

Bible Study # 58  
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Life and Letters of Paul Series—Background on the Apostle Paul

We're going to get into something a little different in Bible study. Last time we completed our survey of the Major Prophets. I've given some consideration as to what would be a good place to go. At this point, we're going to take up a new series of Bible study, one entitled "The Life and Letters of the Apostle Paul." **We are going to focus in on both the life of the Apostle Paul as well as going through the letters that he wrote.**

I will comment a little later on the way in which we will proceed through Paul's letters or his Epistles. "Epistles" is just simply an older word that means "letters." You won't have to be like the lady in the joke I heard one time: the lady thought the epistles were the wives of the apostles. I won't belabor you with the entire joke, but that basically was the punch line of it.

This evening, to kind of set the stage, **we are going to focus in on introductory material. We will focus on the background of the life of the Apostle Paul and the letters he wrote.** It is important to understand the background of the Apostle Paul and these letters in order to understand the message that's contained in each of them. We are going to proceed through these letters in the order in which Paul wrote them. We will go through them in the context of the book of Acts in order to try to get them in their proper perspective and their relationship with one another.

Before we get into the letters Paul wrote, let's talk a little bit about the Apostle Paul. In order to understand and appreciate what he wrote, we have to understand some things about him. There are many things that we're told. Primarily, our biographical information on the Apostle Paul comes from the book of Acts, as well as certain information that he mentioned in some of his Epistles. Particularly in the book of Galatians, he mentioned a little bit about his background.

One of the things Paul mentions is that he came from Tarsus. Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. If you have maps in your Bible, you might notice that this is in the area of what is modern-day Turkey. It is what was anciently called the Asia Minor peninsula. It has as its southern coast, the Mediterranean Sea and its northern coast, the Black Sea. Cilicia was

a province that was in the southeastern section of modern-day Turkey or ancient Asia Minor.

The city of Tarsus was the capital of this province. It was a thriving and prosperous city. It was a commercial center. It was, virtually, at the crossroads of three continents—Africa, Asia and Europe. They all converged there in that Middle Eastern area. That's one of the reasons the Middle East has always played such an important role. Civilization—whether it was African civilization centered in Egypt to the south, Greece to the west or the area of Mesopotamia to the east—converged there in the Middle East. Egypt was the gateway to Africa, just as the area of Mesopotamia was the gateway to Asia, and Greece served as the gateway to Europe. They all converged there in the Middle East.

You had a convergence of civilizations, commercial trade and travel. There were all sorts of things going on. There were great caravan and sea routes that came through—caravan routes to the East and sea routes coming up from Egypt. There was commerce that traveled up the Nile coming from the Port of Alexandria there in Egypt and commercial travel across the Black Sea. A lot of things converged in this area. It was a commercial area.

Tarsus was located, as far as agriculture is concerned, in a fertile plain. It had a dense population and was very wealthy. It was also the focal point of Greek culture and one of the greatest centers of education in the ancient world. The university in Tarsus ranked third in the ancient world, right after the universities of Athens and Alexandria. Those were the most noted centers of learning in the ancient world—let's say, of the first century, anyway.

The Apostle Paul grew up in a thriving, teeming, commercial, metropolitan area. It was an area noted for Greek culture. There were many Greeks in the area; Greek was the predominant population. The Greek language was very common. It was the language of commerce all through that area. It was an area where a wide variety of people from further east in Asia, Africa and Europe would converge in the great market squares where the various things were being sold and traded.

As Paul grew up as a young boy, this was the background that he had. In fact, he was very much involved in that because we learned that his father was a prosperous tentmaker. As a prosperous tentmaker, one of the main sources of his trade would be dealing with many of these caravans and traders, providing them with

tents. We learned he was a tentmaker; we know he was prosperous. I will show you a couple things later that will show how we know he was prosperous.

The family was Jewish. They were not the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora. "Diaspora" is the term that is used to refer to the Jews who were dispersed away from the land of Judea. Those who were dispersed throughout the rest of the world tended to center in certain areas. Many of the Jews, in what was called the "Diaspora," tended to absorb a lot of Greek culture and Greek ideas. They were not that different from many of the Jews in modern-day America and Europe in that they tended to absorb the culture and the attitudes of the people around them and only cling in a very superficial way to Jewish religion.

The Apostle Paul's family was not that way. His father was a Pharisee, a member of the strictest sect of the Jews. Even though he lived in the Diaspora and had commercial dealings with the Gentile populace and the people who came and went, yet he was a very strict practicing Jew. As a tentmaker, the Gentile populace would have been his clientele. The main ones he would have sold his wares to would have been the caravans that traveled through, the traders.

Paul grew up in this environment. He grew up as a young boy being there around his father's shop, learning his father's craft. He grew up meeting and seeing these people of various nationalities and ethnic backgrounds come in there and haggle over the price of tents and put in orders for things that they wanted to buy.

There was a big university there in Tarsus. The teacher of the Roman Emperor Augustus, the great stoic philosopher Athenodoras, was a native of Tarsus.

Tarsus had the status of a Roman free city. Many of its citizens possessed Roman citizenship. There was a sizable Jewish community there. Paul's father was a Pharisee and he was also a Roman citizen. We find that Paul inherited his Roman citizenship. Remember, in one encounter in the book of Acts, Paul brought up that he was a Roman citizen.

Acts 22:28, one of the Roman officers there was impressed and said, "... 'With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.' And Paul said, 'But I was born a citizen.'"

The only way you were born a Roman citizen was if your father was one. We take citizenship for granted. If you are born in the United States, you are an American citizen. You can also acquire citizenship. Anciently, Roman

citizenship was confined to natives of Rome. That's why it is called Roman.

The little city-state of Rome gradually conquered some of the other communities in the central Italian peninsula, gradually subdued the whole of the Italian peninsula and eventually they extended out. At first, they didn't allow any of these people to be Roman citizens. The only ones who possessed the rights and prerogatives of Roman citizens were people whose ancestry was in itself Roman. Gradually, they extended that out and Roman citizenship included everyone in the Italian peninsula. As the Roman Empire spread, they limited Roman citizenship to people whose origin was in the Italian peninsula (those who were born there) and to those who would go out to administer the empire in various areas.

A Roman citizen had a lot of protection. He had rights as a Roman citizen. He had the protection of Roman law. Much of our concept in terms of our American concept of Republican government and the written constitution go back to concepts of Roman law. Roman citizens had many rights.

As an area was conquered, not everybody became a Roman citizen. They were subject people of the Roman Empire, but they were not citizens. However, from time to time, individuals because of certain particular things on their part would be granted the status of Roman citizenship. When somebody was granted that status, then it was hereditary in their family from then on. They could pass it down.

Being a Roman citizen was a very coveted possession. It was not something that everyone could obtain. Generally, you had to do something of great merit for the Roman Empire. You had to help out in some way. You had to do something that they felt like they rewarded you. As time went on, it got to where (as a lot of things) it could be purchased with a price. If you were willing to pay enough or pay off the right officials, they would manage to find some way that you could be given citizenship. We find that human nature hasn't changed a whole lot and politicians haven't changed a whole lot. Some of these things went on then and have continued down.

Paul's father was a Roman citizen. How he became one, we are not told, but Paul was born as a Roman citizen. His father was prosperous. We can tell that by the fact that he was a Roman citizen. Being a Roman citizen was not common among the Jews. The other factor is that when Paul was a young man (a teenager), he was sent to Jerusalem to study at the school of Gamaliel.

Gamaliel was the foremost Jewish Rabbi of the day. In the Jewish community, to be able to be sent to study at the school of Gamaliel was the equivalent of going to Oxford and becoming a Rhodes scholar. It was like getting a law degree from Harvard University in the United States. To study at Jerusalem, the center of Jewish learning, and to study at the school of a great and famous rabbi, Gamaliel, the most renowned rabbi of his period, was a very, very prestigious thing in the Jewish community. This attests to the fact that Paul's father was a wealthy and influential man who was able to get his son into a school such as that.

What we find is that the Apostle Paul (or as he was at that time, the Jewish lad, Saul of Tarsus) grew up in a prosperous Jewish family that was very orthodox and strict in their practice of the Jewish religion. His father was engaged as a tent manufacturer. He grew up having commercial and business dealings with a variety of Gentile people from many nationalities that would converge in the crossroads there at Tarsus. This meant that he had a far broader outlook and knowledge of people than did most of the Jews who grew up in Judea who never had dealings with anyone other than other Jews and the occupying Roman troops. He grew up in a city that was dominated by Greek culture and education. He was very educated in Greek culture. We find him quoting Greek poets in Acts 17:28; on Mars Hill he was able to quote the Greek poets of the day. He was learned in the culture and in the philosophy of his day.

I might just point out something. Sometimes in school or college, our young people are exposed to the ideas, literature and philosophies of some of the so-called great philosophers, writers and thinkers of our age—some of whose stuff is nothing but a bunch of garbage. Many times the thought is: What is the value of knowing any of this? The Apostle Paul was exposed to many of the things of his day (much of which was a lot of garbage), but it enabled him to understand the thinking of the people with whom he dealt.

We live in a world that is dominated by people who think a certain way, who have a certain philosophical mind-set, a certain way of thinking and set of values. Paul understood where they were coming from. But he also understood where they were in error. He was conversant with the literature of the Greek and Roman world. He was able to quote from it when he needed.

He was also very well educated and well grounded in the Bible. The Epistles of Paul are absolutely loaded down with biblical quotations

from the Old Testament. We will see that as we go through it. He was very much acquainted with the education and philosophy of his day. God had him prepared. God had a job in mind for him a long time before. He grew up in an environment that, unknown to him, prepared him. He had a business background. He learned principles of how to administer and how to handle many things. He was trained at business.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong, in his autobiography, makes comment on the way that he feels that God prepared him for his job, in terms of the advertising profession and business. These are the things that prepared him in many ways.

God prepared the Apostle Paul for many of these things in a variety of ways. He had a much broader background than did most of the other apostles who were natives of Judea and simply had a much more limited background.

To set the stage, we might notice briefly in the book of Acts that Saul of Tarsus was a very zealous individual. He was a man of strong convictions. What he believed, he believed with his whole heart. He was not a "wishy-washy" sort of person. He was not the kind of person who had a kind of "ho-hum," lackadaisical approach. You would never refer to Paul as a "Laodicean" sort of person—there was nothing lukewarm about him. He was hot or cold. He was on fire; even when he was wrong, he was wrong in a grand way. We pick up the story.

Acts 9:1-2, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem."

He was stirred up. He viewed Christianity as a heresy that was a threat to the religion of God. He was determined to do whatever it took to wipe it out and he was prepared to do it. He was a "gung-ho" sort of fellow. He was not one who was simply content to sit back and say, 'I sure think they are wrong.' If Paul thought something, he thought it very, very strongly.

God had plans for him.

Verse 3, on his way to Damascus, he was struck down. We have the story of his dramatic encounter. There was this blinding light and this roll of thunder; he heard a voice, but everybody else heard the sound. Paul understood the words, but none of the others did. What Paul saw and encountered when he was blinded by this blast of light was Jesus Christ in vision.

Verse 4-5, "Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'"

Verses 6-8, he was told to go on into Damascus.

Verse 9, "And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank."

Verses 10-12, Ananias, a disciple there, was instructed of God to go to Saul.

Verses 13-19, he went and talked with him, laid hands on him and Paul was healed. He was then baptized and received God's Holy Spirit. We find Saul's conversion.

One thing I would like to point out. God works through human instruments and God works in an organized, orderly way. Saul did not appoint himself to his job. God worked through the authority that He had set in His Church. When He struck Saul blind, He sent a man who served there in some capacity as an elder to come and anoint and lay hands on him, and he was healed. He sent the elder to counsel with him and then take him out and baptize him. God could have done all these things without the use of human intermediary, but He wanted it made evident that He was working through the constituted authority of His Church.

If you want a chronology of Paul's life, we would date his birth at approximately 1 A.D. This is a general date. It places him just slightly younger than Jesus Christ and a few of the other apostles. Stephen's stoning was in 33 A.D. (Acts 7). This is two years after Jesus was crucified and resurrected and the miracle of Pentecost. In the aftermath of Stephen's stoning in 33 A.D., the disciples began to spread out from Jerusalem.

We're first introduced to Paul at Stephen's stoning. He was holding the coats for some of the men who were throwing the stones. Two years later, in 35 A.D., is when we pick up the story of the Apostle Paul in Acts 9. This is the time of his conversion. In the aftermath of this, he then spent three years in Arabia. He was being taught directly by Jesus Christ in visions and revelations. He spent a time of preparation and then returned to Jerusalem in 38 A.D. He spent two weeks with James and Peter; then he left and went back to his hometown of Tarsus in 38 A.D. where he remained until 42 A.D.

Acts 9:17-18, we find that Paul was healed.

Acts 9:19-23, "And when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus. Immediately he preached the Christ in the

synagogues, that He is the Son of God. Then all who heard were amazed, and said, 'Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ. Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him."

Verses 25-27, "Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket. And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

Verse 30 describes that when the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.

We actually are skimming over several years here. You wouldn't realize that from Acts 9, but there are about three years that transpired in this account. To get the chronology of it, let's go to Galatians 1. We have to put the Bible together to get the whole story.

Galatians 1:11, "But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man." He said, 'It's not some human invention. It's not something I got from what other people told me.'

Verses 12-24, "For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God in me."

Galatians 2:1, "Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me."

We have here the basis of establishing the chronology of Paul's life. The event that he makes reference to in Galatians 2:1 is the ministerial conference that is recorded in Acts 15. We date that as 49 A.D.; Paul refers to going up to Jerusalem in 49 A.D. He was going up there for the conference 14 years after his conversion. That would place his conversion in 35 A.D.

In Galatians 1:16-17, we are told that when he was converted, he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood or go up to Jerusalem. Rather, he went up to Arabia and then returned to Damascus.

Verses 18-19, after his return to Damascus, he went to Jerusalem three years after he was converted. He was there two weeks, and the only apostles he talked to were Peter and James. He was instructed by them to go on back home.

Verse 21, he went back to Cilicia; Tarsus, his hometown, is the capital of Cilicia.

What we find when you put that account together with Acts 9 is that he was in Damascus and preached for a short time. He was there and had access to the synagogues. He was given letters of recommendation. He was a highly educated Jew, and there is some indication that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. The indication of that is a reference to his consenting to the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Why did he have a voice in the matter? Because this was normally something that was decided in an official capacity by the Sanhedrin, it's very possible that he was even a member of the Sanhedrin. He certainly was connected with it in some capacity. He was an individual of note and highly educated; his credentials were recognized throughout the world by the Jewish community.

Acts 9:3, when he was going to Damascus, He was converted before he ever got there.

Verses 8-9, he was sitting in Damascus, blind, fasting and praying.

Verses 17-19, an elder came in, counseled with him, anointed him and laid hands on him. His sight was restored. Then he was taken out and baptized.

Verse 20, immediately, he was so excited that he did what most of us do when we start coming into the Church—we start trying to convert everybody. He stirred up a real "hullabaloo." People said, 'This is the guy who had the letters to put all these people in jail' (Acts 9:1-2). 'What in the world has happened to him?'

He didn't stay there very long. He left immediately from Damascus.

Acts 9:23, "Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him." The "many days" is the equivalent of the three years he was in Arabia.

1 Kings 2:38-39, "...So Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. Now it happened at the end of three years, ...." The expressions "three years" and "many days" are used interchangeably. "Many days" can certainly refer to a period of three years.

In fact, it refers to exactly that in 1 Kings 2. It makes a reference to a period of "many days" in Acts 9:23, but when you put it together with Galatians 1, we find that Paul, within a matter of a few days after his conversion and baptism, left and went to Arabia.

Galatians 1:17-18, he was there three years and then he returned to Damascus.

Acts 9:23, when he returned to Damascus is what it talks about, "many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him." He disappeared and was gone from the scene; nobody heard of him for three years. Suddenly, when he came back, he appeared on the scene and began once again to speak in the synagogues. This time the attitude toward Christians had hardened to the point that he barely got out of there with his life.

Verse 26, he then went to Jerusalem.

Galatians 1:18, the first time he went to Jerusalem was three years after his conversion. He went up to Jerusalem and talked with Peter and James.

In Acts 9:26, after Paul got away from Damascus, he came to Jerusalem. He wanted to come there and be a part of the group, but everyone was a little bit skeptical. They wondered what he was up to. He had simply dropped out of circulation. The last they had known, he had left Jerusalem going down there to arrest Christians. They had, undoubtedly, gotten the story of his baptism and the fact that he disappeared and was gone for three years. Nobody heard of him or knew what happened to him. The next thing they know, he pops up in Jerusalem as though he is a part of the Church. They are not sure how to receive him.

How did Paul react? Did he suddenly get offended and say, 'If you people can't be more

“Christian” than that, I’m going to leave.’ No, he didn’t say that. Maybe they didn’t receive him as well as they could have, but they were suspicious. They didn’t know and understand what he was up to. There was something kind of odd about this whole thing. They were nervous and acted funny around him. Nobody wanted to have anything to do with him.

Verse 27, Barnabas kind of took him under his wing, talked to him and brought him to Peter.

Galatians 1:18-19 and Acts 9:28, he spent two weeks with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus—the two leading apostles. James presided over the Church in Jerusalem and Peter was the chief of the 12 apostles. He was talking and fellowshiping with them. Undoubtedly, there were a lot of deep conversations about the things that he had experienced. At the end of this time, they came to the conclusion that it was not yet time for whatever God had in mind for him. They told him that instead of his remaining in Jerusalem as a part of the ministry, what he needed to do was go back to his hometown. In effect, “don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

Have you ever volunteered for something and felt like you kind of got the “brush-off”? It’s important to understand that he did not simply appoint himself. We’re going to read a little later in the book of Acts of his ordination as an apostle. Previously, he had been ordained as an elder.

God works in an organized way. A period of time went by. We can skim over it in a few pages and not realize years went by. He went back to Tarsus. He was respectful and responsive to the government in God’s Church. At this point, they didn’t have a need for him. They didn’t see a place for him right there in Jerusalem as a part of the ministry at that time. He was in his hometown for four years, from 38 A.D. to 42 A.D. He lived a Christian life, was engaged in his own business and did the things that he was to do.

In the meantime, we have the story in Acts 10. Just a short time after Paul left God opened the door for the gospel to be preached to the Gentiles. Remember the vision that Peter had of the sheet coming down from heaven? God opened the door for a work to be done among the Gentile nations through Peter. Previous to this time, there was no grasp of organized preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. In fact, the concept was that unless they became circumcised and converted to Judaism first, they could not be baptized as a part of the Church.

Peter’s vision in Acts 10 is the story of Cornelius and his household. The revelation that uncircumcised Gentiles could be converted was a major revelation.

Acts 11 continues with the story of the Gentiles accepted into fellowship.

Verse 19, we find the scattering abroad that took place after the stoning of Stephen and that the word was preached.

Verses 20-21, word came back that there was a group of disciples in Antioch.

Acts 11:22, “Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch.”

Verse 24, “...And a great many people were added to the Lord.”

Verses 25-26, “Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch.” This is 42 A.D. Paul had disappeared from the scene; he had gone back to Tarsus.

Things had gone along. A lot of the Jews had been converted there in Jerusalem. There were a lot of Jews coming to Jerusalem for the festivals. Jews from all over the Roman world came to Jerusalem for the festivals. The word spread and several of them were baptized. They went back to their own home areas; certain areas were major commercial centers that people moved to.

Just as today, some of you are not from this area. You are here because of job circumstances. People sometimes relocate. They go to certain major urban areas because of jobs that are available there. This is what happened in ancient times as well.

In Antioch, there were several Jews who were converted. They were excited about it and this set the synagogues “abuzz.”

Verse 22, word got back to Jerusalem and they decided they had better send a minister down there.

Again, we see organization and leadership. We see the headquarters Church taking a leading role and making a decision. We see that the group in Antioch did not organize themselves into a Church and decide whom they would call to be their minister. For some of you who come out of a Baptist background as I did, that comes as a little bit of a revelation. They didn’t send out and listen to various ones preach and then elect who they wanted to hire to be their preacher. The Church in Jerusalem heard that there were some down there and said, ‘We better send somebody down there.’ They sent Barnabas who was

probably at the time holding the rank of evangelist. He went down there and preached.

He saw what the situation was and within a fairly short time, verse 25, he left and went on up to Tarsus where Paul was. He had, perhaps, kept in some sort of contact with Paul.

In Acts 9:27, we find that he had befriended Paul several years earlier when Paul had come to Jerusalem. By this time—four years later—Paul had proved himself and Barnabas offered Paul the opportunity of coming full time into the ministry (Acts 11:25-26). At this point, Paul was brought down to Antioch. He came to Antioch as an elder and entered full time in the ministry working with Barnabas in Antioch.

Acts 11:27, “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch.” They were dispatched by the apostles.

Acts 12 is somewhat of an inset. It is an account of Herod seeking to stir up certain trouble.

Verses 1-2, he killed James, the brother of John. James was one of the 12 apostles; this was not James, the brother of Jesus.

Acts 12:3, “And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.”

Verse 7, but God delivered Peter from jail.

In the meantime, Saul and Barnabas had taken some foodstuffs up to Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).

Then in Acts 12:25, they came back.

Acts 13:1, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger [Niger was the term used at that time to refer to Blacks from the area of West Africa; the word “Niger” is the Greek word for Black. The term “Ethiopia” was the term used to refer to Blacks from East Africa. The Niger River in West Africa, the nation of Niger, as well as the nation of Nigeria, all derived their name from this.], Lucius of Cyrene [Cyrene is a city of North Africa up in the modern-day nation of Lybia.], Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch [Manaen could have either been considered one of the prophets but more likely was one of the elders], and Saul.” Barnabas is mentioned first because he was the pastor of the Antioch Church.

We see that Simeon and Lucius, at least, were prophets because it mentions prophets were sent down from Jerusalem on a mission there. We read the details of that in Acts 11:27-30.

Acts 13:2-3, God revealed to the prophets (to Simeon and Lucius) that Barnabas and Saul were

to be set apart (separated, ordained) for the job He had. When they had fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Simeon and Lucius fasted and prayed, which is customary prior to an ordination. They laid hands on them (set them apart) and sent them away. This is the ordination of Saul and Barnabas as apostles.

Verse 4, “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” They departed.

We find here the story of Paul’s first evangelistic journey. This would bring us to 45 A.D. Paul, if we’re following through, was converted in 35 A.D. He was in Arabia until 38 A.D. and then came back to Damascus very briefly. He had to flee for his life to Jerusalem. He spent a couple of weeks there with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. They sent him back to Tarsus in 38 A.D. He remained in Tarsus in business from 38 A.D. to 42 A.D. Then in 42 A.D., the Jerusalem Church dispatched Barnabas to Antioch. Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch to assist him and to serve in the ministry full time. Paul remained in the local ministry there in Antioch from 42 A.D. to 45 A.D. In 45 A.D., he was ordained as an apostle and began his first evangelistic journey. Interestingly enough, this is 12 years after the stoning of Stephen and ten years after his own conversion.

We see that even when God has a special mission for someone, He still works through the constituted authority that already is present in His Church. He does it in an organized, orderly way. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). God does not have all kinds of conflicting groups working against one another. There is order.

We see in Acts 13:4 **Paul’s first evangelistic journey** which began in 45 A.D. The journey took a period of about three years. It was completed in 48 A.D. with Paul’s return to Antioch.

He first sailed from Antioch down to the island of Cyprus. If you look on a map, you can see that Cyprus is in the Mediterranean Sea west of Antioch.

Verse 5, Paul began his teaching there.

Verse 13, he sailed from Cyprus up to Asia Minor (Galatia). He went through some of the cities of Galatia, which is in Central Turkey or Central Asia Minor. He went through there from city to city then retraced his steps back.

Acts 14:26, then instead of coming back to Cyprus, he sailed directly back to Antioch. We find the story of his first journey in Acts 13 and

14. He came to Cyprus in Acts 13:4; he preached the word. It goes through the details of what he did, and they came from Cyprus to Asia Minor.

Verses 13-14, they went to Pamphylia and to Antioch in Pisidia. This is not the Antioch of Syria that Paul had as his headquarters but an area in central Turkey or Asia Minor.

Verses 14-41 give the account of his sermon in the synagogue. You find the extent to which Paul was very, very conversant with the Old Testament by the amount of quotations that he gave.

A couple of things we might note.

Verse 14, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath. When he was given an opportunity to speak, he did. Some would say the only reason he went in on the Sabbath was because he was preaching to the Jews and not because he viewed the Sabbath as a day of worship.

Acts 13:42, “And when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.” Why didn’t Paul tell them, ‘You don’t need to wait until next Sabbath? The Sabbath is done away. We are going to have church for you Gentiles ten o’clock tomorrow morning.’ That is what any self-respecting Protestant or Catholic would have done.

Verse 44, “And the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” It wasn’t just Jews. These were Gentiles.

Verse 45, “But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.” They were mad about it and a lot of trouble stirred up. Paul traveled through this area.

Acts 14 lists Iconium (v. 1), Lystra and Derbe (v. 6); these are areas of Galatia. He preached in many of these areas and then he retraced his steps.

Acts 14:21-26, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.’ So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. And after they had passed through Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. Now when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed to Antioch, ....”

Antioch is the area that served as Paul’s headquarters for the Gentile work.

Acts 13 and 14 tell of Paul’s first evangelistic journey in the area through Cyprus and the area of Galatia. A period of three years transpired as he traveled through that area and spent time place by place. Then on the way back, he fully organized them into Churches and ordained elders. By that time, it was apparent who God was choosing to be used in those capacities. Things were organized; then he and Barnabas left and returned to Antioch.

After they returned to Antioch, Acts 15:1, individuals from Judea came and stirred up quite a bit of controversy by claiming that it was necessary to be circumcised in order to be converted and be a part of the Church.

Acts 15:2, “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” After the matter had been discussed and Paul and Barnabas had sought to explain the situation and settle the controversy, it became apparent that this was stirred up to the point that it was necessary to go to Jerusalem and receive an official clarification about this question.

Verse 5, “But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, ‘It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses.’” There came up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who had come into the Church from this background; they were very adamant of the necessity of circumcising the Gentiles and instructing them in the ritual laws.

Verses 6-7, “So the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute [a lot of discussion], Peter rose up and said to them: ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’”

Verses 7-12, Peter set and expounded the matter. He explained how God made it plain, to begin with, that circumcision was not necessary for conversion and gave the story.

James, as the pastor of the Jerusalem Church, was the presiding apostle over the conference.

Verses 13-18, he went through and reiterated what Peter had said. Then he stated the judgment of the Church.

Verse 19, “‘Therefore I judge [“krino,” a legal technical term which means “my decision; the binding decision of the Church”] that we should



not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God...” His judgment was, ‘We are not going to insist that the Gentiles be circumcised.’ God had already revealed by a direct miracle that this was not necessary.

However, verse 20, they were to be instructed in terms of other questions that had been raised involving idolatry, fornication, things strangled and from blood. They were to abstain from these things. These were not ceremonial laws and should not be regarded as such.

The issue came up as to what was ceremonial. Once you make the statement that circumcision is not necessary, then the question arises—what is? If rituals are not necessary, what is a ritual? There were questions they raised concerning meat offered to idols, meat improperly slaughtered and immorality (fornication). There are some who sometimes have misunderstood some comments Paul made in 1 Corinthians and think that Paul just arbitrarily took it upon himself to change the statement of the Jerusalem Church in regard to meat offered to idols. If you read carefully what Paul says in Romans and 1 Corinthians, it is very plain that Paul reiterates the decision of the Jerusalem Church (Romans 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 8:4, 7-13; 10:7-8, 16-33).

The Jews misunderstood. The point that he makes is that meat offered to idols did not physically taint the meat. The only reason to avoid meat offered to idols was to avoid the appearance of being involved in idolatrous worship. The meat itself had not been hurt. If you ate meat that had been offered to an idol, this was not the issue. If you didn’t know that it had been offered to idols, and somebody made comment about it having been, the meat hadn’t been hurt and that was not the issue.

It was stressed that the Gentiles coming into the Church were to culturally withdraw from the society and culture of which they had been a part. The Greek and Roman culture around them took immorality very lightly. They were very casual in their approach to morality as well as the issue of idolatry.

Notice why the apostles didn’t feel it necessary to go into greater detail.

Verse 21, “‘For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.’” ‘Everything else you will hear being read in the synagogues on the Sabbath.’

Verse 22, “Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul

and Barnabas, ....” They sent a deputation back from Jerusalem.

Verse 23, “They wrote this letter by them: ....”

Verses 23-29 was the official decision.

The account of Acts 15 is the ministerial conference of 49 A.D.

There was the decision in Acts 15 (latter part) for **Paul’s second evangelistic journey.**

Verse 40, Paul this time took Silas and departed.

Verse 39, Barnabas took a different route. He took Mark and they went in a different way.

Verse 41, “And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.” Paul is going back to the area of Galatia, but this time, instead of sailing to Cyprus and going up by water, he travels overland. This would be in the spring of 50 A.D.

Acts 16:1, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra.”

This is the area of Galatia where he had established Churches several years earlier. He now travels overland up from Antioch and through the eastern part of the Turkish peninsula.

Verses 1-3, Timothy, whom he had known earlier as a younger teenager, is now up in age (perhaps 18-19 by this time) and Paul takes him with him. He did go ahead and circumcise Timothy because Timothy’s mother was Jewish and he knew this would be a matter of controversy. Timothy was at least part Jewish; he was Jewish on his mother’s side and Greek on his father’s side. Paul knew the fact that Timothy was uncircumcised would be a matter that the Jews would really take exception to. At this account, Paul and Silas have traveled on across the Turkish peninsula or Asia Minor peninsula.

Verse 9, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’” Paul has a vision; he sees a man of Macedonia, which is across into northern Greece and southern Yugoslavia, the modern area of Macedonia. Paul crossed into Europe.

Verse 13, “And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.”

We can show this to be the day of Pentecost of 50 A.D. The gospel was first preached in Europe exactly 19 years after the gospel was first preached on Pentecost in 31 A.D. The word “Sabbath” in verse 13 is a different form. It is literally “Sabbaths.” “And on the day of Sabbaths” would be a more literal rendering. It is a term that the Jews used to refer to Pentecost. We find here the preaching in Macedonia. This is

his second evangelistic journey. He comes down further into Greece proper.

Acts 17:1, "...they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews."

Verses 2-4, he preaches in Thessalonica.

Verse 10, he then went to Berea.

Verse 15, he went into Athens.

Verses 22-31, we have his sermon on Mars Hill.

Acts 18:1, "After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth." This is the fall of 50 A.D.

Verse 11, he stays there for about 18 months. It is during that period of time, while Paul is in Corinth from the fall of 50 A.D. to the spring of 52 A.D., that Paul wrote the first letter (actually the first two letters) that we have preserved for us in the New Testament. During that 18-month period that he was in Corinth, he wrote the books of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Now we come to a period, 15 to 17 years after his conversion, five to seven years after his ordination as an apostle and in the midst of his second evangelistic journey, that we have the first of the letters that Paul wrote that makes up such a crucial part of our New Testament. We will go into those letters next time.

I want to give you a little background leading up to the beginning of Paul's letters. I'd like to review a couple of things. What we are going to do in this series is study the life and the writings of Paul with emphasis on doctrine and Christian living. We want to get the overview of Paul's background and the background of each book. We want to understand the message of the book in the light of its historical setting.

Paul's letters are very important. First, they are essential for understanding the historical development of the New Testament Church. They provide the record of the development of the New Testament Church over a 15- to 17-year period. That was the period during which Paul wrote. We learn a lot about how the New Testament Church developed.

Second, we can learn much from the examples of the early Church. We learn about Church authority and organization. We see mistakes that were made that we can avoid. We have examples of the early Church pointed out. There are things we should copy and things we should avoid. That's why God has examples recorded. Every generation doesn't have to "reinvent the wheel." We can learn from what has gone before.

Third, Paul's letters are very important because they are the chief repositories of what might be termed "the systematic theology of the New Testament." It is the clearest and chief place

where we have a detailed exposition of what the Church believed and taught.

Paul wrote 14 letters that are preserved as a part of the New Testament canon. There are nine letters that were written to seven specific Churches. The Churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossi and Thessalonica represent seven Churches. There are nine letters written to those seven Churches because two of the letters were written to the Church at Corinth and two to the Church at Thessalonica. Paul wrote one General Epistle, the book of Hebrews. He wrote four Pastoral Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon. He wrote two letters to Timothy, making four. We have 14 letters altogether.

It's very interesting the way in which the letters of Paul are arranged. One of the things we will notice as we go through is that Paul's letters are not arranged in the order in which he wrote them. He wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians first. Why don't we have them in the order in which he wrote them? We are going to go through and study them, in this series, in the order in which Paul wrote them because we're going to study it going through the book of Acts and from the Life and Letters of Paul.

When you go through and read it in the New Testament, the order that they were preserved in is important. There are some important concepts there. In fact, we could divide Paul's 14 letters and there is a specific order. You might be aware that the order of the Greek Bibles (the Byzantine text of the Bible that has been preserved by the Greek Church) is different than the Latin order that has been preserved in the western world. They're the same books but a different order.

The Greek order is sometimes referred to as the inspired order because it was the order that was preserved by the Greeks who preserved the New Testament. The order in which they preserved the New Testament books was, first, the four Gospels and Acts, just as we have them. The next section that they preserved was the General Epistles: James, Peter, John and Jude and then the Epistles of Paul. They preserved the Epistles of Paul as we have them, with one change. They preserved Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Then in the Greek order came the book of Hebrews, followed by 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon, then the book of Revelation.

This makes four sections of the Greek New Testament that the Greeks preserved: (1) the Gospels and Acts, (2) the General Epistles, (3)

the Epistles of Paul and (4) the book of Revelation. You take those four sections and combine them with the three that the Jews recognized of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings. Altogether, you have seven divisions or sections of Scripture that constitute the Bible and shows a stamp of completion. There's no room for an Apocrypha. There's no room for some of the extra books that have gotten in. They don't fit with either the Old or the New Testament.

Why are Paul's Epistles arranged in the order in which they are? The interesting thing is that if you look at the first ten of Paul's Epistles (Romans through Hebrews), you find that these books basically follow the order of the Holy Days and the message that they expound. Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians are books that deal with the subject matter of the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread.

We have scriptures in the book of Romans that clearly deals with these subjects.

Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 5:8-10, "But God demonstrated His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."

Romans 6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."

Verse 16, "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?"

What we find here is the message of Passover and Unleavened Bread. The emphasis is on the message of Passover and Unleavened Bread, the matter of Christ's atonement, the necessity of putting sin out of our lives, of being justified by Christ's sacrifice.

1 Corinthians focuses in on much of the message. 1 Corinthians 5 is the famous chapter that we read nearly every year prior to Passover and Unleavened Bread.

1 Corinthians 5:6-8, "...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and

wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

1 Corinthians 11 gives instructions about observing the Passover service.

2 Corinthians 7:1, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." This certainly deals with the matter of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The subject matter of Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians is the subject matter of Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread—the emphasis on the Savior and the necessity of our coming out of sin and putting away sin.

The next four Epistles—Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians—would tie in and parallel the message of Pentecost. They consist of deeper spiritual things. They talk about the covenants and about the fruits of the Spirit. We find much of these things in Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. The day of Pentecost focuses in on the Old and the New Covenant, on the giving of God's Holy Spirit, the fruits of God's Spirit—many, many things that could come out.

1 and 2 Thessalonians tie in with the message of the Feast of Trumpets. There are many places we could look at.

1 Thessalonians 4:16, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." It goes into details.

2 Thessalonians continues and talks further about some of those same things. Clearly, there is an emphasis on the subject matter of the Feast of Trumpets, the return of Jesus Christ.

The book of Hebrews deals with the subject matter that relates to the Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles and Last Great Day.

We have Hebrews 9 and 10 that deal with the subject matter of the Day of Atonement. It explains and goes through the symbolism in great detail of the high priest entering into the Holy Place. It goes through and explains the symbolism of the Day of Atonement.

We have in Hebrews 3 and 4 the information about entering into God's rest, the parallel that ties in with the Feast of Tabernacles.

Hebrews 11 also has a lot concerning the fulfillment of that.

There's insight into the Last Great Day, the time of judgment. I will summarize on some of that. We went through it at a much earlier Bible study

when we went through the canonization of Scripture. If you want more details, you can go back and review those Bible studies.

Basically, the Pastoral Epistles were in the order of the rank of the individual to whom he wrote. Timothy was an evangelist, Titus was a pastor, and Philemon was a local elder in Colossi.

We find that there is a systematic arrangement in his letters, in terms of subject matter. I think from this we can get a little bit of insight. Paul's letters come in an appropriate place.

The Gospels, the personal teachings of Jesus Christ, form the basis. That is logically where you start. The book of Acts picks up the story and goes on through and shows the continuity of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The first five books of the New Testament correspond to the first five books of the Old Testament. They correspond to the Law, to the books of Moses.

These are the books of the second Moses, of Jesus Christ who was prophesied in Deuteronomy 18.

Deuteronomy 18:15, ““The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, ...””

Hebrews 9:15, “And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, ....”

We have the direct teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, and Acts continues the work of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

The General Epistles are the teachings of the senior apostles, the ones who were with Jesus, either in the case of James and Jude (two of his physical brothers) or in the case of Peter and John, two of the original twelve. They pick up the story and they deal with very basic fundamental issues.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter even tells us that Paul wrote some things hard to be understood. When you have that background, then you get into Paul's writings. Paul's writings are arranged in an order that follows a subject flow that really, in terms of emphasis, follows the basic outline and plan of God, concluding with letters of pastoral instruction.

Then the New Testament concludes with the book of Revelation. Revelation is the logical place to end. It is the counterpoint to the book of Genesis.

In our survey of Paul's life and letters, we are going to follow them through in the order that he wrote them. We are going to get their message in the context of the background provided by the book of Acts. Hopefully, this different approach will give us a little more of a fresh insight into these letters and into the message that they

contain. They contain a timeless message. It is a message for us today. It is a message that is just as important for us today as it was for those to whom it was originally addressed.

This will be our last Bible study prior to the Feast of Tabernacles, which is an incredible thing. Our next scheduled Bible study would have been the evening that begins the Feast of Trumpets. Two weeks from tonight, we will be observing the beginning of the Feast of Trumpets and two weeks from then, we will be observing the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles.

On the evening that we are gathered around the world observing the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles—the evening of Wednesday, October 3—there will be something else of note that will take place at the same time we are meeting. Documents will be signed in Berlin on the evening of Wednesday, October 3, that will officially reunite Germany as one nation. One year ago at the Feast you saw the Berlin Wall begin tumbling down. An awful lot has happened in the last year. Can you imagine where we will be if the world changes as much in the next year as it has changed in the last year?