostle Paul and His Times: History in the Making - Billy Graham Had a Dream

Enthusiasm for racial reconciliation has never been so high among American evangelicals. Why?

Edward Gilbreath is assistant editor of Christianity Today magazine.

"Eleven o'clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America," declared civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., in a well-known line he used a number of times. What is not so well known is that the remark was first made by someone else in a 1950s *Reader's Digest* article on racism. The article was written by King's friend, evangelist Billy Graham.

Racism has strained American society since our nation's birth. And, sadly, the American church carries its share of blame. But today, a surge of racial reconciliation among blacks, whites, and other ethnic groups is sweeping the American church like never before.

Last year black and white Pentecostals came together in a dramatic demonstration of repentance for the sins of racism during what is now called the "Memphis Miracle." In that historic meeting, black and white leaders shed tears of confession, washed each other's feet, and most significantly, agreed to dissolve their separate organizations to form a new one, free of color barriers.

Since 1990, the Promise Keepers men's movement has brought together thousands of Christian men with a call for racial unity as one of its prime tenets.

And recently, African-American leaders such as John Perkins, Anthony Evans, and Raleigh Washington have been stirring evangelical audiences, white and black, to a new awareness of the race issue in the church.

"There is no biblical basis for a black, white, Hispanic, or Asian church," declared Perkins recently to a predominantly white crowd. "We need some living examples to stand up and be willing to accept the persecution that goes with preaching [the message of reconciliation]."

This relatively new concern has not come out of nowhere. It started in the 1950s most publicly in the ministry of America's foremost evangelist, Billy Graham.

### Mixed Heritage: Whitefield and Finney

To better appreciate the uniqueness of Graham's concern for racial reconciliation, we need to set him in historical context. He comes from a long line of nationally known American evangelists who as public figures had to confront the problem of racism. As might be expected, their record of dealing with it is mixed.

Consider George Whitefield, the father of America's Great Awakening. In the 1740s, Whitefield won countless souls to Christ—both black and white. Early in his ministry, he questioned the morality of slaveholding. Yet later he approved buying slaves to help work in the fields of his Georgia orphanage. Whitefield justified the move in part because enslaving blacks, he reasoned, had exposed them to Christianity and so made possible their conversion.

Whitefield's logic was followed by subsequent church leaders, most of whom did not see a connection between believing in Christ and in practicing racial justice. Many Christians were opposed to the oppression of blacks, but they believed the church's main function was to win souls, and secondarily, to perform acts of mercy—but certainly not to change social structures like slavery.

An exception to the rule was renowned nineteenth-century revivalist Charles Grandison Finney. Finney was both an influential evangelist and an outspoken abolitionist. In 1851 he was elected president of Ohio's Oberlin College, a leading stronghold of the anti-slavery movement. Eleven years later, through Finney's efforts, Oberlin student Mary Jane Patterson became the first African-American woman to receive a bachelor's degree in the United States—an astounding milestone of the era because of Patterson's race **and** gender.

Finney's stands were due in large part to his postmillennialist views. He believed the Kingdom of God was to be ushered in by a reformation of society at all levels.

### **Public Caution: Moody and Sunday**

Thanks to Christians like Finney, the nineteenth century saw increased concern over social issues. But not every Christian was convinced about the need to abolish slavery. The controversy divided America's largest denominations—Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Some historians believe that when these churches split, civil war could hardly be avoided. So America's bloodiest war pitted brother against brother—not only among human families, but also within the family of God.

After the war, southern Christians still balked at integration, as evangelist Dwight L. Moody was to discover. Well-known for his ministry to urban America, Moody's efforts in the South forced him to confront head-on the race issue.

In 1876, during a series of revival meetings in Augusta, Georgia, the popular evangelist attracted both black and white audiences. The meetings were originally unsegregated, but soon whites began complaining that too many blacks were filling the best seats. So those sponsoring the rally divided the seating according to race.

Moody opposed this decision, but soon he bowed to pressure from his white audiences. From then on, whenever Moody preached in the South, he either addressed audiences that were segregated or held separate services for blacks and whites. Moody was troubled by racial injustice, but his reputation as a leading Christian figure among whites made it difficult for him to take a public stand.

By the early 1900s, evangelist Billy Sunday had taken his place as America's preeminent preacher. Sunday, who began as a Bible teacher with the Chicago YMCA, had been sensitive to the plight of minorities and the poor in urban America since the start of his ministry. In the fall of 1917, during his Atlanta crusade, Sunday held special meetings for African Americans and visited several black churches.

When it came to holding integrated meetings, however, Sunday drew the line. He knew that any national Christian leader who wanted to maintain his public image would not want to upset the social mores of the day.

### **The Troubled Young Graham**

Four decades later, evangelist Billy Graham found himself in a similar bind. During his early years of ministry, Graham freely accepted the custom of segregated seating at his southern crusades. As his ministry grew, Graham was faced with either preaching to segregated audiences or demanding that the crusade crowds be given equal seating privileges.

By 1952, the young preacher, now a national figure, felt troubled by the racial prejudice in the church. "There is no scriptural basis for segregation," Graham told a crusade audience in Jackson, Mississippi. "It may be there are places where such is desirable to both races, but certainly not in the church." Graham's words were greeted with enthusiasm by blacks and a few whites but provoked criticism from many.

Though the statement was ahead of its time, Graham was still tentative on the issue. When pressed by his critics, he softened his views. "We follow the existing social customs in whatever part of the country in which we minister," he said. "I came to Jackson to preach only the Bible and not to enter into local issues."

But he soon discovered that solution was not going to work. The race issue was too volatile—and Graham's ministry too popular—to downplay the reality of segregation. Graham had to decide where he was going to stand publicly.

### **Decisive Break**

In 1953—three years before Martin Luther King hit the national scene and more than a decade before the 1964 Civil Rights Act—Graham stunned the sponsoring committee of his Chattanooga, Tennessee, crusade. At a meeting of the committee, Graham railed against the customary practice of segregated seating. And then before one of the crusade meetings, the committee watched in astonishment as Graham personally took down the ropes separating the black and white sections at the crusade arena.

From then on the evangelist began to take slow but decisive steps towards dismantling the barriers of racism in the American church.

In 1957, Graham integrated his ministry internally by adding his first black team member, Howard O. Jones, a young pastor from Cleveland. Soon Graham was working regularly with African-American churches within the communities where his crusades were held. That same year, at a black church in Brooklyn, Graham said publicly for the first time that antisegregation legislation might be necessary to bring an end to discrimination.

Graham's change in public demeanor on the race issue stirred the wrath of many of his supporters. Indignant whites hurled at him derogatory names such as "integrationist" and "nigger lover."

Some southern cities overrode his demands, and they in turn demanded segregated seating; in a few instances, Graham felt forced into accepting the status quo. In spite of a few such temporary retreats, the evangelist held a steady course; he consistently spoke out against racial injustice and gradually added more African Americans to his organization.

In a recent article in *Christianity Today*, Graham said, "Of all people, Christians should be the most active in reaching out to those of other races." Graham has been the most public white evangelical to condemn racism and to reach out to African Americans. In 1986, the late Samuel Hines, a nationally known black pastor from Washington, D.C., said about Graham, "His preaching of reconciliation and his call to repentance have had a direct impact on the alienation and polarization which have afflicted our land."

Graham's example is certainly one reason that in the 1990s, groups like the Pentecostals and Promise Keepers have put racial reconciliation high on their agendas.