

# Bible Reading Plan

WEEK OF MAY 3, 2020

## WEEKLY READING: ACTS 20-24

As we enter the final section of Acts, the focus is turning to Paul's ministry almost exclusively. Paul is the author of much of our New Testament (*Fun Fact: Paul wrote more of the books in our New Testament than anyone, and yet, based on word count, Luke actually wrote more*). It is helpful for us to realize that as Paul was traveling and spreading the Gospel about Jesus, he was also writing the letters we will soon explore in our Bible Reading Plan. This week is an ideal opportunity to get a grasp on Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. God used Paul to extend His message of forgiveness and life to Gentiles like you and me.

### Early Years (1AD-33)

Paul was likely born around 1AD in the city of Tarsus (Acts 22:3). A coastal city, Tarsus was an important commercial center, university town, and a crossroads for travel. Paul, who described himself as a Jew of Jews, was educated under one of the greatest Jewish scholars, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Paul was an extremely zealous Jew (Galatians 1:13-14). In Philippians, he tells us he was a legalistic Pharisee, from the tribe of Benjamin, circumcised on the eighth day (Philippians 3:4-6). He was also a Roman citizen, which meant he was especially privileged (Acts 22:22-28).

### Conversion (34-37AD)

In Acts 9, we see his dramatic encounter with Jesus (ca. 34 AD). Paul describes his life before this encounter as "rubbish" compared to the "surpassing greatness of knowing Christ" (Philippians 3:7-11). Having been converted, Paul began preaching that Jesus is the Christ. He was led to Arabia for three years where Christ equipped him to minister as Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:22-23; Galatians 1:11-18; 2 Corinthians 12:1-6). After his time in Arabia, Paul's ministry career began in earnest (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-24).

Paul, dead to the Law and alive in the Spirit, began ministry around 37AD. He went up to Jerusalem where he became acquainted with Peter and James (Acts 9:26-29; Galatians 1:18-19). Then, he returned to spread the Gospel in the regions around his birthplace, Syria and Cilicia (Galatians 1:21; Acts 9:30).

### First Missionary Journey (46-48AD)

Around 46AD, Paul was called by the Spirit, appointed, and sent on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-14:28). This evangelical mission took Paul to the island of Cyprus and through the region of Galatia (in modern-day Turkey). Along the way, Paul came into conflict with Peter for a hypocritical attitude towards Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-21). **Galatians** was probably written by Paul following this incident. This journey made it evident that the church would need to figure out the role of Jewish laws for Gentile believers.

### Second Missionary Journey (49-52AD)

Around 49AD at the Jerusalem Council, Paul shared what he saw the Holy Spirit doing amongst the Gentiles (Acts 15). The Apostle James, the brother of Jesus, defended Paul's testimony based on Scriptures (Acts 15:13-19; Amos 9:11-12). The Council then gladly accepted Paul's testimony and made a few simple guidelines to help Gentiles believers. From here Paul was sent on a second

missionary journey (Acts 15:40-18:23). This journey took Paul back through Galatia and farther into Macedonia and Achaia. During this time, Paul faced a trial before Gallio, the Roman proconsul of Achaia. It is likely he also wrote **1 and 2 Thessalonians** while in the Achaian city of Corinth.

### **Third Missionary Journey (53-57AD)**

Around 53-57AD, Paul's third missionary journey began in Antioch in Syria (Acts 18:22-21:17). This journey again took Paul through Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia, and then to the city of Jerusalem. He probably wrote **1 & 2 Corinthians and Romans** during this time. While in Jerusalem, he was arrested (Acts 21:17-23:22). During his imprisonment in nearby Caesarea, he may have written several of the "**prison letters**" (Acts 23:23-26:32). (**The "prison letters" include Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians.**) On trial, Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome. On route as a prisoner, a storm wrecked their boat on the island of Malta (Acts 27:1-28:16). Over three months, Paul took every opportunity to minister in Malta before being taken to Rome.

### **Imprisonment in Rome (59-61AD)**

Around 59-61AD, Paul was imprisoned in Rome for a few years while waiting for a hearing before Caesar (Acts 28:16-31). He may also have written his "**prison letters**" at this time. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison preaching about Jesus Christ.

### **Possible Fourth Missionary Journey (between 62-68AD)**

*Between the end of Acts and Paul's death, he may have been able to go on a fourth missionary journey. Around 62-68AD, Paul may have been released from prison. Based on the later writings of Clement and Eusebius, some scholars believe Paul made his long-anticipated trip to Spain on this trip (Romans 15:24). Then, it is believed his journey took him back through the cities of Ephesus, Colossae, and Philippi. He may also have written **1 Timothy and Titus** in Philippi before being arrested and taken to Rome once again.*

### **Paul's Death (around 68AD)**

During this final imprisonment, Paul probably wrote **2 Timothy** (see 2 Timothy 4:6-8). Most likely, Paul's trial and execution took place under the reign of Emperor Nero, a brutal persecutor of Christians (ca. 68AD).

### **Jerusalem Destroyed (70AD)**

In 70AD, responding to a Jewish uprising, new Emperor Titus Flavius Vespasian oversaw the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. This effectively ended Judaism as it was known. Within 300 years, Christianity grew exponentially among Gentiles from being a small Jewish sect, through great persecution, to become the official religion of the Roman Empire.

### **Paul's Impact**

From conversion, Paul lived for Christ planting churches around the Roman world and reaching countless Gentiles over many decades. His pastoral heart led him to emphasize unity in the body (Ephesians 4:1-6). Yet, he was also known for being bold in the Lord and fiercely defending the Gospel for the Gentiles (Galatians 1:6-12). Paul suffered a great deal for serving Christ – he was whipped, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, starved, and sleep-deprived, but he never lost faith (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). He died as he had lived, for Jesus Christ. – *Nate Metler*