

Who is Paul?

(from the book of Acts and Paul's letters to churches)

Paul's birth name is Saul. He traces his lineage to the tribe of Benjamin, the tribe that gave Israel its first king, King Saul (1 Samuel 9-31, especially 10:20-24). He was born in Tarsus, a Roman citizen. He calls himself, "a Hebrew of the Hebrews...a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:4-11). His early training was at the feet of Gamaliel, the foremost rabbi of that time. As a Pharisee, he determined to destroy the new Christians, imprisoning men and women who considered Jesus the Messiah. On one such trip to Damascus, Jesus confronted him from heaven. As a result of this encounter Saul acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God and his life took an abrupt turn. He abandoned his allegiance to the laws of the Pharisees and began to argue persuasively, "proving that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9).

After his conversion Paul (i.e. his Greek name) lived a less public life in Caesarea and Tarsus for 12-13 years. Barnabas (known as the Son of Encouragement – Acts 4:36,37) sought out Paul and brought him to a growing Gentile church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30). Thus began Paul's missionary work, bringing the Word of God to key cities and planting new churches. His strategy was [1] to preach in the Jewish synagogue, and [2] as some of these Jews professed the name of Christ, to use them to plant small house churches with some God-fearing Gentiles. Most Jews still rejected Jesus as Messiah and reacted with violence. Acts 13:46-52 records Paul and Barnabas' changing course to refocus their ministry exclusively to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas made three missionary journeys. They worked with the early church to discern what was "Jewish" and what was "Christian". In other words, what was God's truth and traditions of the Old Testament for all times and all peoples. For example, did Gentiles need to be circumcised and obey all the ceremonial laws of the Pharisees to be "Christ-followers" (cf. Acts 15)?

Paul was joined by Silas and Timothy in his journeys. Eventually, Dr. Luke joined the team. They preached in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and ultimately Ephesus, where Paul spent two years teaching the Word (Acts 19). Finally, Paul returns to Jerusalem where he is arrested, imprisoned, and sent to Rome to appeal his case to Caesar. Paul continued to minister in Rome while under "house arrest." His arrest limited his access to public preaching. So Paul wrote letters to the early churches, reminding them of the truths of the good news about Jesus and warning them against heresies that would undermine God's truth. These letters are an accepted part of the inspired Word of God and as such, speak God's eternal truths to us in the 21st century.

History tells us that Paul was martyred in Rome around 65 AD.

His epitaph might read ...

"Saul, a **M**urderer in the name of the Law.
Then **M**issionary and **M**artyr for the name of Jesus."

Introduction to Colossians

Colossians is a Biblical letter from a man to a group of people in a particular time (about 60AD) and place, the Greek city of Colosse. It is also a message from the Spirit of God to all peoples in every generation. And, it is a personal letter for today, as the Holy Spirit speaks to each of us individually and collectively through Paul's words.

Author: Paul is identified as the author of Colossians; Timothy is also mentioned (Col. 1:1, 4:18). He writes the letter with the wisdom and authority of an apostle; he also writes from prison or house arrest (4:10,18).

Church at Colosse: Colosse, once great, was a small, socially unimportant city by 60AD; it was perhaps the least important of all the churches to which Paul addressed a letter. Colosse was home to varied cultural and religious expressions, both mystical and apocalyptic... all attracted the early Christians. Mixing Judaism, oriental, and pagan cults to suit one's personal taste was popular in the 1st century.

The church in Colosse was probably planted by Epaphras (1:7,8/4:12,13). (Scholars believe he committed to Christ during Paul's two-year ministry in Ephesus. See Acts 19:8-10). The congregation is mostly Gentile converts (1:21,27/2:13). Although Paul never personally visited (1:4,7,9/2:1), he writes a letter, most likely in response to Epaphras' concern about false teachings that threatened the church.

In particular, Paul speaks to the dangerous teaching that gives Jesus a place in worship, but relegates Him to minor status.

Themes: God's glory is unmatched
Jesus' absolute supremacy in all things – creation, redemption, rule,
Wisdom and knowledge
Faith is in Christ alone, no syncretism with other religions
Redemption is God's work, not one's own self-understanding
We are complete in Christ
Knowing Jesus puts the rest of life into perspective

"Hidden Treasures"

"...that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".
Colossians 2:2b,3