

Saint Paul to the Galatians

01. Introduction



Andrei Rublev
Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia
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Re the 'Acts of the Apostles' by Luke

Luke was a close companion of Paul in his mission.

Luke was a historian: 'I have decided, after investigating everything carefully, to write an orderly account for you so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed' (Luke 1:3-4).

First century historians used all the tools of rhetoric to impress the reader, and they were expected to create speeches, but only after 'investigating everything carefully.'

born in Tarsus

“I am from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city”

(Acts 21:39).

According to Jerome (died c.420), Paul’s parents emigrated to Tarsus from Gischala in Galilee (*Commentary on Philemon* 23-24).



- Born possibly about 4BC

He refers to himself as a **πρεσβύτερος** (late 50’s) in his Letter to Philemon (composed c.54AD)

Luke (Acts 7:58) refers to him as a **νεανίας** (middle 30’s) at Stephen’s martyrdom (c. 34AD).

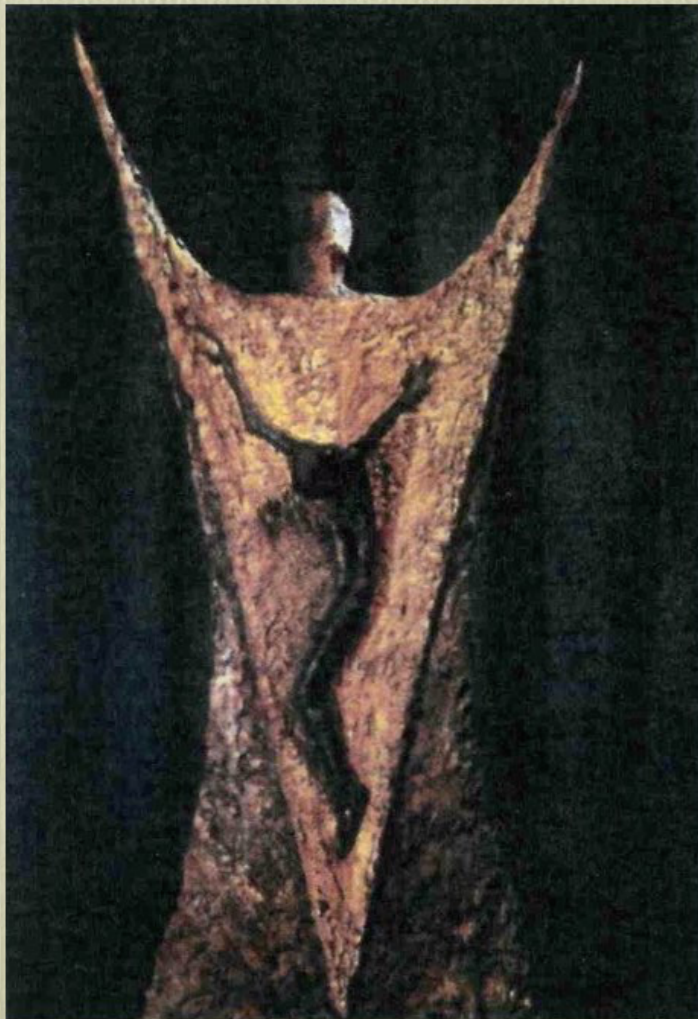
Saul was a Jew

‘I was circumcised on the eighth day’ (Philippians 3:5).

- In his Letter to the Philippians (3:5), he refers to himself as ‘a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews.’
- Given the name ‘Saul’ (Acts 7:58). In all his letters he calls himself ‘Paul’. Luke refers to him as ‘Paul’ only after the meeting with the proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). Did they share a family name, or did the proconsul offer him patronage?
- He was a ‘Pharisee’ (Philippians 3:5; see Acts 26:5)
- He studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, ‘educated strictly according to our ancestral Law’ (Acts 22:3).
 - He inherited Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28).

33AD

Acts 7:58-60



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‘The members of the council dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man (νεανίας, 37?) named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him.’

- Paul claims to have been ‘intensely zealous in persecuting the Church of God and was trying to destroy it’ (Galatians 1:13; see Philippians 3:6; Acts 9:1-2, 22:4, 26:9-11).

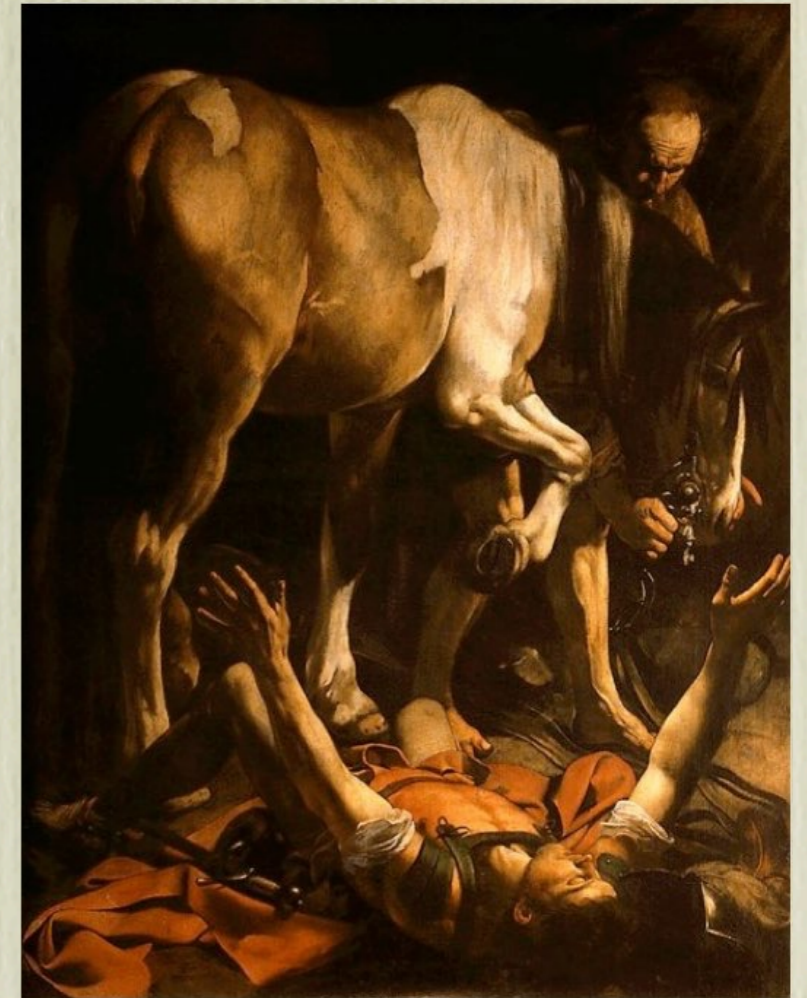
34AD

His Encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus

(Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:13-18).

Acts 9:3-6

‘As Saul was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.”



Carravaggio. Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo
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‘Have I not seen the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 9:1).

‘He was seen also by me’ (1 Corinthians 15:8).

‘I received the Gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ (Galatians 1:12).

‘God called me through his grace and was pleased to reveal his Son in/to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles’ (Galatians 1:15-16).

Acts 9:17-19

‘Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus.’

34-37AD

In 'Arabia' (The Nabataean kingdom)
(Galatians 1:17-18; Acts 9:20-25)

'I went away at once to Arabia,
and afterwards I returned to
Damascus' (Galatians 1:17).



37AD

‘In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands’ (2 Cor 11:32-33).

Saul pays a short visit to Jerusalem ‘to talk things over with **Cephas**’ (Galatians 1:18)

37-45AD

‘Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy” (Galatians 1:21-23).



46AD

‘Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people’ (Acts 11:25-26).

Saul visits Jerusalem with Barnabas and Silas and confers with Peter, John & James concerning conditions for accepting Gentiles into the Christian community (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 11:27-30)

47AD

Sent on mission

Acts 13:1-4

‘In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers ... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus.’

Cyprus The port of Salamis

Acts 13:5

When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them.



When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. He was with the proconsul, Sergius **Paulus**, an intelligent man, who summoned Barnabas and Saul and wanted to hear the word of God. But the magician ... opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, also known as **Paul**, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him. [The magician loses his sight]. When **the proconsul** saw what had happened, he **believed**, for he was astonished at the teaching about the Lord.

Antioch in Pisidia Acts 13:13-14

Then Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. John, however, left them and returned to Jerusalem; but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.



BITHYNIA

ASIA

• Troas

MYSIA

• Assos

• Mitylene

CHIOS

LYDIA

• Smyrna

PHRYGIA

• Antioch

GALATIA

• Iconium

• Ephesus

SAMOS

IONIA

• Miletus

PISIDIA

• Lystra

PAMPHYLIA

• Derbe

CARIA

• Attalia

• Perga

CILICIA

• Cos

LYCIA

• Patara

RHODES

• Antioch

CYPRUS

• Salamis

• Paphos

SYRIA

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Acts 13:14-22

On the sabbath day they went into the synagogue ... Paul stood up and began to speak: “You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen.

The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. For about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness ... He gave them their land as an inheritance ... he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul ... When he had removed him, he made David their king ...

Acts 13:22-25

God made David their king ... Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Saviour, Jesus, as he promised.

Before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John was finishing his work, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet.'

Acts 13:26-29

“My brothers, you descendants of Abraham’s family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognise him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. When they had carried out everything that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb.

Acts 13:30-33

“But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you.’

Acts 13:38-41

Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers! Be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you.’”

Acts 13:42-45

As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath. When the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul.

Acts 13:46-47

Both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying: It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, “I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 13:48-51

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers. Thus the word of the Lord spread throughout the region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, and stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their region. So they shook the dust off their feet in protest against them.

Paul's Key Insights

- Paul is a monotheist, who sees God revealed in Jesus and in the continued presence of Jesus' Spirit.
- He sees himself as a faithful Jew, sharing the faith of Abraham, and carrying on the mission entrusted to him which is to demonstrate to everyone that God wants everyone to enjoy divine communion in a community of shared love.
- He experiences intimate communion with the risen Christ, and is committed to see the diversity of people's gifts shared in the unity of the Christian community.

Acts 13:51-52

They went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.



Iconium: Acts 14:1-7

The same thing occurred in **Iconium**, where Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks became believers. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who testified to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through them. But the residents of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, and some with the apostles. And when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, the apostles learned of it and fled to **Lystra** and **Derbe**, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country; and there they continued proclaiming the good news.



PHRYGIA

Antioch ●

GALATIA

● **Iconium**

Lystra ●

● **Derbe**

CARIA

PAMPHYLIA

Attalia ● ● Parga

LYCIA

CILICIA

Antioch ●
Seleucia ●

SYRIA

● Salamis

CYPRUS

Lystra: Acts 14:8-14

In Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet and had never walked, for he had been crippled from birth. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. And Paul, looking at him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And the man sprang up and began to walk. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates; he and the crowds wanted to offer sacrifice. When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting:

Acts 14:15-18

“Friends, why are you doing this? We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.” Even with these words, they scarcely restrained the crowds from offering sacrifice to them.

Acts 14:19-20

But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.

In 2 Timothy 3:11, Paul speaks of the sufferings he endured 'in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.'

After they had proclaimed the good news to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, then on to Iconium and [Antioch](#). There they strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God.” And after they had appointed elders for them in each church, with prayer and fasting they entrusted them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe. Then they passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. From there they sailed back to [Antioch](#), where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had completed.



Points of contact for proclaiming the Gospel

- The synagogue (Jews and sympathetic Gentiles)
- Work place (market)
- Public platform
- Homes

Market place in Corinth

Acts 14:27-28

When they arrived back at Antioch, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. And they stayed there with the disciples for some time.



Acts 15:1-2

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders.

48AD

Paul writes from Antioch to Galatia

Letter to the Galatians