



Part 31: Act Two: Paul

Word ALIVE



Paul and Barnabas



Background Notes -

PURPOSE: Of all of the dogmatic issues that the Church has had to hammer through the centuries to this day, the first such major issue is already found in the Acts of the Apostles: the role of Judaism in the Church, the New Israel. Through Peter and especially Paul, the Gospel was taken to the Gentile world, starting in Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world, to different cities, to Rome, the center of the pagan world, from which it would spread to the ends of the earth.

AUTHOR: Luke the Evangelist, a companion of Paul.

DATE: Acts was probably written between 80 and 90 AD.

STYLE: Luke is a physician but also a historian. The style here is the same as the Gospel that bears his name, chronicling events in an organized fashion.



Opening Quotes

“The Holy Spirit had not as yet come down upon any of them since they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Ac 9:16

“The Church was being built up and was making steady progress in the fear of the Lord; at the same time it enjoyed the increased consolation of the Holy Spirit.” Ac 9:31

“I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality.” Ac 10:34

“Peter was detained in prison, while the church prayed fervently to God on his behalf.” Ac 12:5

“Now I know that the Lord sent his angel to rescue me from Herod’s clutches and from all that the Jews hoped for.” Ac 12:11

“The Gentiles responded to the word of the Lord with praise. All who were destined for life everlasting believed in it.” Ac 13:48

“Their disciples knew only how to be filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.” Ac 13:52

“We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God.” Ac 14:22

“It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too, not to lay on you any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary.” Ac 15:28

“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I am Jesus of Nazareth whom you are persecuting.” Ac 22:7

the BIG PICTURE		← : LAW, History, Writings, Prophets		← : key covenants in our Father’s plan	
12 Periods ▼	Plot ▼	Other books related to period ▼		stories in each period ▼	
BC	☉ THE BEGINNINGS	GN 1-11	Ps 8, 104	Creation, Adam & Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah’s ark, Tower of Babel	
1850	♠ THE PATRIARCHS	GN 12-50		Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, Melchizedek	
1250	⚠ EXODUS FROM EGYPT	EX		Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, passover, exodus	
1200	♣ JOURNEY TO CANAAN	NM, Jos	LV, DT	Sinai desert, 10 commandments, Levites, Law, Joshua	
1100	☠ THE JUDGE CYCLE	Jg	Ruth	12 tribes, Gideon, Samson, Ruth, Samuel	
1030	☆ KINGS & PROPHETS	1 & 2 S	1 Ch, Ps, Prov	Saul, David, Solomon, Jerusalem, the Temple	
1000	■ THE DIVIDED KINGDOM	1 Kg	2 Ch, Prov,	Israel (N), Judah (S), Elijah & Elisha, Isaiah, Assyrian exile	
721 587	☉ BABYLONIAN EXILE	2 Kg	2 Ch, Tob, Hos, Am, Hab, Is, Jer, Lam, Jl, Mic, Zp, Jon, Nah, Ob, Ez, Dan, Bar	Babylonians, “major” prophets, Isaiah (to Israel), Jeremiah (to Jerusalem), Ezekiel (to the Exiles)	
538	⚙ THE RESTORATION	Ezr, Neh	Est, Judith, Hag, Zech, Mal, Job, Ecc, Songs	Cyrus, 2 nd temple, 2 nd Law, “minor” prophets, new writings	
163 63	🕯 THE REPURIFICATION	1 Mac	Dn, 2Mac, Sirach, Wisdom	Greeks, Maccabean revolt, Hasmonean Dynasty, Romans, Jewish sects (Pharisees, Saducees, Zealots, Essenes)	
AD	♠☩ JESUS CHRIST	LK	MT, MK, JN	Incarnation, Good News, New Law, Cross & Resurrection	
33 70	🕯 APOSTOLIC CHURCH	Acts	Rm, 1&2Co, Ga, Ep, Phil, Col, 1&2Th, 1&2 Tm, Ti, Phm, Hb, Ja, 1P, 2P, 1,2&3J, Jd, Rv	Pentecost, council, journeys, epistles, Body/Bride of Christ	



The Story of Part 31: Act Two: Paul



Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew and one of the first deacons of the Church, followed Peter's footsteps in boldly proclaiming the Gospel. This landed him his own audience with the Sanhedrin. When he said "I see an opening in the sky, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand," the Jews had had enough of this Jesus talk. They took him outside and stoned him to death. He followed the footsteps of his Master, Jesus Christ, first by saying as he was dying, "Forgive them, they know not what they do," and, "Into your hands I commend my spirit." And so one of the first deacons of the Church became the first martyr.

One of the first Pharisees who accepted the killing of Stephen was a Jew named Saul of Tarsus. He was peculiar in that he was not just a Jew and a Pharisee, but by circumstance also a Roman citizen. Well versed both in Hebrew and Greek, he began heavily persecuting this new sect of Jews who were following Christ.

On his road to Damascus to persecute more followers of Christ, a bright light knocked him off of his horse. Jesus spoke directly to him: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?" even though Saul was persecuting Jesus' *followers*. Christ had formed his followers into his own mystical body on earth. When the apostles received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, this mystical body of Christ was given its soul, got up, and began walking around. When Saul was baptized, he not only became incorporated into the mystical body of Christ, but became its most ardent and outspoken evangelist.

Of course, when Paul returned to Jerusalem, the apostles were afraid of him! It took some time for them to believe his conversion. Eventually he began freely walking around Jerusalem, proclaiming to Hebrew- and Greek- speaking Jews, both who wanted to kill him for accepting Jesus! But the Spirit was with him and the whole Church, and there was relative peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.

It was brought to the apostles' attention that a Hellenistic Jew named Philip had started a Church in Samaria and was performing miracles like their own. Peter and John went to visit him and laid hands on him, apostolically confirming and authenticating the work that was being done by Philip.

At this point an unforeseen situation came up. A Roman centurion named Cornelius expressed his desire to be baptized. What would the apostles do? This was not a Jew! When the circumcised (Jewish) followers began hearing some of the uncircumcised (not Jewish!) followers speaking in tongues, Peter realized that they had received the Holy Spirit, so he felt compelled to baptize the Roman centurion, since God was showing no partiality. And so a Gentile was baptized!

King Herod, the Jewish puppet king of Rome, then began a persecution of the Church that landed Peter in jail. When Peter was miraculously rescued by an angel,

he came to see his freedom from Herod as a sign that it was time to take the Gospel to the Gentile world.

But it would not be Peter who would be called the great Apostle to the Gentiles. That title is reserved to Paul. After being constantly rejected by Jews himself, Paul boldly declared that since they were thus convicting themselves unworthy of everlasting life, he would turn to the Gentiles. When the Gentiles heard the word of the Lord, they received it with praise! The apostles approved and sent Barnabas to assist him. After being kicked out by Jews who rejected Jesus, Paul and Barnabas went to another town, rejoicing that they, too, had been persecuted for Jesus' sake!

At this point dissension arose in the Church as to whether circumcision was still necessary. A council had to be held to settle this tricky issue. This was the first council of the Church, the Council of Jerusalem. After much debating, Peter took the floor and affirmed that God had spoken to the Gentiles through him, and why should they now impose unnecessary restrictions of the Jewish Law on Gentile converts? Paul and Barnabas added to this reports of how favorably the Gentiles received the Gospel. The apostle James then spoke up and suggested that a minimum of a couple of Jewish precepts should be kept for the Jewish converts' sake, but that circumcision, in keeping with Peter's decision, should not be enforced. A letter was sent to the different local churches pronouncing this first apostolic decree.

The remainder of Acts focuses on Paul, who would embark on three world-changing missionary journeys, establishing churches, and writing letters of instruction. Persecuted and imprisoned like Peter, Paul was rescued from his chains by miraculous intervention. God intended for His "Apostle to the Gentiles" to take advantage of his background as a Pharisee and as a Roman citizen to bring God-fearing Jews and Gentiles into the Church. He showed Jews that Jesus was the Son of David they awaited, and he showed the pagans that Jesus was the "unknown god" that some of them looked for. His journeys were marked by a dramatic series of events. He was shipwrecked three times. In one city, a group of listeners mistook him to be a god himself! In another city he restored to life a man who had fallen off of a balcony after falling asleep during one of his sermons!

The letters Paul would send to these local churches during his journeys would one day become the bulk of our New Testament. Sometimes they commend the faith of believers, sometimes they clarify Christian doctrine to newcomers, and other times they strongly exhort communities for lapsing in the faith. Other letters were addressed to Timothy, an elder he installed at a Church before he died (martyred, like Peter, in Rome). To Paul's letters we now turn.



Defending the Faith: Salvation Outside the Church

"If you don't go to my Church, you go to hell!"

The Church Fathers repeatedly said "Outside the Church there is no salvation." Pope Boniface even went so far as to say in his decree *Unam Sanctam*, "It is necessary for every human being's salvation to be subject to the Roman pontiff." These words make it sound like the Catholic Church does what so many other churches and cults still do – damn anyone who does not belong. A careful reading of the text and a little history will clear up this misconception.

Taken word for word, *Unam Sanctam* does not damn anyone. It doesn't even say that anyone has to *submit* to the Pope. What it says is that we are *subject* to him out of necessity. For example, we may not submit to our country's laws and leaders, but we are still *subject* to them, whether we like or not. In the same way, you may not freely submit to the Pope, but like it or not, as a Christian, you are a member of the flock that Christ commissioned Peter to oversee as its shepherd (Jn 21:15-17). Christ even gave Peter the "keys to the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:19). What does this mean, aside from all the jokes that start "A guy dies and sees St. Peter at the gates of heaven..."? Obviously, Peter is not our judge – Jesus is. What authority, then, does the Church have over us?

Christ told his apostles "As the Father sent me so I send you," and "He who hears you hears me." In a word, we are subject to the *teaching* authority ("magisterium") of the Church. The Church was commissioned from the outset to proclaim the Good News, forgive sins, baptize all the nations, and *teach* everything that Jesus commanded. To disregard Church teaching is to effectively disregard Christ's teaching.

Being saved from the beginning meant accepting Christ and therefore being incorporated into his mystical body, the Church. This was a *visible* community of believers, a "communion of saints," as Paul called the first churches, in communion with the universal Church which was centered in Jerusalem before it moved right into Rome, the heart of the Empire that persecuted it. History also reminds us that at the time of *Unam Sanctam*, there were no Protestant Churches yet, and the Orthodox Churches were all but destroyed by the Muslims.

But what about today? Now that the Body of Christ has been visibly divided (and the blame lies on both sides – CCC 817), the Popes have had to re-formulate the expression "Outside the Church there is no salvation" to address this (CCC 846-848). The possibility of salvation outside the visible Catholic Church has scandalized just as many people as the teaching that outside the Church there is no salvation! But in case there is any question, one priest (Fr. Feeney) was even excommunicated as recently as the 1950's for teaching that non-Catholics go to hell.

In all of the debating over whether God saves people outside this or that church, the better question may be: *Can* God save anyone outside the Church? Of course He can. He's God! The only way He wouldn't is if by "Church" we mean precisely all the people that God predestined to be saved (Rom 2:15-16, CCC 793-794, 839-845).

As members of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, we can know where his Body, the Church is, even if we're not sure where it is *not*.



Expressing the Faith: Shines on Me

Blinded by the light, like Paul, Crazy Bread sings of the brilliant truth that the world can sometimes blur.

*You got your car, it goes so fast
You got your train, it's strong, it lasts.
You got your plane, it goes so high,
You got your stars to guide you, but...*

***I got a God and he takes me there, He takes me there.
I got a God and He takes me there, there.***

*And all the "crosses" that you bear,
And all the clothes you like to wear,
The fancy places that you dine,
Your diamond ring that shines, but...*

***I got a God and He shines on me, shines on me,
I got a God, and He shines, shines***

*But it's you I've been running from,
You I've been thinking of,
You I've been praying on, and on, and on (repeat)
(chorus 1 and 2)*

*You got your life, it goes so fast,
And all your thrills, well they won't last.
A shining light you just can't see,
I've got a God and He shines on me.*



Next time: "Good Faith Works"

