

Paul In Snippets

Mark Morgan

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Paul In Snippets

The life of the Apostle Paul
in short snippets

Mark Morgan

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Cover picture: Paul
by Bartolomeo Montagna (1482).

I thank him who has given me strength,
Christ Jesus our Lord,
because he judged me faithful,
appointing me to his service,
though formerly I was a blasphemer,
persecutor, and insolent opponent.
But I received mercy
because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.

Paul, from 1 Timothy 1:12-13

To my ever-patient wife, Ruth



Contents

Book One - Early Life	8
Chapter 1 - Tarsus.....	9
Chapter 2 - Jerusalem.....	12
Book Two - Before Christ	13
Chapter 3 - Stephen.....	14
Chapter 4 - Persecuting believers.....	17
Chapter 5 - To Damascus.....	19
Book Three - A New Life	21
Chapter 6 - New Sight.....	22
Chapter 7 - Arabia.....	25
Chapter 8 - Back in Damascus.....	26
Chapter 9 - Jerusalem - Briefly.....	28
Chapter 10 - Return to Tarsus.....	30
Chapter 11 - Antioch in Syria.....	31
Chapter 12 - To Jerusalem with Donations.....	33
Chapter 13 - Antioch Again.....	35
Book Four - The First Missionary Journey	36
Chapter 14 - Setting off.....	37
Chapter 15 - Cyprus.....	38
Chapter 16 - Antioch in Pisidia.....	40
Chapter 17 - Iconium.....	42
Chapter 18 - Lystra.....	43
Chapter 19 - Derbe.....	46
Chapter 20 - Back to Antioch in Syria.....	47
Book Five - Intermission	49
Chapter 21 - Mission Report.....	50

Paul In Snippets

Chapter 22 - Conference in Jerusalem	52
Book Six - The Second Missionary Journey	55
Chapter 23 - Arguments and Division	56
Chapter 24 - Through Syria and Cilicia	58
Chapter 25 - Derbe and Lystra: Timothy	59
Chapter 26 - Limitations	60
Chapter 27 - Philippi	61
Chapter 28 - The Jailer	63
Chapter 29 - Leaving Philippi	65
Chapter 30 - Thessalonica	67
Chapter 31 - Berea	69
Chapter 32 - Paul in Athens	70
Chapter 33 - Corinth	72
Chapter 34 - Cenchrea	74
Chapter 35 - Back to Antioch	75
Book Seven - Intermission	76
Chapter 36 - Time in Antioch in Syria	77
Book Eight - The Third Missionary Journey	78
Chapter 37 - Galatia and Phrygia	79
Chapter 38 - Ephesus	80
Chapter 39 - Macedonia and Greece	83
Chapter 40 - Troas	84
Chapter 41 - Miletus and the Elders of Ephesus	86
Chapter 42 - On to Jerusalem	88
Book Nine - Jerusalem and Caesarea	90
Chapter 43 - Attacked in Jerusalem	91
Chapter 44 - Before the Council	94
Chapter 45 - To Caesarea by Night	96

Contents

Chapter 46 - Tried by Felix.....	98
Chapter 47 - Tried by Festus.....	100
Chapter 48 - Tried before Agrippa II.....	102
Book Ten - Journey to Rome.....	103
Chapter 49 - Shipwreck.....	104
Chapter 50 - Malta.....	106
Book Eleven - Rome.....	108
Chapter 51 - To the End.....	109

BOOK ONE

Early Life

Chapter 1

Tarsus

Paul of Tarsus is a famous man today, but it was not always so.

He did so much: work, travelling, teaching, writing, encouraging, and even suffering, that sometimes it is hard to believe all these things could fit into the life of just one man.

This is the story of a man driven to achieve. Driven, if you like, by guilt, but expanding his vision so much along the way that you could never describe his stunning achievements as simply resulting from guilt.

Here was a man of vision: a man who could never do enough to pay back his Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, and a man who would do anything his Lord would have done to help his fellow believers.

Paul In Snippets

Paul was just an ordinary tent-maker with an extraordinary faith.



Acts 21:39; Acts 22:3; Romans 11:1; 2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5; Acts 13:9; Acts 23:6

Tarsus was a city to the north of Israel in the area of Cilicia, but Paul – a Jew – was born there. It was no unimportant city, and despite being a Jew, his father was a citizen of Rome. This conveyed immense privileges which Paul would later be able to take advantage of at times – but always with care.

Paul's heritage was from the tribe of Benjamin, the youngest of the children of Jacob. In accordance with the command of God through Abraham, he was circumcised when he was eight days old. His father was a Pharisee, the strictest sect of their religion. These were important details.

Baby boys were named when they were circumcised, and Paul was given the name "Saul", the name of the first king of Israel, and the most famous son of all the tribe of Benjamin. His parents must have had high hopes for him. He kept this name for many years, but once his empire-wide preaching work began, we suddenly read of him as "Paul" and the name "Saul" is no longer used, except when Paul is retelling past events.

We know nothing of Paul's early childhood in Tarsus, but he grew up to be a well-informed and committed

Tarsus

follower of the religion of his fathers. His knowledge of the scriptures reflects a home in which the ancient words of God in what we now call the Old Testament were treasured.

Although no-one knew it at the time, this Jewish boy – growing up in a foreign city far from the land of Israel – would contribute a significant percentage of the writings in the New Testament.

Chapter 2

Jerusalem

Acts 5:33-42; Acts 22:3

Paul did not stay in Tarsus. His education was in Jerusalem, sitting at the feet of a famous teacher called Gamaliel. He learned to listen, to read and to write. Laws defined his life and his teacher was a wise man.

The Law of Moses was the most important subject on the curriculum. Teachers must know the laws from start to finish, and Paul wanted to be a teacher. Obedience to it, and to the traditions which hedged it about, was vital. Law and tradition were his life. His zeal was noticed by the religious establishment. Paul's career began to blossom.

BOOK TWO
Before Christ

Chapter 3

Stephen

Acts 6:8-7:60; Acts 22:20; 1 Timothy 1:13

Jesus Christ had lived and died and lived again. His followers had been transformed from timid, fearful admirers into true converts. At their hands, the Jewish religious world was being turned upside down.

The establishment tried to fight back. With reason and logic, they fought for the law of their fathers. It didn't work. These uneducated, ignorant country folk ran rings around the professors. Worse still, they performed miracles which couldn't be ignored.

If rational argument cannot succeed, violence often comes next.

Jesus' followers were beaten. It made no difference. They even had the audacity to rejoice in sharing the

Stephen

sufferings of their Lord Jesus. They continued to preach, continued to dispute, continued to win and continued to convince many. The numbers of converts grew rapidly.

Stephen was one of the preachers, one of those who made life difficult for the leaders because his arguments could not be controverted. The Pharisees were uncomfortably reminded of Jesus and their attempts to best him in argument: it had never worked.

Paul was a Pharisee. A young man, but progressing quickly in his religion. Stephen disputed with many zealous Jews from many areas, including Cilicia, home to the town of Tarsus. His opponents did their best, but it was no good, so then they did their worst. Lies and false witnesses were used to bring a case against Stephen and he was dragged into court.

Paul was never involved in the shadier parts of the fight against the followers of Jesus. Paul had a conscience, and he did his best to always keep it clear. The law forbade false witnesses. Others did the dirty work.

The trial was a farce. No attempt was made to seek truth. Death was all they sought: death for Stephen. When his answers could not be gainsaid, they shouted with one voice and attacked him, dragging him out of the court and out of the city. A barrage of stones, and it was all over. Stephen was dead.

The zealous ones had taken off their cloaks to free up their arms for the work. A studious young man stood and

Paul In Snippets

watched over the pile of nice clean clothes, while Stephen was reduced to a bloodied and lifeless pile of clothing.

Saul – that is, Paul – approved.

Chapter 4

Persecuting believers

Acts 8:1-3; Acts 22:4, 19; Acts 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13; 1 Timothy 1:13

Stephen was dead, but the followers of Jesus did not give up.

Brave and godly men buried Stephen, and then they went about their business. They kept up the fight. It was never a physical fight; these followers of Jesus never fought their attackers, after that one lapse on the part of Peter during the arrest of Jesus. Jesus' words rang in their ears: "He who takes the sword will perish by the sword."¹ Their focus was salvation, offered to those who had been perishing but had chosen a new way of life following Jesus. So they

¹ Matthew 26:52

Paul In Snippets

followed him. To dungeons and death, to beatings and torture.

Paul joined in the persecution. He became the face of the relentless assault. He hounded the believers from house to house and from town to town. In prisons and synagogues, he did his best to make them suffer. He urged them to recant, and if they wouldn't, he cast his vote for the death sentence.

All over Judea and even to foreign cities, he mercilessly persecuted them in his madness against them.

Chapter 5

To Damascus

Acts 9:1-3; Acts 22:4-5, 19; Acts 26:9-11; Galatians 1:13-14

Synagogues in different countries had significant autonomy. Local elders settled local problems and there was little interference from the religious leadership in Jerusalem. But there was a central authority, and the chief priest could flex his muscles from time to time.

Paul had heard that the followers of Jesus had spread to many different cities and towns, and he was eager to apply his “methods” to believers in Damascus. The chief priest was all cooperation, and the letters were duly signed and handed over to Paul.

It took the best part of a week to travel to Damascus, and Paul was champing at the bit. He couldn’t wait to get

Paul In Snippets

his hands on the harmless, the innocent and the gentle. His attendants were baying for blood too.

Damascus was well in sight when the unthinkable happened. In a blinding flash, Paul met the man who simply had to be dead.

BOOK THREE
A New Life

Chapter 6

New Sight

Acts 9

A light from the sky changed everything for Paul.

Jesus had to be dead. But he wasn't.

Paul just had to be right, didn't he? But he wasn't.

The light, the voice, the commands. How could Paul deny Jesus when he had spoken to him? Darkness came after the light. It had all been too much for Paul's eyes. He was blind.

Led into Damascus by his attendants, he struggled to come to terms with the new situation. Jesus was alive. He couldn't deny that.

New Sight

But, oh! What had he done? The people he had persecuted: the beatings, imprisonment, torture and even death. What had he done? And now, what could he do?

Wrong, wrong, wrong. Everything he had been trying to do was wrong and he wrestled with his understanding and his conscience. Guilt for wrongs which could never be righted. Sorrow for the suffering inflicted on the innocent.

Paul could have given up. But he didn't. He could have denied that he had ever met Jesus and kept going with his plans in Damascus – except that he was blind.

Day by day in the house of Judas, Paul struggled, eating nothing and drinking nothing. Three days of blackness, but growing insight.

After three days, he was ready, and Jesus sent a believer to prove it hadn't been a dream and to keep nudging him along a new path.

Ananias heard of his task with dismay. He knew about Saul. He had heard of the letters he was carrying and the authority vested in him. Ananias was no fool: he did not want to go. But Jesus was gently insistent, explaining to him that Saul was expecting him – name and all.

Paul sat in his personal darkness, waiting for the knock to come. Would it come or was he going mad? But there it was, and the visitor was brought in and announced as “Ananias”. Laying his hands on Paul, he called him

Paul In Snippets

“brother” and spoke of the Lord Jesus who had appeared to Paul. He knew it all, thought Paul. How?

Immediately something seemed to fall off Paul’s eyes and he could see. What a difference a few days had made. If he had met this man a few days before he would have been trying to kill him, but now he was thanking him profusely and asking him to baptise him as the followers of Jesus were all baptised.

A new life was before him and new sight within him.



Paul did not waste time. Off to the synagogue he went, no embarrassment stopping him. People must be taught that Jesus was real, a living saviour.

Passages from the Hebrew scriptures now made perfect sense to him and he could argue them clearly with any opponents. In just the same way as Stephen had bested his enemies, Paul could now excel. Conviction was in his voice and his words told of a truth that made sense.

Chapter 7

Arabia

Galatians 1:17

Shortly after this, Paul went into Arabia and his understanding and faith continued to grow. After some time, he returned to Damascus.

Chapter 8

Back in Damascus

Acts 9:23-25; Galatians 1:17; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33

Back in Damascus, Paul's work prospered. Many opposed him, but none mastered him. He knew that Jesus was alive, and this truth about Jesus was spreading. After three years, his enemies took action and plotted to kill him.

Providentially, Paul heard of the plan and the other believers dreamed up a counter-plan. After the gates of Damascus were shut one night, Paul was let down over the walls in a large basket. It's not hard to imagine how disappointed his enemies were when they couldn't find him the next day.

Safely away under cover of darkness, Paul had escaped with his life as he would do many more times before his work was finished.

Back in Damascus

At this time, Paul had not met any of the leaders of the believers since his miraculous conversion. Jerusalem was the next place to visit.

Chapter 9

Jerusalem - Briefly

Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-19

Paul was not universally welcomed in Jerusalem. Believers were afraid of him and his erstwhile friends had heard the news of his conversion.

Barnabas made the difference with the believers – he was not called the “Son of Encouragement” for nothing. With his support, Paul was accepted into their fellowship. At this time, most of the leaders among the believers were not in Jerusalem, and Paul was only able to meet Peter (also called Cephas) and James, the half-brother of Jesus.

Nothing would make his old friends accept Paul. They saw him as a traitor, rather than as one who had found truth and was willing to admit he had been wrong.

Jerusalem - Briefly

After a couple of weeks they were plotting to kill Paul, so his visit to Jerusalem ended after only 15 days. He was happy to have met the brethren he had, but he would have preferred to meet more.

Escape, again.

Chapter 10

Return to Tarsus

Acts 9:30

Paul was hurried away to Caesarea, and from there he went to his home town. It would be some time before he revisited Jerusalem.

With Paul gone, the believers in Jerusalem were left in peace.

Chapter 11

Antioch in Syria

Acts 11:22-29; Galatians 2:1-3

It was about 13 years later that Barnabas and Paul met again. Preaching had spread the word about Jesus and some had started to speak to Greeks, not just Jews. The news was heard in Jerusalem, and Barnabas was sent to Antioch in Syria to see what was happening and make sure that nothing got out of control.

Barnabas worked his work of encouragement, and then went to Tarsus to see if he could involve Paul. Barnabas saw difficulties coming and saw opportunities for Paul to help.

It worked. Paul returned with Barnabas to Antioch and they spent a year working with the believers and teaching many others.

Paul In Snippets

During this time, a famine spread over the empire and believers in various places began to be in need. Believers can sometimes be believers only in name, but not this time. Collections were taken and everyone gave as much as they could. Soon there was enough money to be useful to the needy believers in Jerusalem.

Chapter 12

To Jerusalem with Donations

Acts 11:29-30; Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 12:1-25

Barnabas and Paul were chosen to take the donations and deliver them to Jerusalem. Another believer called Titus went with them. He was a Greek and some problems could be anticipated. As a Greek, he was not circumcised. This was a major problem for most Jews, even for many who were believers in Jesus.

Paul was pleased to go because he had received a revelation that he should go to Jerusalem and discuss the gospel he was preaching with the apostles. When they arrived he did so, and was very pleased to receive confirmation that the teachings all matched. The apostles had received them over the time spent with Jesus as disciples,

Paul In Snippets

while Paul had received them by a special appearance from Jesus, but they matched exactly.

One detail was emphasised: don't forget the poor, they said. Paul was very eager to agree – after all, hadn't he come to Jerusalem with a gift for the poor?

The apostles offered the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas and they parted brothers and fast friends.

While Paul and Barnabas were still in Jerusalem, a terrible tragedy happened. James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John, was killed by Herod Agrippa I. James wasn't the only one who was arrested, and many were badly mistreated while in prison. Herod saw that this pleased the enemies of Jesus and so he arrested Peter as well, intending to kill him after the Feast of Unleavened Bread had finished.

It was a very worrying time for Paul and Barnabas and the other believers, but on this occasion there was a miraculous answer to the prayers of many. Peter was freed from his prison cell and made his way to the house where the believers were gathered, praying. Despite the ongoing prayers, most of the believers did not really believe that such an answer to prayer would be given. Quite a lesson, really.

Interestingly, the meeting had been at the house of John Mark, who was Barnabas' cousin. He was eager to do some more travel and further preaching work with Barnabas, so when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, he went along too.

Chapter 13

Antioch Again

Acts 13:1-2

Back in Antioch once more, the friends got on with the work. However, they didn't only devote themselves to work. They devoted themselves to prayer and fasting as well, with the rest of the congregation.

While they were doing this, a special message came from the Holy Spirit. Barnabas and Paul were to be sent away on a special work, preaching the word of God in many new areas.

Where would it lead them?

BOOK FOUR
The First Missionary
Journey

Chapter 14

Setting off

Acts 13:3

All the brothers joined in a time of prayer and fasting, then laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them on their way.

John Mark went with them as well.

Although Paul did not know it at the time, this journey would become famous through subsequent history as the first of several preaching trips undertaken by Paul.

The first missionary journey had begun.

Chapter 15

Cyprus

Acts 13:4-12

Leaving Antioch, Barnabas, Paul and John Mark went to Seleucia to catch a ship and sail to Cyprus. Landing at Salamis, the preaching work began.

Paul had a method for preaching. If there was a Jewish synagogue in the place, he would go there on the Sabbath. While there, he would take any opportunity to talk about the good news of Jesus, using the scriptures and his own experience of Jesus. Visitors, particularly educated ones, would often be invited to speak or read, and Paul made the most of it. Sometimes, if he could interest people on a Sabbath, he would be able to talk to them on other days as well.

Cyprus

Town by town, they went through the island of Cyprus until they came to Paphos at the far end. News of their work had travelled and the proconsul wanted to hear the message from Barnabas and Paul. He was an intelligent man and Paul was enjoying explaining the gospel. However, there was also a Jewish magician and false prophet there who thought it was his job to stop the proconsul listening. Paul put up with this for a while, but then cursed the man and struck him with blindness in the name of the Lord. The proconsul was amazed and kept listening. The miracle achieved its purpose.

It was in Paphos that “Saul” changed to “Paul”. From then on, he was always called Paul.

Chapter 16

Antioch in Pisidia

Acts 13:13-52

A sad and disappointing thing happened after Paul and his companions left Paphos and sailed to Perga. John Mark left them and sailed home. Obviously, the stresses of such an uncertain task as preaching were more than he could bear. Paul and Barnabas could not give up so easily, and they headed north to Antioch in Pisidia.

Once again, the Sabbath found them in a synagogue, sitting down with the rest of the congregation. After the readings from the Law and the Prophets, they received a quick message from the synagogue officials, “If you have any words of encouragement for the people, please speak.” Paul stood up and motioned with his hand for silence.

Antioch in Pisidia

He spoke to them briefly of the history of Israel and how God had looked after them. Speaking of David, he referred to the offspring God had promised and introduced them to Jesus as the son of David. Crucifixion and resurrection completed his discourse, and the entire presentation was very well received. People begged them to come again the next Sabbath.

They did. So did almost the entire town, as news had been passed around about this new message. A perfect opportunity for all to hear about Jesus.

However, the Jewish leaders were less happy with the good turnout. Jealousy ate them up and they denied anything Paul and Barnabas said.

Paul and Barnabas responded with the simple message that it was necessary for Jews to have the first chance at salvation through Jesus, but that since they did not want the opportunity, it would go instead to the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were pleased and many believed, but the Jews stirred up some important men and women to start persecuting Paul and Barnabas until they could drive them away.

As Jesus had suggested to his disciples, Paul and Barnabas wiped the dust off their feet as a sign of rejection and moved on.

The new believers were left behind with a feeling of joy because of the salvation they had learned about.

Chapter 17

Iconium

Acts 14:1-5

Paul's standard procedure was followed again. Into the synagogue on the Saturday and speaking to the crowds. Jews and Gentiles listened together and many believed.

The Jews who did not believe stirred up the crowds – this was becoming a familiar situation – and drove them out of the synagogue.

Some believed and the city was divided. Amazing miracles were performed by Paul and Barnabas, and these helped to convince some.

Those who wouldn't listen and wouldn't believe got together and plotted to mistreat and stone them, but they heard about it early enough to escape to other towns.

Chapter 18

Lystra

Acts 14:6-20

Walking to Lystra, they continued preaching. By now they were quite familiar with the process that was played out each time. But this time was a little different.

A man who had never been able to walk sat and listened intently to Paul. Paul saw that he had faith to be healed and said, “Stand up on your feet.” Remember that this man had never walked in his life, so there would be all sorts of things stopping him, from weakness to fear. But he didn’t let any of those things put him off. He not only stood up, he leaped up and walked around.

Naturally enough, the crowd was amazed and they said in their local language that the gods had come down to earth. They meant Paul and Barnabas, and they called them

Paul In Snippets

by the names of Greek gods, which upset them greatly. It was spiralling out of control, with the priest of Zeus coming to offer sacrifices to them and bringing garlands of flowers with him.

Paul and Barnabas had to do some straight talking very quickly, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that they managed to stop the crowds worshipping them. Finally they tore their cloaks in despair, and that seemed to be what finally convinced the crowd they were serious.

You might think that if men could perform a miracle like this, they would also know how it was done. But the crowd wanted none of their explanation about a living God. Strange, really.

It was not long after this episode that troublemakers from Antioch and Iconium came on the scene. They won over the crowd (possibly still a little bit upset with what Paul had said about their gods), and stoned Paul. They thought he was dead and dragged him out of the city.

Maybe he was dead, but his work was not finished and when the disciples surrounded him, he stood up and went back into the city. A brave man indeed.

Now Paul had suffered as Stephen had, with the stones of hatred beating him down to the ground, but he survived to preach another day. Was this payment for his support for the stoning of Stephen? If so, he paid double, because he also had to suffer during the lengthy recuperation as the

Lystra

bruises and cuts slowly healed. Whatever the reason, Paul's suffering for Jesus had well and truly begun.

The next day, Paul and Barnabas left.

Chapter 19

Derbe

Acts 14:20-21

Derbe was yet another town where Paul could tell others about Jesus. Many heard his message and quite a few became disciples of Jesus as Paul and Barnabas were.

And then it was time to move on again, going back over their path to board a ship and return to Seleucia.

Chapter 20

Back to Antioch in Syria

Acts 14:21-26

Bravely, Paul returned to Lystra, and this time he was not stoned. Many disciples welcomed them and were encouraged by what they heard of the work in Derbe.

Paul encouraged them to remember that they could only enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation, but that it was worth it.

In each town as they passed through, they appointed some to be elders and leaders among the disciples, and joined with them in prayer and fasting before committing them to the Lord and leaving.

Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, Perga, Attalia, Antioch.

Paul In Snippets

The first missionary journey was complete and the disciples welcomed them back.

BOOK FIVE
Intermission

Chapter 21

Mission Report

Acts 14:27-28; Galatians 2:11-14; Acts 15:1-37

Paul and Barnabas were glad to be back, and as soon as they arrived, the believers met together to hear a report.

They told of the ears God had opened, the hearts of Gentiles touched through their words, and everyone rejoiced.

A door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles.

Paul and Barnabas stayed for a long time with the believers. After a while, Peter came to visit and joined in the fellowship of the believers, including meeting with the Gentiles who believed. Peter had already been shown in a vision that Gentiles were welcome, so it was nothing new to him.

Mission Report

Trouble came when some believers came from Jerusalem. These were very strict, very Jewish believers, and they did not want to welcome Gentiles at all. Peter tried to keep them happy, but Paul and Barnabas did not believe in appeasement when truth and salvation were at stake. Even Peter had to be told off and the stand-off was rather upsetting.

After long debate and arguments, it was decided that the whole matter should be discussed at a gathering of the leaders of the believers in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were appointed to represent the believers in Antioch, and Peter went with them to Jerusalem.

The situation did not look good.

Chapter 22

Conference in Jerusalem

Acts 15:3-29

Paul and Barnabas stopped in a few towns on the way, describing their experiences in preaching to the Gentiles and reporting the joy of salvation as it was accepted by these new believers. Everyone rejoiced at the news.

In Jerusalem, they were welcomed too, and many heard their reports with delight. But some believers, rather too attached to their old ways of life and beliefs, insisted that it was necessary to circumcise Gentiles and teach them to obey the law.

This, then, was the nub of the matter. This was the question which had brought them all together. The conference began with some review of the past, Peter telling of the initial preaching to the Gentiles which God had done

Conference in Jerusalem

through him. He insisted that God had shown them clearly that he made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but that both were offered salvation through faith in Jesus.

Next it was Paul and Barnabas' turn to report on their first missionary journey, and they stated clearly the miracles God had done through them and the hearers who had believed. You could have heard a pin drop through all of that time – everyone was amazed at the astonishing harvest of Gentiles.

James then spoke, and it was a critical time in the discussions. He pulled the threads together and came up with some practical suggestions of how the conflicts could be resolved if there was a will towards unity. There was, and it was agreed that the Gentiles should not be forced to keep the law, but rather that they should be encouraged to pay attention to some of the more fundamental rules of the law of Moses, which most Gentiles knew anyway.

Four related things he suggested the Gentiles must keep:

- Abstain from anything contaminated by idols
- Abstain from fornication
- Abstain from eating what is strangled, and
- Abstain from eating blood.

All the gathered believers agreed and a letter was written to be distributed to all of the groups of believers, whether

Paul In Snippets

they included Gentiles or not. Everyone needed to know this agreement.

The letter included an apology for the trouble caused by those who had come without authorisation and insisted on rules which were not to be enforced at all. Paul and Barnabas were vindicated. Peter was glad that the matter was sorted out, though it was a little embarrassing for him. Peter was always willing to graciously admit when he was wrong. What an admirable man!

BOOK SIX

The Second Missionary
Journey

Chapter 23

Arguments and Division

Acts 15:30-40

Returning from the conference in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas brought with them the letter and two representatives sent by the elders, one of whom was a prophet named Silas.

Once again, the believers were gathered together to hear a report, and once again they were wonderfully pleased with the encouraging message of the letter. Gentiles were welcome, circumcision was not required and keeping away from idols was a good thing anyway.

Silas was a good speaker and held the believers' attention throughout what was really quite a lengthy message.

Arguments and Division

Paul and Barnabas stayed for some time, teaching the believers and preaching to any who were not already believers. After a while, they both wanted to go back to visit the believers in all the places they had visited on their first missionary journey.

But there was a hitch. John Mark was back again, and Barnabas wanted to take him with them. Paul disagreed, strongly. It was not, he argued, a good idea to take with them someone who had let them down before. His argument was good – they needed helpers they could rely on. However, Barnabas was sure that John Mark had changed and grown up in his spiritual life.

The argument was fierce and no agreement could be found. In the end, Barnabas took John Mark and went home to Cyprus² to preach – a good way to encourage Mark, given that he had already been there before and knew what to expect. Paul took Silas and they walked north, having been committed to the grace of God by the believers.

Paul's second missionary journey had begun.

² Acts 4:36

Chapter 24

Through Syria and Cilicia

Acts 15:41; Acts 16:4-5

Paul and Silas travelled north through Syria and Cilicia, past Tarsus and on towards the towns where Paul and Barnabas had preached before.

Along the way, they met groups of believers and shared with them the letter sent with the conclusions of the conference in Jerusalem. Paul's wonderful ways of expressing the truths of the Bible strengthened the faith of the believers.

Chapter 25

Derbe and Lystra: Timothy

Acts 16:1-5

When Paul and Silas came to Derbe and then to Lystra, they met a new believer, a young man called Timothy. His mother was a Jew, but his father was a Greek, so he was not circumcised. With Timothy's agreement, Paul circumcised him because of the unbelieving Jews in the area, since they would not allow any contact with him if he was not circumcised. That would badly limit his opportunities of working with Paul and Silas, and his later chances of preaching to Jews, so it was the best answer.

Timothy was a marvellous young man who was very popular with all the believers in Lystra and Iconium.

Chapter 26

Limitations

Acts 16:6-10

Phrygia and Galatia were visited, but Paul and Silas were forbidden by the Holy Spirit from going into Asia. Jesus was controlling the preaching of his word, and Bithynia was excluded too. Arriving at Troas, Paul saw a vision in the night. A man, appealing to him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” How could they refuse what was so obviously a sign?

These areas could wait.

Macedonia must be visited next.

Chapter 27

Philippi

Acts 16:11-23

Paul and Silas caught a boat travelling to Neapolis, the port which would allow them to get to Philippi. It was a very quick trip, confirming that this was indeed the will of God. From Neapolis, they walked to Philippi, which was a Roman colony and a leading city in the area. There was no synagogue in the city, so Paul had to use a different plan.

After asking some questions, it appeared that there was a place outside the city, down by the river, where some believers in Judaism met to pray. On the Sabbath Paul and Silas went there, and the reports were true. Surprisingly, there were no men present, so Paul and Silas were asked to speak to the women assembled. One worshipper of God was there, a woman called Lydia from Thyatira, and she listened very carefully to everything that was said. The Lord

Paul In Snippets

opened her heart and she learned the gospel of Jesus. After she had been baptised, she invited Paul and Silas, and those who were travelling with them, to stay at her house. She was very eager to hear as much as she could about this new hope.

But problems are never far away when there are people who want to exploit others. A young slave-girl was being used by her masters to make money. A sickness in her mind was called a spirit of divination and she told people's fortunes. Paul and the others passed her every time they went to the place of prayer by the riverside, and every time she shouted to any who would listen that these men were telling people the way to be saved. Paul found this very frustrating and irritating. Surely people could listen and work things out for themselves? In the name of Jesus, he healed her. As a result, she could no longer do the fortune telling she had once done. Her masters were furious and dragged Paul and Silas before the authorities. Of course, there were no genuine charges they could bring, so they tried to link it to a religious objection against Paul's teachings. They worked up the crowd, and the magistrates as well, and soon Paul and Silas had their outer clothes torn off and were beaten with rods – many blows fell.

After that, they were thrown into the prison to think it over.

Chapter 28

The Jailer

Acts 16:23-34

Paul and Silas found themselves in the inner prison, feet held in the stocks and nothing to do but wait for the next morning.

With lacerated backs and their feet prevented from moving, the option of lying down was no pleasant thought. Lying on their backs would have been the only option, and the pain was just too great. As midnight crawled around, they were praying and singing hymns and the other prisoners were listening. A sudden earthquake, sent to do the work of God, and they were free to stand. All the other prisoners, too, were free to leave, their chains having miraculously come undone. But one man's advantage is another man's problem, and the jailer was not going to be happy. These prisoners were his responsibility. He rushed

Paul In Snippets

in, saw the situation at a glance and snatched out his sword, planning to kill himself before the magistrates did.

Paul had a loud voice when he needed it, and he used it all that night, shouting to the jailer that he did not need to kill himself since all the prisoners were still there.

God's work is done by earthquakes, visions and many other means. A vision had brought Paul and Silas to Philippi, and now an earthquake had given salvation to the jailer and his family. The jailer was baptised that night.

Chapter 29

Leaving Philippi

Acts 16:35-40

Morning came and the magistrates considered Paul and Silas' case again. In the cold light of day, it seemed that enough punishment had been meted out, and they sent a message to the jailer to let the two men go.

Paul refused to go.

Now was the time to play the citizenship card. Now it could be used to guarantee protection from persecution for the small group of new believers. The magistrates had made a bad mistake when they beat Paul and Silas – both of whom were Roman citizens. Quickly, they hurried to the jail and tried to placate the men who could cause a lot of trouble if they chose to.

Paul In Snippets

Paul was quite happy to go and had no wish to cause trouble, as long as he could be confident that the believers would be left alone.

Paul could have used his citizenship to protect himself the day before. Instead he used it to protect his new children in the faith.

After a short meeting of encouragement, Paul and Silas walked out of Philippi.

Chapter 30

Thessalonica

Acts 17:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 2:18

From Philippi through Amphipolis and Apollonia to Thessalonica went Paul and Silas. There they found a synagogue, so Paul could follow his normal custom of visiting the synagogue on the Sabbath.

For three Sabbaths he discussed the scriptures with those who attended, explaining that Jesus had to die and rise again and that he was the Christ, the anointed king.

Some Jews, some God-fearing Greeks and some leading women were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, but others were jealous. Trouble-makers helped them form a mob and an uproar began.

In the end, everything calmed down, but not before one of the new believers, Jason by name, had been compelled to

Paul In Snippets

give a pledge of good conduct – in this case, a pledge that Paul would leave and not come back.

Paul and Silas left by night.

Chapter 31

Berea

Acts 17:10-14

Berea was their next haven, and it proved to be a nice safe haven for a while. There were many people in Berea who wanted to hear Paul's message and check whether it was true or not. This noble attitude made Paul's job much easier, until the Jews of Thessalonica heard that Paul was in Berea.

They came at once, agitating and stirring up the crowds, and once again, Paul moved on. He was taken straight to the sea, where he boarded a ship bound for Athens.

Silas and Timothy remained in Berea.

Chapter 32

Paul in Athens

Acts 17:16-34

Paul had asked for Silas and Timothy to come to him at Athens and had intended to stay quiet until they came. But it just wasn't possible. How could he say nothing when he was in a city that was full of idols?

He could reason with the people at the synagogue, but what about all the others?

He started talking to people in the market places, arguing with any who would listen. Philosophers revelled in the opportunity, and they soon brought him to the Areopagus to speak before many others – important people all.

Paul in Athens

Paul chose to speak about an altar he had seen marked “To An Unknown God”, a sort of catch-all to make sure no deities felt left out.

Paul took the opportunity to tell them about the God they didn't know, a living God who does not live in temples and does not need any to serve him to keep him well fed. Paul presented to them the creator of heaven and earth, maker of mankind, and he presented his son Jesus Christ, once dead but raised to life.

Some sneered, but others listened.

Paul left, but one of the members of the Areopagus followed him, along with some others.

Chapter 33

Corinth

Acts 18:1-18

Paul went next to Corinth, where he met a couple who would be his close friends from then on. Aquila and his wife Priscilla were Jews, and they were also tent-makers as Paul was.

Every Saturday, Paul went to the synagogue and the normal pattern played out again. After a while Silas and Timothy came, and Paul devoted himself entirely to preaching, instead of trying to fit in work as a tent-maker as well. Some in the synagogue believed and joined Paul. Others resisted. Paul withdrew and went again to the Gentiles.

Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, believed Paul, and later his replacement Sosthenes did the same. Many were

Corinth

believing and being baptised, but still it was there in Corinth that Paul reached one of his lowest ebbs. Fear was within and fear was without, and Paul was finding it hard to keep going.

Jesus spoke to him in a vision by night and told him not to be afraid, but to keep speaking to everyone. Jesus gave him a guarantee that no-one would harm him and that many in the city would believe.

Paul took hold of his courage and kept going.

He stayed for one year and six months before there was an attempt to attack him, but it was unsuccessful and Paul was able to stay safely for many days longer.

The promise of protection was fulfilled, but it was time to move on again.

Chapter 34

Cenchrea

Acts 18:18

Cenchrea is one of the ports of Corinth, and as Paul was leaving, he cut his hair in fulfilment of a vow.

But it was time to leave and he was eager to get home to Antioch. He had been away for several years.

Chapter 35

Back to Antioch

Acts 18:18-22

Cenchrea, Ephesus, Caesarea, Antioch.

Paul was in a hurry, and when they asked him to stay longer in Ephesus he refused.

At Caesarea he greeted the believers, and then he went to Antioch.

The second missionary journey was complete.

BOOK SEVEN
Intermission

Chapter 36

Time in Antioch in Syria

Acts 18:23

Paul stayed some time in Antioch in Syria, but then he was back on the road again. North through the interior again and round the corner past Tarsus.

BOOK EIGHT
The Third Missionary
Journey

Chapter 37

Galatia and Phrygia

Acts 18:23

Paul travelled into Galatia and Phrygia and did his best to strengthen all of the believers. This was a task Paul considered vital. Believers should never be left to wither, their faith dying a slow death without support. Paul knew this and he lived it.

Chapter 38

Ephesus

Acts 19:1-20:1

Aquila and Priscilla had been busy in Ephesus, teaching a man named Apollos about the truth in Jesus, since he knew only about John the Baptist. After his learning was sufficient, he went on to Corinth and supported the believers there.

Meanwhile, Paul came to Ephesus and found twelve believers there who had not met Aquila and Priscilla, for they knew only the baptism of John, in much the same way as Apollos had done.

Paul explained to them that John the Baptist had come to announce the coming of Jesus and that Jesus had come and provided a better baptism – one into his name as the only begotten son of God. The twelve accepted his teaching

Ephesus

and were baptised into the name of Jesus. After their baptism, Paul laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Three months were then spent by Paul speaking in the synagogue, persuading people about the kingdom of God. As usual, some began to speak evil about The Way, so Paul withdrew with the disciples and they discussed their faith every day for two years in the school of a man called Tyrannus. By this time, anyone with open ears had heard the message about Jesus.

Miracles were common with Paul. He often cured the sick and sometimes people would even take handkerchiefs or aprons which he had touched and take them to sick people who would then get better.

Some Jewish fakes wanted to have some of the glory of doing miracles. They took to healing people by announcing the “name of Jesus whom Paul preaches”. On one occasion, they got what they deserved, when a man admitted to knowing Jesus and Paul and their power, but having no recognition of those fakes. He jumped on them and beat them severely.

Sometimes the results of preaching were unexpected. After all the miracles of Paul and the disastrous beatings of the fakes, many who practiced magic were convinced that Paul was right. They collected their valuable books of magic and started a bonfire in the sight of everyone. Books of

magic may sell for a high price, but they have no real value at all.



Money and religion are a dangerous mix.

While Paul was in Ephesus, the makers of silver shrines of Artemis became upset because they felt their income was declining. Paul, they said, was to blame, and they got up a mob to prove it.

The objection was couched in religious terms, with great respect being shown to Artemis, but in truth, it was their livelihoods that were important to them.

Two hours is a very long time for a massive crowd to keep shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians”, and it was a terrifying time.

Eventually the city clerk was able to get the right mix of threats and cajoling to calm the situation and everything went back to normal.

Once again, it was time for Paul to move on.

Chapter 39

Macedonia and Greece

Acts 20:1-6

Leaving Ephesus, Paul went on to Macedonia, going though all the districts he had visited before and encouraging any believers he met.

He continued on to Greece and spent three months there, but a plot against him forced him to abandon his plan to sail for Syria, and instead he went back through Macedonia. Luke was with him, but his other travelling companions had already travelled to Troas, waiting for him there.

After the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Paul and Luke left Philippi for Troas, a much slower trip than the speedy traversal made after Paul had seen the vision of a man from Macedonia, begging for help.

Chapter 40

Troas

Acts 20:6-13

Arriving at Troas, Paul caught up with his travelling companions: Sopater and the son of Pyrrhus from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus the Thessalonians; Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. Paul often had quite a few people travelling with him and they were often sent to do things he could not spare the time to attend to.

After seven days, it was the first day of the week and Paul was to leave on the following morning. Everyone was eager to hear a message from him and whenever he started to slow down, he was encouraged to continue. It was stuffy in the upper room and a young man called Eutychus fell asleep. That must have been a little embarrassing for the rest of his life, but for a while it was tragic. He fell out of the window,

Troas

and by the time anyone could get down to him, he was dead. It was a great blessing that Paul was there, for he bent over the lad and embraced him, then reassured the crowd that he was not dead. Not any longer. That made all the believers so happy that they asked Paul to continue and he kept talking until daybreak. No-one else fell out of the window.

Chapter 41

Miletus and the Elders of Ephesus

Acts 20:13-38

From Troas, Paul walked to Assos, while the rest of his companions went by ship. From there, they all went to Mitylene and then Miletus.

Paul did not want to stop at Ephesus because it would slow him down and he was eager to get to Jerusalem by Passover if possible.

From Miletus, he sent for the elders of Ephesus and they came to him. He gave them a message of sober warning, reinforcing what his attitude to them had been over the three years he had spent with them, and reminding them that now they must stand on their own. None of them would see his face again, he warned. He warned them about

Miletus and the Elders of Ephesus

false believers, ones who would behave like savage wolves among a flock of defenceless sheep, and said that these would come from their own midst. A sobering message indeed.

There was a lot of weeping and embracing, but finally they accompanied Paul to the ship and then returned to Ephesus.

Chapter 42

On to Jerusalem

Acts 21:1-17

Changing ships at Patara, Paul and his companions landed at Tyre and stayed there seven days with the disciples.

There, a warning was given to Paul that trouble awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul had already told the Ephesian elders that he had no choice about going to Jerusalem – he was bound in the Spirit to do so. Nevertheless, it was a worrying warning.

At the end of the allotted time, Paul left, after all the believers had gathered on the beach and knelt in prayer.

Back on the ship, the company travelled to Ptolemais and the next day to Caesarea, where a prophet named Agabus gave an inspired warning that Paul would be bound

On to Jerusalem

and handed over to the Gentiles. Many tried to discourage him from continuing, but Paul was immovable.

Eventually, the believers acknowledged: “The Lord’s will be done.”

From Caesarea to Jerusalem and then the third missionary journey was complete. What awaited Paul in Jerusalem?

BOOK NINE
Jerusalem and Caesarea

Chapter 43

Attacked in Jerusalem

Acts 21:18-22:29

Paul was back in Jerusalem. Since his conversion, he had spent very little time at this centre of Jewish life. His life had been spent in travelling, preaching, teaching and supporting, but now his freedom was coming to an end.

Everyone was glad to see him, and eager to hear the news of his latest work. But they were also a little concerned that there could be trouble because of the reports about Paul's abandonment of the Jewish law. A plan was put in place to show the doubters that Paul was just as much a follower of the law as anyone else. Rites of purification were required by some of the brethren and the idea was to have Paul go along as well and pay their expenses. This was to take seven days.

Paul In Snippets

When the seven days were almost completed, the trouble broke like a storm. Some Jews from Asia recognised Paul as a hated enemy. Not only that, but they had seen Trophimus from Ephesus in the city with Paul, and jumped to the completely wrong conclusion that he had entered the temple. They rushed around and shouted and caused all the trouble they could until the whole temple area was in an uproar.

Their main hope was to kill Paul, but the commander of the Roman garrison came at an opportune time and they were forced to hand over Paul before they could kill him.

Paul saw an opportunity to speak to the crowd, so he asked the commander for permission. It was granted and Paul spoke. He told of his conversion, explaining how there could be no doubt that Jesus was alive, and the crowd listened enraptured. Then he added the words of Jesus, "Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles." That did it. Cloaks and dust filled the air along with shouts demanding his death. If the Roman soldiers had not carried Paul up the stairs into the barracks, it is unlikely he would have got there in one piece.

The commander wanted to find out what the cause of the disturbance was, so he had Paul stretched out with ropes in preparation for scourging. Paul enquired politely whether it was lawful to scourge a Roman citizen. It wasn't, and the supervisor quickly spoke to his commander in forceful terms. "Be careful what you do! He is a Roman

Attacked in Jerusalem

citizen.” After to-ing and fro-ing Paul was released from the ropes, but kept in custody until the next day.

Chapter 44

Before the Council

Acts 22:30-23:11

The chief priests and all the council were gathered to hear Paul the next day. Paul claimed to have a clear conscience before God, and the chief priest in anger ordered him to be struck on the mouth.

Paul recognised that the easiest way to handle the council was to divide it. And the easiest way to divide it was to mention the old problem: resurrection. Pharisees accepted resurrection, but Sadducees did not. It worked, and the council was more interested in arguing amongst themselves than in examining Paul.

The argument grew and the commander was afraid it would escalate out of control, so he sent his troops to get Paul and carry him off to the barracks.

Before the Council

That night, Paul saw Jesus, who told him that he must be a witness to Jesus in Rome.

Chapter 45

To Caesarea by Night

Acts 23:12-33

Next day, the Jews came up with a plot. Clever and simple, but doomed to failure.

More than forty men vowed to refuse food until they had killed Paul.

The plan was to notify the commander that the council wanted to examine Paul again, but when he was sent to the council, he would be murdered on the way.

Somehow, the son of Paul's sister heard of the plan and passed it on to Paul, who asked a centurion to take the young man to the commander. After hearing of the plot, the commander made some quick plans. It was a massive overreaction, but it worked.

To Caesarea by Night

Two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen sent to rush Paul to Caesarea to the governor with a note which was almost true, but claimed a little more credit for the commander than was really justified.

By night, they went to Antipatris, and the following day, the horsemen continued with him to Caesarea.

This story cannot tell whether the plotters kept their vows. If they did, they died, for Paul was safely in Caesarea.

Chapter 46

Tried by Felix

Acts 23:34-24:27

Felix was the Roman governor, and now he had to solve the problem of Paul. But he didn't.

Five days after the night-time escape, the high priest Ananias was in Caesarea with some heavyweight officials and a very clever attorney named Tertullus.

Tertullus tried to butter up the governor and criticise the commander, but in the end, it was Paul's turn to speak. Paul took the opportunity to preach about the Way, including resurrection and judgement, before concluding that all the charges were trumped-up nonsense.

Felix put the entire issue on hold. He hoped that Paul would pay a bribe, and left him in prison for two years.

Tried by Felix

Even after two years in prison, Paul would still not pay the bribe.

Chapter 47

Tried by Festus

Acts 24:34-25:27

Two years in prison for doing nothing wrong. God's plans are hard to fathom sometimes.

Finally, Festus replaced Felix as the Roman governor, and inherited the problem of Paul.

He went to Jerusalem and the Jews asked that Paul be sent to Jerusalem for trial, planning again to kill him on the way.

Festus refused and after about ten days went back to Caesarea and waited for the Jews to come before him.

They came.

Festus was not really interested in justice. He wanted to do the Jews a favour. Paul was disposable in his eyes.

Tried by Festus

A Roman citizen could appeal to have his case heard by Caesar, and in the end, Paul felt compelled to do this. Jesus had already said he must travel to Rome, so this was no real surprise.

Chapter 48

Tried before Agrippa II

Acts 25:23-26:32

Festus decided to hear Paul again. It didn't seem to him completely fair to send a prisoner to Caesar without having any information about the charge against him.

Agrippa was King over various areas in and around the land of Israel, and Bernice was his sister, or maybe his wife, or maybe both. The Roman kings weren't so very particular about this, and Agrippa was happy to agree with them.

Paul told the story of his conversion once more and spoke of repentance, resurrection and hope.

All the hearers agreed that Paul could have been set free – if only he had not appealed to Caesar.

BOOK TEN

Journey to Rome

Chapter 49

Shipwreck

Acts 27

Paul and some other prisoners bound for Rome were entrusted to a centurion called Julius, who arranged a passage on a ship from Adramyttium which was to sail along the coast of Asia. It was a dangerous time of year for sailing and the first stages of the voyage were very slow.

The Day of Atonement had passed, and normally ships would be getting ready to stay over winter in a safe harbour.

But the pilot and the captain of the ship did not want to wait. An entire crew, sitting idle for longer than absolutely necessary? A waste indeed. Take the risk. Paul warned them, but who would listen to a tent-maker when there are expert seamen at hand?

Shipwreck

They struggled on, sailing close along Crete, hoping to get a little further before wintering. A storm caught up with them and the ship was tossed around like a cork in the maelstrom. Fourteen days the storm raged and on the fourteenth night the crew began to get worried that they were approaching land. The water was getting more and more shallow, and the night was dragging on.

Eventually day came, and hope with it. A bay with a beach. The pilot aimed, but his skill could not match the savagery of the waves, and the ship was caught on a reef and battered to pieces.

The soldiers had an idea. Kill the prisoners and let everyone else make for shore. But Julius had other ideas, and soon everyone was making for shore on pieces of the ship.

Paul had predicted that no-one would die.

All reached land safely.

Chapter 50

Malta

Acts 28:1-10

Safely ashore, the ship's company found that the island was called Malta. The people living there looked after them very kindly, lighting a fire and helping to keep them warm.

Paul was helping to collect sticks, when a viper came out because of the heat and bit his hand. He shook the creature into the fire, and thought no more of it. Had not Jesus promised that deadly snakes would not hurt his disciples?

The people of the island had no such faith.

They saw crude justice in the serpent's fangs and waited for Paul to suffer. When nothing happened, they changed their minds and called him a god.

Malta

Paul knew the God who was in control, and he taught the people of the island as much as he could in the three months they waited before travelling on in another ship.

BOOK ELEVEN

Rome

Chapter 51

To the End

Acts 28:16-31

On to Rome to stand before the emperor. Paul spent two years in Rome on his first visit.

Subsequently, he was freed – he had no real charges to answer – and is believed to have travelled again, possibly to places like Spain.

After a while, he was arrested again, and this time there was no escape.

Paul is believed to have died in Rome, executed with a sword.

A courageous end to a life of tireless service to the master who would not let him go.

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