

Year of St. Paul

Background information:

Paul (Saul is his Jewish name) was a Jew, a Pharisee, from the City of Tarsus in Cilicia. He is thought to be a Roman citizen. He had a Hellenistic education and served as an envoy between Rome and Jerusalem. He was a tent maker, a weaver. Before his conversion to Christianity, he was active in protecting the religious traditions of his Jewish faith. The Law was his life. He was appalled at the preaching of Peter and the Apostles and believed that Jesus was rightly punished. He saw Jesus' teaching as an attack on Judaism. He approved of the death of the Deacon Stephen and sought out others for stoning.

Conversion of Paul:

On the road to Damascus, Paul had a vision of Christ.

Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city and you will be told what to do." Acts 9.1-6

Paul began his mission by going to Arabia. Three years after his conversion, Paul traveled to Jerusalem to meet with Peter. Paul became an ardent missionary for Christianity. He traveled to many countries and towns proclaiming Jesus and his teachings.

The Pauline Corpus

The Pauline Letters or Epistles were written around 45-55 AD. Thirteen letters are attributed to Paul. Seven or eight are believed written by Paul:

I and II Thessalonians; I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians and Romans and Philomen

Biblical scholars believe that the rest of the Letters in the Pauline corpus were not written by Paul but in the Pauline style.

The Structure of the Letters consists of an address, prayer and the body and ends with final messages and salutations.

The Letters are not intended to give a summary of Christian teaching but are letters of instruction to the communities he founded. They address pastoral problems as well as moral issues and God's plan of salvation.

Paul's Christ

Paul did not meet Jesus during his earthly life although he calls himself an apostle chosen by Christ. Paul's conversion is post Resurrection. Paul believed that one was saved by holding fast to Christ and only Christ could make him righteous before God. He came to see that God loved us and that God loves us not because we are good but so that we can become good. God's love freely given was grace.

Paul saw the Church as the Body of Christ. Through faith and baptism the Christian 'puts on Christ' and becomes Christ's body. It is apparent in his letters that Paul had to reread his Old Testament Scriptures to see that Christ did not die for his sins but for ours.

"In Jesus, cross and resurrection Paul found the key to the whole of human existence," wrote Melvin Farrell, S.S. in **Getting to Know the Bible** from ACTA Publications.

Paul is known as the **Great Apostle to the Gentiles** and the **Father of Evangelization**.