

**Church History 101**  
**Lesson 5**  
**Paul the Evangelist**

**Key Concepts:** The Apostle Paul (c. 5 CE - c. 67 CE) was one of the most significant evangelists (meaning those who tell people the Good News about Jesus) in the early church. During his travels he founded numerous churches across the Roman Empire.

**The Story:** When we first meet Paul in the scriptures we know him by his Jewish name Saul. Saul was educated and trained as a Pharisee under Gamaliel (d. 50 CE). This meant he not only knew and observed all of the Jewish laws but that he knew philosophy and ethics as well. As the Jesus' movement was beginning, he saw it as a threat to his understanding of Judaism. He persecuted those who participated in the movement, including the stoning of a believer named Stephen.

Saul's/Paul's life was radically changed when on the road to Damascus he had an encounter with Jesus. Paul was blinded and only when he heard the full Jesus' story and believed, did he regain his sight. At that moment he became as zealous for Jesus as he had been earlier for the Jewish Law. What is interesting is that 3 years after his conversion (c. 36 CE) he met with the Apostles in Jerusalem but then went off the grid for almost 10 years, which are called the "unknown years."

When Paul returns to the scene he begins a series of three missionary journeys (c. 46 CE – 49 CE). He and a man named Barnabas, who had been critical in Paul's introduction to the Jesus story, leave from Antioch, which was already a Christian center (near today's Antakya, Turkey), and travel to ten different cities. Along the way they mainly tell Jews about Jesus, describing him as the long awaited Davidic messiah. At the end of the journey Paul makes the decision that his mission would no longer be to the Jews but to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch around 49 CE and then go to Jerusalem for the first church council, which will decide if Gentiles need to become Jews to become part of the Jesus' community. The council decides that Gentiles do not need to become Jews and this allows Paul to continue his work with Gentiles.

Paul's second missionary journey begins in Jerusalem and takes him to twelve different cities. In many of these cities and areas including Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth and Ephesus he founds churches. On this journey Paul spent about a year and half (c. 50 CE – 52 CE) in Corinth. He makes friends with Priscilla and Aquila who become believers and fellow evangelists.

Paul's third missionary journey (c. 53 CE – 58 CE) routes him back through Galatia, where he works with existing churches, then to Ephesus where he will remain for two years. He then travels to numerous other cities before returning home to Jerusalem.

Paul's work begins to come to an end when he is arrested and imprisoned in Caesarea Maritima (between current day Tel Aviv and Haifa in Israel) for two years. He appeals to Rome for his freedom and so is transported to Rome to make his appeal. Along the way he encounters multiple difficulties. Once in Rome he is allowed to preach and teach while under "house arrest." Ultimately he dies at the hands of Emperor Nero.

By the end of Paul's journeys and the work of his co-evangelists, dozens of churches had been founded, thousands of people had become followers of Jesus Christ and the church was spreading throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

**Questions**

1. What do you make of Paul's conversion experience? How do you relate to it?
2. Why do you think it mattered that Gentiles did not have to become Jewish in order to become part of the Jesus' community?
3. Does this story change how you think about the Apostle Paul?