



# MAIN COMMENTARIES ON 'ROMANS'

## WHO IS ST. PAUL?

The Holy Apostle Paul was born in the city of Tarsus, in modern-day Turkey (Acts 21:39). He was a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5), and was a member of a wealthy family who were citizens of the Roman Empire (Acts 22:25, 27). His Hebrew name was Saul, but he was also called by the Latin name Paulus (which we know as Paul) (Acts 13:9).

St. Paul is believed to have been average looking, and not a particularly good public speaker: some of his critics described him by saying, "His bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Corinthians 10:10). Basil Eleftheriou describes the Apostle:

*Tradition has it that he was baldheaded, bow-legged, strongly built, of small size and stature, with meeting eyebrows, rather large nose but full of grace which, at times gave him the appearance of man but at other times, he had the face of an angel. But behind such an unattractive exterior lay the physical nature of a lion which gave him the stamina to endure the most severe of strains, and a soul full of grace.*

St. Paul traveled to Jerusalem to study theology and law under the famous rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Despite the fact that Gamaliel refused to persecute the early Christians (Acts 5:34-39), St. Paul at first viewed the Christians as a threat that needed to be destroyed. The Apostle first appears in Acts 7:58, where he guarded the clothes of the men who killed St. Stephen; he went on to make "havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3).

When St. Paul was traveling to Damascus (the modern-day home of the Patriarchate of Antioch) to capture Christians in the city, Jesus appeared to him in a vision and said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (Acts 9:5). After this vision, the Apostle was blinded until he was healed in Damascus by St. Ananias (9:17-18). St. Paul was then baptized, and began to preach about Christ throughout Damascus (9:18-21).

St. Paul spent three years in inner Arabia (Galatians 1:17). We do not know exactly what he did during this time, but the Church traditionally teaches that he spent most of his time meditating and praying by himself. This is probably why he said that he was not taught the Gospel message by any human, but instead received the Gospel directly from Jesus through revelation (1:12). He was then introduced to the other Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-28), and he later joined St. Barnabas in Antioch (11:25-26).

It was in Antioch, approximately 48-49 AD, that St. Paul began his first great missionary journey (Acts 13-14). He and Ss. Barnabas and Mark traveled to Cyprus (where they converted the proconsul, Sergius Paulus) and Pamphylia, and then he and St. Barnabas traveled to Pisidia and Lycaonia. In Lystra, a town in Lycaonia, Ss. Paul and Barnabas were mistakenly believed by the townspeople to be Mercury and Jupiter, two of the major Roman gods (14:8-18); St. Paul later barely survived being stoned by the people (14:19).

In approximately 49-50 AD, Ss. Paul and Barnabas attended the Council in Jerusalem, where the Apostles decided that converts to Christianity did not need to be circumcised in fulfillment of the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1-35).

In approximately 50-52 AD, Ss. Paul and Silas went on St. Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22). They traveled through Syria and Cilicia, and in Lystra - where a few years earlier St. Paul was nearly killed - they met St. Timothy (16:1-3). They then went through Phrygia and Galatia, and later into Macedonia (after St. Paul experienced a vision telling him to go there) (16:9). In Philippi Ss. Paul and Silas met and baptized St. Lydia, and then were briefly imprisoned and beaten for their faith (16:23-40). They traveled to Thessalonica and Athens, where St. Paul gave a famous speech at the Areopagus about worshipping the one true God (17:19-24). Finally, St. Paul spent one and one-half years in Corinth, where he lived with Ss. Aquila and Priscilla (18:1-22). On his way back to Antioch, St. Paul briefly stopped in Ephesus.

St. Paul's third missionary journey occurred approximately 53-57 AD (Acts 18:23-21:16). He spent approximately three years in Ephesus, where his preaching persuaded many people who practiced magic to burn their expensive books (19:19). He traveled through Macedonia and Greece; it was during his three months in Greece that he wrote his Epistle to the Romans (see Romans 15:25-26). He then journeyed back to Jerusalem to deliver to the church there money that had been donated by the Macedonians.

On his trip to Jerusalem St. Paul stopped in Caesarea, where St. Agabus prophesied that he would be captured and delivered in chains to the Gentiles (Acts 21:11). A mob attacked St. Paul in the Temple in Jerusalem, but he was rescued by Roman soldiers and taken back to Caesarea (21:27-23:33). During a trial before the governor of Judea, Porcius Festus (and later King Herod Agrippa II), St. Paul claimed his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before Caesar: he was then taken to Rome (25:11-12).

St. Paul was briefly shipwrecked off the Island of Malta during his journey to Rome (Acts 27:41-28:1), but he eventually arrived safely and spent two years under house arrest (28:30) before eventually being freed. He then traveled to Spain, but soon returned to the churches in Macedonia and Ephesus (where he consecrated St. Timothy a bishop). On Crete he consecrated St. Titus a bishop, and then moved on through Epirus before returning to Rome.

St. Paul was beheaded by Roman soldiers on the Ostia highway in Rome in approximately 64 AD; he is traditionally believed to have been martyred on the same day that the Holy Apostle Peter was crucified on Vatican Hill. St. Paul was approximately sixty years old when he died.

St. Paul shares a feast day with St. Peter on June 29<sup>th</sup>.