

THE MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF ST. PAUL

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When we pronounce the name of Paul, the first things that come to mind are his trips, his apostolic travels by land and by sea in order to bring the word of God everywhere and to establish Christian communities. And still it is not clear how many trips there were, what their goal was, and what truly happened in the course of their undertaking.

Generally we speak of three missionary journeys completed by the Apostle. But were there truly only three? Could there not have been others?

The biblical sources at our disposition are of two types: the “authentic” Pauline letters and the Acts of the Apostles. We are dealing here with two strands which at times proceed in parallel and at other times intersect without ever agreeing. For that reason if we want to reconstruct the journeys of Paul we have no other choice than to opt each time for one of these strands in an autonomous way, without however overlooking the contribution of the other.

In the course of our study, as incidentally all the authors do, we will give priority to the information provided to us by Paul himself in his writings, integrating them, insofar as possible, with those offered by the book of Acts.

These will be the stages of our overview:

1. THE FORGOTTEN MISSION: ARABIA
2. THE NON-EXISTING MISSION: JERUSALEM
3. THE UNKNOWN MISSION: TARSUS
4. THE PROLONGED MISSION: ANTIOCH
5. THE ITINERANT MISSION: FIRST JOURNEY
6. THE INDEPENDENT MISSION: SECOND JOURNEY
7. THE FINAL MISSION: THIRD JOURNEY¹

1. THE FORGOTTEN MISSION: ARABIA

a) To avoid an encounter with the Jewish colony

The first missionary journey undertaken by St. Paul (cfr. map on page 17), to which one does not normally refer when listing his apostolic objectives, is that taken to Arabia immediately following his conversion.² In confirmation of this journey we possess two references: one in his letter to the Galatians, the other in the Acts of the Apostles.

In Galatians 1:16-17 Paul mentions that after his conversion “immediately, without consulting anyone, and without going to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, I went off to Arabia and later returned to Damascus.” Notwithstanding the scarcity of information, we can broadly examine this fact.

First of all, what was the motive for this trip? The classic position holds that, precisely in view of his recent conversion, Paul needed some time of spiritual retreat in order to be able to reflect, and above all to deepen his understanding of the Christian doctrine to which he had adhered.

¹ Let us put aside the part regarding the return trip at the end of the third journey with the collection for the Church in Jerusalem, insofar as it does not deal with a true and proper apostolic journey, but rather a kind of “conclusion” to Paul’s mission in the East. For the same reason we will not treat of Paul’s journey to Rome as a prisoner.

² Today authors prefer to speak of “vocation” instead of “conversion” by reason of the fact that Paul never did renounce his Judeo/Israelite past (Rm 11:1). He himself describes the change he underwent as a correct understanding of Judaism (Ph 3:3), as the call to a “special mission,” that of bringing to all the nations the richness proper to Judaism. We, for convenience, will continue to use the term “conversion.”

But this opinion is unsustainable. Paul writes his letter to the Galatians with the precise intention of justifying his authority as an apostle, and it is in this context that he recalls this episode in his life. Now to recall a period of solitude and recollection, of prayer and reflection, could only impede the development of the discourse that Paul had undertaken. And this would go against his usual way of doing things.

On the other hand, Paul already knew the Christianity preached by the Hellenists. He knew well who Jesus was according to the vision presented by these missionaries that he had persecuted. Not for nothing did he consider dangerous the legal Judaism of the Pharisaical branch to which he had belonged. For this reason, after his conversion, he did not feel any particular necessity of learning who the teacher of Nazareth might be.

We have to conclude, therefore, that the trip into Arabia was a true missionary expedition, undertaken by Paul in the role of a new apostle with the scope of preaching and announcing Jesus Christ, by this time fully embraced in his own life.

But why did he go off toward Arabia? He himself states that from the first day of his conversion he had a clear awareness that God had destined him to announce Jesus “to the Gentiles” (Gal 1:16). He, therefore, wanted to pick a territory where he would be able to meet pagans and thus pave the way for his first mission. Certainly there were Gentiles also in Damascus, but he preferred to distance himself in order to avoid encountering the Jewish colony – fairly numerous in that city³ – of which he had been part as one of its more authoritative members and fervent persecutors of the Christians.⁴

b) An inglorious finale

What region is Paul referring to when speaking of Arabia? The indication is too vague and could refer in those times to the immense territory east of the Jordan River, extending north to Syria, east to the Euphrates River and south all the way to the Red Sea. In this territory there were many urban centers, especially along the commercial roads; and besides these there was a dissemination of nomadic tribes of shepherds and caravans as well.

The expression “I went off to Arabia and later returned to Damascus” (Gal 1:17) seems to indicate that the place chosen was not far from the Syrian capital. Perhaps it was a location close by where there were settlements of Greeks, Syrians and Nabatean Arabs.⁵

This first Pauline mission, however, did not have a happy ending. We deduce this from another letter of the Apostle in which, in passing, he makes reference to this period. In the second letter to the Corinthians, where he lists the many ups and downs that he confronted in the course of his apostolate, so continuously exposed to difficulties and dangers of every sort, he says: “*In Damascus, the ethnarch, King Aretas, kept watch over the city of the Damascenes in order to arrest me, but I was lowered in a basket from a window in the city wall and escaped his clutches*” (2 Cor 11:32-33).

We thus come to understand that the king of Arabia, Aretas IV, disturbed by the activity of Paul in his territory, had him followed all the way to Damascus where the local governor purposely set up a watch guard with the idea of capturing him. The fact that Paul had returned from Arabia to Damascus surrounded by the emissaries of the king, confirms that he had not gone into that territory

³ According to Flavius Josephus, in the 1st century there existed in Damascus a numerous colony of Jews calculated at between 15 and 20,000 persons (cf. *Jewish War* 2,22,2).

⁴ We are following here the hypothesis according to which Paul would not have been converted during his journey “toward” Damascus, but rather “in” Damascus, where he was living and working at the moment of his “encounter” with Christ. The presumed trip from Jerusalem to Damascus, with letters of credence which authorized him to imprison Christians, has very little basis and the majority of authors do not consider it historical.

⁵ An ancient tradition points to the village of Mismiye as the place where Paul would have gone to preach. It is situated some 40 kilometers south of Damascus and has to its credit the fact that no other locality claims this tradition. In the 1st century Mismiye enjoyed good communication with Damascus thanks to a pre-Roman trail that united the Syrian capital with Bosra.

to remain in solitude, but rather in order to undertake an activity that he did not want to remain without results. Perhaps he was also the cause of riots or accusations on the part of the Jews who resided there that resulted in some kind of denunciation against Paul and hence in his persecution.

The vigilance was so intense that Paul, to save himself, was constrained to hide himself in a basket and be let down from an opening in the city walls. This event remained forever engraved on his memory and he considered it a shameful circumstance brought on by his own weakness (2 Cor 11:30).

This first of Paul's missions may have lasted about two years. In fact, he writes: "*Three years later, I went up to Jerusalem...*" (Gal 1:18). This "later" alludes to the time of his conversion, for which the "three years" (two years and a fraction) must have been those spent in Arabia, seeing that, once he had returned to Damascus, he could not have spent much time there.

c) The version from the book of Acts

Recounting his strange flight from Damascus, Paul exclaims: "*God... knows that I do not lie!*" (2 Cor 11:31). Why did he feel obliged to assure us that his version is correct? Perhaps because someone had told the story in another way? We don't know. It is certain, however, that Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, does tell of the events in a different manner.

In the first place, he omits entirely the journey in Arabia and says that, after his conversion, Paul remained in Damascus and there began to preach (Acts 9:19-20; 26:20). This seems to correspond to Luke's theological scheme according to which the Gospel was to be preached to the nations, however "*beginning from Jerusalem*" (Lk 23:47; Acts 1:8).

And it was precisely the Jews in Damascus who, filled with surprise, asked themselves: "*Isn't this the fellow who was trying to destroy those in Jerusalem who called upon this name, and didn't he come here to lead them back to the chief priests in chains?*" (Acts 9:21). But Paul "*grew all the stronger and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah*" (Acts 9:22).

Even here this way of presenting the facts is consistent with Luke's theological ideas, in that he does not want to present Paul preaching to the pagans, preferring to wait for Peter to open the door of the Gospel to the first pagan following an explicit divine revelation (Acts 10). Only then will Paul be able to turn to the pagans. Up to that moment Acts presents a Paul who preaches exclusively to the Jews.

Finally, Luke says that Paul had to flee Damascus because he was persecuted by the Jews who wanted to kill him (Acts 9:23), and not to escape capture by the Arabs, as Paul maintains in his account. Here again, a theological intention prevails: that of describing Paul as an Apostle who from the very beginning shared the same fate as the Christian community of which he was a part. And as this brought them into the danger of death at the hands of the Jews, Paul also could not subtract himself from the same destiny.

2. THE NON-EXISTENT MISSION: JERUSALEM

a) In his visit to the Holy City

The second evangelizing mission of Paul corresponds to his first trip to Jerusalem.

As stated in Acts (9:23-27), "*several days later*" Paul is seen obliged to leave Damascus, having come to know that the Jews wanted to kill him. He goes therefore to Jerusalem where he seeks to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, "*not believing that he was a disciple.*" It is at this point that Barnabas, a Jewish Levite from Cyprus who had become a Christian, intervenes. He must have been a person who was highly esteemed, in a position to influence the local Christians. It is not said how he knew Paul, but it is he who presents him to the Christian community and sets it at ease with regard to the new conduct of the convert. He tells of the

encounter of the persecutor with the Lord Jesus and how in Damascus he had assiduously preached in his name before the Jews.

All doubt and fear having thus been dissipated, Paul was taken in by the apostles and Christians of Jerusalem, and *“he moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord. He also spoke and debated with the Hellenists, but they tried to kill him”* (Acts 9:29-30). It is here and in this manner that, according to Acts, the second evangelizing mission of Paul unfolded.

The “new disciple” must have thus poured such enthusiasm into his apostolic work that the Hellenist Jews, to keep him quiet, saw no other way than to remove him from their midst. But note that, always keeping with Acts, while Paul was praying in the temple, he fell into an ecstasy and saw the risen Jesus who told him that his mission did not consist in preaching in Jerusalem to the Jews, but that he had to leave there in order to announce the Gospel to those far off, to the pagans (Acts 22:17). In the meantime, the Christians in Jerusalem came to know of a secret plan hatched by the Jews to get rid of Paul, for which it was decided to take him to the port of Caesarea and put him on a ship headed for Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

b) The testimony of Paul

In his letter to the Galatians, however, Paul offers a different version of these events: *“Three years later, I went up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord”* (Gal 1:18-19).

To begin with, Paul asserts that he had gone to Jerusalem *“three years later,”* following his conversion. Why would he have waited so long to get into contact with the leaders in Jerusalem? In this regard, again from the letter to the Galatians, Paul insists on pointing out his relative autonomy with respect to the other apostles in Jerusalem, as well as to the churches in Judea in general, wanting in this way to demonstrate that *“the good news that I proclaimed is not a human gospel, for I didn’t receive it from any man, but it was revealed to me by Jesus Christ”* (Gal 1:11-12). For this reason he insisted on saying that his apostolate was not subordinate to *“those who were apostles before me”* (Gal 1:17).

Going on, Paul affirms that the scope of his trip to Jerusalem was *“to get to know Cephas,”* in other words to personally inform himself about him. He did not go, therefore – as some have hypothesized – to receive a catechetical updating, nor to visit the holy places. His stay with Peter was exclusively of a personal and private character, lasting 15 days (whereas Acts would have us think of a much longer stay).

As far as the persons he met is concerned, he does not name any one of the apostles apart from Peter. We must therefore categorically exclude any kind of contact or official encounter with the group of the apostles, as is stated in the Acts. Paul says that he had also met James, the brother of the Lord, who played an important role in the church of Jerusalem. But he doesn’t list him among the apostles, again pointing out his own autonomy.

Finally, his visit to the Holy City does not seem in any way to have been caused by the persecution on the part of the Jews, as is instead recounted in the Acts. His departure from Jerusalem was wholly serene. For the rest, from the first moment he nurtured the awareness that his specific vocation was to preach to the pagans.

Once again, at the conclusion of his testimony, Paul feels constrained to utter an oath: *“Before God what I am writing to you is no lie!”* (Gal 1:20).

c) What probably happened

The two versions which we have with respect to the journey of Paul to Jerusalem allows us to conclude that the evangelizing activity, attributed to him in Acts, did not take place in that city. Nor was his meeting with the other apostles and those responsible for the Christian community. We are confronted here in the book of Acts with a theological reconstruction meant to show Paul

strictly tied to the church of Jerusalem, one with its hierarchy, threatened with death on the part of the Jews.

The actual truth of the fact seems to be that offered by the letter to the Galatians: Paul made a short visit to Jerusalem to know Peter, and then went back.

3. THE UNKNOWN MISSION: TARSUS

Of all the missions undertaken by Paul, the least known, for lack of news, is that taken immediately after his return from Jerusalem.

The Acts tell us that he settled in Tarsus (Acts 9:30), from where he moved to Antioch (Acts 11:25). Paul, for his part, writing to the Galatians says more or less the same thing, although in inverse order: "*Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia*" (Gal 1:21). Now since Antioch is the capital of Syria, and Tarsus of Cilicia, in some way the two versions do correspond, at least insofar as they were the geographical places where Paul spent this period of his life.

What activities did the Apostle dedicate himself to in the meantime? Unfortunately we don't have any direct documentation. The one thing that is mentioned is offered to us by Acts, where it is said that the churches of Judea received news relative to his evangelizing work, such that the Christians commented that: "*the one who persecuted us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy,*" and for this they glorified God (Gal 1:23-24).

From this we can conclude that Paul did not remain inactive during those years, but rather that he undertook an intense work of announcing the gospel, causing wonder on the part of the Jews and admiration on the part of the Christians. To want to reconstruct this period in greater detail, we have no other choice than to depend on the information present in Acts.

We can therefore state that Paul, after having left Jerusalem, embarked from the port of Caesarea on his way to Tarsus, and that he settled there to fulfill his mission. Not being able, in fact, to return to Damascus where, in light of his past experience his very life would have been in danger, he chose the city which could guarantee him a warm reception on the part of his friends and family members.

During his stay in Tarsus, he could undertake a fruitful missionary work, both in the city and in its environs. In fact, a little further on in the Acts of the Apostles mention is made of the existence of a Christian community in the region of Cilicia (Acts 15:23, 41). It is also possible that at the time of his arrival there already were Christian churches in that territory, founded earlier. In that case, Paul would have approached them, offering them his contribution in order to consolidate them in their faith.

Whatever the case may be, Tarsus must have represented for the Apostle a center of operations during that time. How long, we do not know with precision. Some authors speak of about two years until Barnabas came to take him back to Antioch and hence to initiate a new missionary period.

4. THE PROLONGED MISSION: ANTIOCH

a) The fruits of persecution

The next missionary journey of Paul was that which led him from Tarsus to Antioch. A journey not mentioned in the authentic Pauline letters. The sole reference regarding the activity of the Apostle in the next fourteen years – from the middle 30's to the end of the 40's – is that little bit that we mentioned above: "*Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia*" (Gal 1:21). We have no other choice then, in order to reconstruct this period, than to entrust ourselves once again to what Luke says in the book of Acts: namely that Barnabas went to Tarsus and convinced Paul to follow him to Antioch, in order to help in the evangelization of that city.

It is useful at this point, to remember how the gospel first reached Antioch and what consequence it produced. There had in fact broken out in Jerusalem, some years earlier, a grave persecution of the Hellenist Christians who fled, beginning to spread the gospel in various regions: Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11:19).

The city of Antioch, capital of the province of Syria, was at that time the third largest city of the Roman Empire, after Rome and Alexandria. Famous for the beauty of its temples, theaters and hot baths, it boasted a very active Mediterranean port – the port of Seleucia – which made it a central commercial base between east and west. At the time of Paul it counted around 500,000 inhabitants, among them an important Jewish colony.

An extremely important fact for the history of the Church took place in this city: it was, in fact, that some Christians coming from the Jewish Diaspora (in particular from Cyprus and from Cyrene) began to spread the gospel also among the pagans. Thus for the first time the message of Jesus was announced in an open and systematic way to non-Jews: that had as a result the formation of the first “mixed” Christian community, composed of Christians coming from Judaism and from paganism (Acts 11:20-21). This forced the people of the place to give a new name to the members of this group which, up until that moment continued to be considered Jews, without distinguishing these from them.⁶ It was thus that “*in Antioch the disciples were first referred to as Christians*” (Acts 11:26).

b) Paul is invited

When news of this new group reached Jerusalem, unexpected and in a certain way revolutionary, the heads of the mother church were worried and decided to send Barnabas to investigate this strange situation. Having arrived in Antioch, the one sent marveled to find verified the enormous growth of the community thanks to the admission of pagans, to say nothing of the fraternal spirit which prevailed there.⁷ He also understood that this presented an organizational challenge, and for this reason he decided to go to Tarsus to persuade Paul to collaborate with him in the leadership and organization of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:22-26).

Thus it was that Paul made his appearance in Antioch.⁸ This undoubtedly deals with one of the most important stages of his life, seeing that it will serve to definitively confirm his vocation to the Gentiles, as well as to bring to perfection his missionary style of universal openness.

⁶ All of the ancient documents seem to confirm that the name “Christians” was not imposed as a self-denomination on the part of the believers themselves. For the rest, in the New Testament this name appears only in the mouth of persons outside the community (cf. Acts 26:28; 1 P 4:16; see also Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 25, 4; Tacitus, *Annals* 15, 44). As a self-denomination we only find it at the beginning of the second century in Ignatius of Antioch (*Eph* 11, 2; *Rom* 3, 2; *Mag* 10, 3). Nor could it have come from the Jews of the city, inasmuch as they, who read the Bible in Greek, only knew that the word *Christos* meant “Messiah,” and to call the followers of Jesus with that name meant to implicitly accept the messianic claims of the Nazarene. We can conclude, therefore, that it was the Greek-speaking community in Antioch who had thought up such a designation. The fact that the word “Christian” was a Latinized adjective has also led some to suppose that it would have come from a Roman administrative environment which did not lose sight of these new religious groups that sprang up very quickly.

⁷ Acts enumerates the different ministries present in the Antioch community: “*there were... prophets and teachers – Barnabas and Symeon who was called Niger, Lucius the Cyrenean, and Manaen, the close friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul*” (Acts 13:1). That is: two Africans, one Cypriot, one Palestinian and one whose origin was from Cilicia, demonstrating the cosmopolitan and open character of this church, different from that of Jerusalem, traditional and uniform.

⁸ While not possessing an historical certainty regarding this information furnished by Luke, it is hardly probable that Paul would have presented himself in Antioch without the authorization of those responsible for the community. On the other hand, Paul himself confirms that Barnabas and he headed the delegation that went to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1). He also makes mention of the fact that Barnabas and Peter drew the Antioch community away from that initial spirit of openness towards the pagans undertaken by him (Gal 2:11-14). It is therefore probable that it was Barnabas who led Paul to Antioch for the purpose of orienting the community in the new style of “liberty” in facing the Jewish law.

Paul spent a rather long period⁹ in Antioch, the most consistent of his apostolic résumé. During this time he will exercise, under the supervision of Barnabas, a silent but efficacious pastoral work.¹⁰ While not having access to information about his work, we can suppose that he would have participated normally in the life of the community announcing the gospel, founding new communities, and contributing to their expansion and growth. Besides he would have exercised his profession as a leather worker, as he will always do, in order to provide food and clothing for himself in such a way as not to impose on others.

The only direct information about this period is from his own hand: it refers to a mystical experience, of which no particular details are given (2 Cor 12:1-10).

5. THE ITINERANT MISSION: THE FIRST JOURNEY

a) Probable Historicity

The first missionary project on a grand scale elaborated by the primitive Church – namely, the first trip conceived as an itinerant missionary journey to spread the gospel among the pagans – departed from Antioch. It was an initiative favored by two factors: the cosmopolitan climate that was dominant in Antioch and the ecumenical experience through which the local community had passed.

Some students place in doubt the historical value of this first journey from the fact that, different from the second and the third, it finds no direct confirmation in the authentic Pauline letters.¹¹ All the same it is hard to completely deny its historicity, as it would be to pretend that Luke had “invented” numerous episodes in his account: and this does not jibe with the spirit of Acts.¹² Therefore it is preferable to think that Paul during his missionary life had visited a notable number of cities and villages whose names have remained imprinted in the tradition and that the author of Acts would have saved, giving them the form of a journey.¹³

Therefore, holding, broadly speaking, that we can consider this trip historical, even though not in all its details, let us return to its principal stages as presented in the book of Acts (13-14).

The mission – made up of Barnabas, Paul and John Mark – set sail from the port of Antioch and had as its first goal the island of Cyprus. The choice of this destination depended in all probability on various factors: a) it was the easiest place to reach from Seleucia; (b) Barnabas was a native of this island; c) some Hellenist Jewish Christians who had been driven out of Jerusalem after the death of Stephen, had already prepared the land for evangelization (Acts 11:19).

⁹ According to many authorities probably nearly nine years, between 36 and 45.

¹⁰ Even though in time Paul would manage to surpass his teacher, during this time in Antioch he was surely kept in second place, in the shadow of Barnabas. In this sense, the book of the Acts does not do full justice to Barnabas, seeing that it exalts Paul beyond measure, to the point of calling him the head of the first missionary expedition (cf. 13:9-12, 13, 16; 14:8-10). Paul instead, on his part, recognizes the decisive role of Barnabas in this period (Gal 2:9-10; 1 Cor 9:6).

¹¹ The second letter to Timothy (3:11) refers to this trip mentioning three places which, according to Acts, Paul had evangelized and in the same order: Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium and Lystra. But 2 Timothy is the work of a later author who certainly knew the book of Acts.

¹² Some specific events don't easily lend themselves to invention. For example, Mark's desertion half way through the journey (Acts 13:13), perhaps on account of a falling out over the way in which Paul conducted his preaching to the pagans. Or the appearance of a false prophet with the unlikely name of Bar-Jesus (“son of Jesus”?), whom Paul, in the course of a bitter encounter, did not hesitate to call “son of Satan” (Acts 13:6-10).

¹³ For that reason the picture of the Pauline journeys does not always coincide with what can be deduced from his letters. Thus, for example, are the number of his visits to Corinth, or the supposed brief stay in Thessalonica, while the letter to the Philippians would have us think otherwise.

b) To Cyprus and in Lycaonia

After a voyage of 200 kilometers, the missionaries arrived at the port of Salamis on the eastern coast of Cyprus. There was a fairly good sized community of Jews that had settled there in the second century before Christ, such that they were able to announce the gospel both to the Jews in the synagogue of the city as well as to the pagans “sympathetic” to Judaism.

They continued their journey over land in the direction of Paphos, the capital situated at the extreme western side of the island. Here the magician Bar-Jesus was encountered (Acts 13:6) and they were received by the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus who, after having heard Paul speak, embraced the faith (Acts 13:12).

From Cyprus the group took the route toward the north and landed in Asia Minor, in the territory that today belongs to Turkey. Disembarking at the port of Attalia, they moved on toward Perga (in Pamphylia), where John Mark decided to separate himself from the group and to return to Antioch (in Syria). Barnabas and Paul, alone, moved on toward the north and following a trip of some 260 kilometers reached Pisidian Antioch. It is at this point that Luke narrates supposed remembrances of a sermon of Paul in the synagogue of the city, and for the first time gives news of the mass conversion of Gentiles (Acts 13:44), which had as its effect the hostile reaction of the Jews (Acts 13:50). From this moment on the missionary preaching was addressed primarily to the pagans, but without completely abandoning the Jews.

The following stage was Iconium where Paul underwent an attempted stoning, such that they had to flee in haste.

At Lystra the difficulty that preaching can carry with it when directed to the Gentiles was made evident. Having assisted in the miraculous healing of a paralytic, the crowd mistook Paul and Barnabas for gods come down from heaven to earth and they wanted to offer sacrifices to them. Luke profits from this episode to give an example of the powerful effect of preaching to the Gentiles. The stoning of Paul, a work of some Jews, is the concluding act to the mission to Lystra.

It was their time in Derbe that brought optimum apostolic results. From there they undertook the return route, touching the localities they had previously visited: Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch and finally Perga where they stopped to preach, not having done so on the occasion of their first passage.

From the port of Attalia they took the ship which brought them back to Antioch in Syria, where their missionary adventure had been commissioned. Here they called the church together and “*they reported all that God had done through them and how He had opened the door of faith to the pagans*” (Acts 14:27).

It was news that the community had greatly longed to hear.

6. THE INDEPENDENT MISSION: THE SECOND JOURNEY

a) Separation from Barnabas

This trip lasted longer than the earlier one and embraced a much larger territory. It included not only the localities of Pisidia already visited during the first mission, but also reached into the Roman provinces of Asia, even touching Europe.

This time Paul no longer has Barnabas as his companion, but rather Silvanus (or Silas, as the book of Acts prefers to call him). The reason for the separation of the two is not at all clear. According to Acts (15:36-40) it might have stemmed from the fact that Barnabas may have wanted to include John Mark once again, whereas Paul was against this, considering that he had abandoned them during the first trip. Their disagreement led them to the decision that each one should move out on their own.

And still the true motive seems to be something else: namely, the incident which had taken place in Antioch when Peter arrived from Jerusalem in a visit to the community. On that occasion the two apostles entered into a serious debate between them on the necessity, or not, that the pagans

converted to Christianity ought to also observe the Mosaic Law. Barnabas made common cause with Peter (Gal 2:13), and its effect was a certain resentment that festered between the two old missionary companions.

This time Paul undertook his journey no longer as one invited by the church in Antioch, and hence dependent on that community, but rather following his arrangement with the authorities in Jerusalem who had recognized his vocation as apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 2:9). For that reason this journey is often spoken of as an “independent mission.”

b) The meeting with Timothy

The authentic Pauline letters don't contain any express mention of this second journey. They do however confirm its most important stages (Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus), even in the same order as indicated in Acts: after Philippi, Thessalonica (1 Th 1:7ff) – the region around Corinth – serves to prove this point. We will reconstruct this journey on the basis of the schema offered to us by the book of Acts, not having any other alternative, especially for those events upon which the letters are silent.

Paul and Silas, leaving from Antioch, directed their steps northward via land, with the primary goal of paying a visit to the churches of Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41). But they didn't linger there long. They then attacked the chain of mountains of the Taurus and by means of the so-called “Port of Cilicia” reached Derbe, Lystra and Iconium, where they encountered the Christian community founded by Paul some years earlier.

At Lystra Paul came across one of his most ardent disciples: a young Jewish boy named Timothy, converted by him to Christianity on the occasion of his first trip. Seeing him work and preach with passion in the churches of the region, Paul decided to take him with himself (Acts 16:1-3). From that moment on Timothy will be one of the great collaborators of the Apostle and one who would remain by his side to the very end of his life (1 Cor 4:17).

A short while later the three missionaries continued their journey. Up to here Paul had visited already existing churches, but his plan was to move west, to the large city of Ephesus, considered a “little Rome” on account of its splendor and celebrity. They set out along the tortuous and precipitous paths of the central territory of Asia Minor, but during their walk something happened which forced the little group to halt its march. What was it? We don't know for sure. The text only says that they were “*impeded by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in the province of Asia*” (Acts 16:6). Some kind of “prophecy” probably was manifested to them which counseled them against that trip; not for nothing did Silas, who had the reputation of being a “prophet” make up part of the team (Acts 15:32). It is a fact that the idea of reaching Ephesus was abandoned in order to take the road north which would have led them to the province of Bithynia (Acts 16:7). Even here there were a number of Jewish colonies where it was possible to speak of Jesus of Nazareth.

c) Illness and the mission to Galatia

After having crossed through the region of Phrygia, and just as soon as he reached Galatia, Paul was suddenly stricken by an illness which forced the three missionaries to come to a halt in an undefined locality in the area.¹⁴ The inhabitants of the area had already helped Paul with great

¹⁴ Authors debate whether the Galatia we're talking about here, whose evangelization preceded that of Corinth (to which Paul himself refers in 1 Cor 16:1), corresponds to the Roman province of Galatia, therefore to southern Galatia, or rather to the region of Galatia, and as a consequence to northern Galatia. In the first case, the reference would be to the mission that Paul fulfilled during his first journey (Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe). In the second case, it would correspond to Paul's passage through the “region of Galatia” during his second journey, as referred to in Acts. We will follow this hypothesis, assuming as a validating argument the fact that Paul would hardly have written “*You foolish Galatians*” (Gal 3:1), thus intending to define as such the inhabitants of the south who were properly Phrygians, Pisidians or Lycaonians, and hence would not have been known in those terms. Let us therefore place the evangelization of Galatia in this moment here.

generosity (Gal 4:13), and he, once restored to health, dedicated himself for the first time to their evangelization (Gal 4:13). The results were magnificent, to the point where the Apostle was received by them as an angel from heaven, in fact as Jesus Christ himself (Gal 4:14).

When the moment arrived for them to resume their trip the three missionaries headed north. But it happened that, during their trek, for the second time “*the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to*” (Acts 16:7).¹⁵ There remained then two possibilities: to try again to head north, or to go back. The first option seemed better, and so they headed off toward the port of Troas, at the extreme western part of Asia Minor. Having reached there, Paul had a dream. A man, from the opposite shore of the Aegean Sea, begged him saying: “*Come over to Macedonia and help us*” (Acts 16:9). That very morning he decided to leave with his companions towards Europe.

d) The anonymous narrator

At this point in the story of Acts something unusual takes place. Luke, who up to this moment always spoke of the missionaries (Paul, Silas and Timothy) in the third person plural, now begins to use the first person plural (“we”).¹⁶ Unless, in addition to Silas and Timothy, a new and unknown companion of Paul didn’t enter into the picture until now.

Who is this individual, the author of these fragments? In the past it was held that it perhaps was Luke, the author of the Acts, who at this point was associated with the group of missionaries. Today another hypothesis is followed: here Luke would have made use of the account of the journey of one of those companions of Paul, keeping the discourse direct in order to give major testimonial strength to his work, and also to increase the dynamism of the narration.

However that may be, at Troas a new missionary joined the group, and the four took off for Philippi. Having reached there, Paul sought out a synagogue where he could preach, but he found none. Knowing however that the Jews, when they didn’t have a building in which to worship, would usually get together by a river, he went outside the city where the Gangite River flowed, but he only found a group of women united in prayer. He spoke to them of Jesus (Acts 16:13), and one of them, a certain Lydia, a seller of purple goods, that same day embraced the message of the gospel and asked to be baptized. She then insisted that the missionaries take up lodging in her house: “*she prevailed on us to accept*” (Acts 16:15). It was not just a courtesy. In fact, in the city the Jews were looked down upon, and the new arrivals could have incurred serious danger, above all because they were preaching a new doctrine and making many adherents. Lydia’s home thus became the base for their missionary activities (Acts 16:40): it was the first pagan house transformed into a temple; it was the first Christian church founded by Paul in Europe.

Their stay in the house of Lydia did not last long. One day, while Paul and Silas were crossing through the city they found a young slave girl whose owners took advantage of on account of the “spirit of divination” that she possessed. Paul freed her, arousing the ire of her owners who denounced the Apostle and Silas before the Roman authorities. These had them arrested and beaten. While they were in prison, around midnight, a violent mysterious earthquake permitted the liberation of the prisoners, the conversion of the jailer and the baptism of his whole family (Acts 16:25-39). Following this episode the missionaries understood that it was time to fold up their tents and head away from Philippi. Here Timothy is probably being talked of since he remained a stranger to the misfortune.

¹⁵ This type of motivation, chronicled in the book of Acts, is further advanced by Paul himself in some of his letters where he interprets some circumstances which set themselves against his projects as signs from the beyond. Thus, for example, in 1 Timothy he says that he had tried various times to return to Thessalonica to visit the faithful of that community, “*but Satan thwarted our plans*” (1 Th 2:18).

¹⁶ There are four plural fragments, concerning just the trip’s itineraries: Acts 16:10-17 (with the path from Troas to Philippi); Acts 20:5-15 (from Philippi to Miletus); Acts 21:1-18 (from Miletus to Jerusalem); Acts 27: 1-28:16 (from Caesarea to Rome).

e) The gospel in Achaia

The new goal was Thessalonica, west of Philippi. There Paul and Silas found a very active Jewish community that got together every Sabbath in the synagogue. With the financial help of the Philippians (Ph 4:16) they were able to obtain lodging in an inn.

In the course of various weeks they preached to the Jews but without much success. Those who adhered to the gospel were just a tiny number of persons, among whom were Aristarchus (who will later become one of the most faithful companions of Paul: Col 4:10), a certain Secundus (Acts 20:4), and Jason, a rich man who was well known in the city who invited Paul and his companions to leave the inn and move in with him.

The reaction on the part of the Jews was not long in coming: they instigated a popular uprising, took Jason along with other Christians and brought them before the magistrates. They were not however able to furnish proof of such crimes, for which the authorities of the city, after having giving Jason a warning, let them all go free. That very night Paul and Silas, accompanied by some Christians from Thessalonica, left the city (Acts 17:5-10).¹⁷

From Thessalonica they headed in the direction of Beroea, where Timothy, coming from Philippi, joined them a little later. Here the Jews showed themselves to be more welcoming than were those of Thessalonica. They received the word of God with greater diligence to the point of consulting the Scriptures to find an answer to the words of Paul (Acts 17:10-11).¹⁸ But this favorable beginning was very quickly interrupted by the arrival of some Jews from Thessalonica, determined to draw their coreligionists away from these “strangers”. The Christian community in Beroea thought at once of organizing the departure of Paul and Timothy, while Silas would still remain with them.

The two missionaries, continuing their trip south, reached Athens. Paul, preoccupied about the churches of Macedonia, decided to send Timothy to set their minds at peace and to sustain them in the work of evangelization (1 Th 3:1-2); he remained in the capital of Greece with the intention of establishing a Christian community there (Acts 17:34).

Acts refers to a discourse given by the Apostle before the Athenian philosophers, epicureans and stoics, gathered in the Areopagus. But while having taken every care to win these listeners over with citations from Greek poets and writers, the effort ended with a resounding lack of success once he started speaking of resurrection from the dead, an idea completely alien to the spirit of Greek philosophy. All the same some in Athens accepted his message and embraced the Christian faith, thus giving rise to a small community (Acts 17:22-32).

For Paul the moment soon came to leave the Greek capital to continue southward in the direction of Corinth: this time however he was alone, without his usual companions, beset with “weakness, fear and trembling” (1 Cor 2:3). He had, however, the good luck to meet there a Christian couple, Aquila and Prisca.¹⁹ The two were tent makers, the same profession practiced by Paul, and so they invited him to work with them and to live at their house (Acts 18:3). All this brought great relief to the Apostle and made the impact of the city much less difficult. Very soon he came to know the little Christian community founded there by the two spouses, in whose home they got together every Sunday to pray and celebrate the Eucharist.

Some weeks later Timothy arrived with good news from Thessalonica (1 Th 3:6); some from Philippi accompanied him who for the third time brought some money to Paul (2 Cor 11:9). This provided him with a certain economic independence and hence total availability for preaching (Acts

¹⁷ The book of Acts states that Paul evangelized the city over a period of three weeks. It is thought however that we are dealing here with a much longer stay during which Paul received help from the Thessalonians on two occasions (Ph 4:16), besides having time to find a stable job (1 Tm 2:9).

¹⁸ Among all the missions described in Acts (cc. 16-19), that of Beroea is the only one that finds no mention in the Pauline letters.

¹⁹ Acts always refers to the wife of Aquila with the diminutive “Priscilla”. Paul, instead, in his letters uses the adult form, calling her Prisca. Some Bible scholars see in this constant use of the diminutive on the part of Luke a subtle intent to minimize her role in the primitive Church, almost so as not to overshadow the figure of Paul.

18:5). Under his apostolic impulse the community grew and a larger place for its meetings was found in the house of a certain Titius Justus (Acts 18:7).

This missionary expansion, with so many Jews passing over to the new faith, could not have failed to upset the representatives of the synagogue who, capturing Paul, led him before the proconsul Gallio accusing him of fostering social unrest.²⁰ The magistrate chose not to take this protest under consideration, maintaining it to be an exclusively religious question, and hence he set Paul free (Acts 18:12-17).

Realizing that his very life could be in danger, Paul decided to depart and to leave the conduct of the “domestic church” of Corinth in the hands of the local Christians. He had stayed in that city for almost a year and a half. His friends Aquila and Prisca wanted to join him on the voyage by ship to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19).

f) The last stage of the journey

Ephesus was a large city, strategically located half way between the more oriental churches (those of Galatia) and the more western ones (those of Greece), which allowed Paul to keep up better communications with all his communities. Having arrived in this city, he remained only for a short while, having the intention of continuing on to Syrian Antioch, his old seat. He left Aquila and Prisca in Ephesus.²¹

According to the book of Acts, Paul “*disembarked at Caesarea, went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch*” (18:22). No mention is made of what church it was; but his disembarking at Caesarea and the use of the verb “went up” make one think of Jerusalem. No information is given with regard to this visit, as for the rest nothing is said regarding the next stage, that of Antioch. We only know that when Paul will leave this last city to undertake his third missionary journey, he will abandon it definitively, never more to return.

These silences lead us to think that Paul had encountered some difficulties, both in Jerusalem and in Antioch. Probably, because of the discussion that he had had some years earlier with Peter, he was no longer welcome in those places.²²

7. THE FINAL MISSION: THE THIRD JOURNEY

a) Residence in Ephesus

Paul left Antioch to begin his last missionary journey. This time at his side there was a new collaborator: Titus.²³

After having crossed the regions of Lycaonia and Galatia, where he had founded communities, he reached Ephesus. In his preceding visit he had discovered in this city an enormous

²⁰ An inscription found in Delphi mentions Gallio as governor of Corinth at the time of the Emperor Claudius, between December of 51 and February of 53. Luke’s account, united to the date of Aquila and Prisca’s arrival following the expulsion of the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2), is used to establish the date of Paul’s mission to Corinth and the chronology of all his activities. It must also be kept in mind that in Acts 18 elements of the two visits of Paul to Corinth are combined.

²¹ These two spouses are effectively the founders of the first Christian community in Ephesus (Acts 18:26-27). Acts, however, shows Paul giving the first welcoming sermon (18:19-21), wanting to show that he is the true initiator of the Ephesian church.

²² The Gospel of Matthew, edited probably in Antioch around the year 80, and which reflects the categories of that place, lets us see that the community had adopted a positive orientation toward the Judeo-Christian mentality.

²³ Timothy was named along with Paul at the end of his stay of around three years in Ephesus (Act 19:22). We can therefore suppose that he had remained in Corinth following Paul’s departure, and from there he had then gone to Ephesus to meet him. Of Silas, instead, nothing further is known. He may have accompanied Paul on his visit to Jerusalem, his church of origin, and remained there. He is not, in fact, named in the headings of the letters written after the first Pauline mission to Corinth.

potential for his apostolate (1 Cor 16:8), for which he decided to select it as his permanent seat. Prisca and Aquila had given life to a prosperous and dynamic community (1 Cor 16:19).

The first pastoral intervention in the area surrounding Ephesus mentioned by Acts has to do with his meeting with twelve members of a movement inspired by John the Baptist. When he realized the incomplete formation that these possessed, Paul introduced them to knowledge of the true faith in Jesus Christ as the Messiah of Israel. At the end he was able to baptize them and hence to welcome them into the Ephesus community (Acts 18:1-7).

After this small missionary success Paul wanted to take up again his preaching in the Jewish milieu, in particular in the synagogues where he intervened to explain how the Scriptures were fulfilled in the person of Christ. But seeing that the Jews reacted negatively towards him, he abandoned the synagogues and rented the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus, where he opened and directed a catechetical center for a period of two years. His reputation was so great that a lot of Jews as well as pagans from all over the region of Asia were able to know the word of God (Acts 19:10). But this produced a lot of persecution and suffering for him, not excluding the risk of death (2 Cor 1:8-11).

Besides the conflicts in Ephesus in that period, Paul had to confront a series of crises which he saw involving the other churches that he had founded.

b) The crises in the churches of Galatia

It happened that some preachers coming from Jerusalem who pretended to bear corrections to the teachings of Paul, in particular regarding circumcision and the observance of the Law of Moses, made their appearance in the Galatian communities. According to them, all converts to Christianity would necessarily need to have themselves circumcised and to hold to the prescriptions of the Jewish law. These missionaries, who first of all contested the authority of Paul, caused serious disturbance in these churches, with painful polemics and divisions among the believers.

Having been made aware of the fact, Paul wrote from Ephesus his letter to the Galatians with the scope of clarifying some fundamental themes which had come under discussion. In the first part of his message, in fact, he reaffirms his authority denied by those preachers (Gal 1-2). In the second part he explains the theme of justification before God by means of faith, and not through works of the Judaic law (Gal 3-6). With great severity he opposes those who would pretend to impose circumcision and the observance of the old law as necessary to the attainment of salvation.

Probably this letter was sent with Titus as special mention of it in Gal 2:1, 3 would make us think.

c) The crisis in the church of Philippi

Again during the same period, a crisis was manifested even in Philippi of which we have news by means of the letter to the Philippians. Students hold that here, in reality, three letters²⁴ sent by Paul to this church at different times have been made into one.

The first letter was written from prison.²⁵ Having come to know of Paul's misfortune, the Philippians sent him economic help by means of a member of the community by the name of Epaphroditus. It was the fourth time that they had intervened with money for the Apostle; this same Epaphroditus was destined to bring him relief under the harsh conditions of the prison. Paul writes briefly to thank them for their most welcome gesture.

²⁴ The said letters being: letter A (4:10-23), letter B (1:1-31; 4:4-7), and letter C (3:2-4:3, 8-9).

²⁵ In the past it was held that Paul had undergone this incarceration in Caesarea or in Rome, since they were the only two prolonged imprisonments narrated by Acts. The letters to the Philippians make us think however of a fluid communication between Paul and his readers, and both Caesarea as well as Rome are fairly distant from Philippi. For that reason it is actually preferred to hypothesize a closer place, namely Ephesus, in conformity with the declarations of the same Apostle who in 1 Cor 15:32 writes: "At Ephesus I fought with beasts"; and in 2 Cor 1:8-11: "We want you to know, brothers, about our afflictions in Asia. We were so utterly weighted down, beyond our strength, that we doubted that we could go on living, and thought that we had received the death sentence."

The second letter, too, was written from prison some months later. In it Paul communicates news of his condition and expresses his hope in being freed soon so that he might pay them a visit in person. For the rest, Epaphroditus had become ill while offering assistance to the prisoner and his family in Philippi was worried about him; now that Paul was better he made him go back.

The third letter is that which reflects the crisis in the community at Philippi. Even here, as happened in Galatia, some foreign preachers had arrived trying to convince them of the necessity of circumcision and the keeping of the Mosaic Law. With bitterness, Paul calls them “dogs,” “evil doers,” “false circumcisers,” and exhorts his children not to abandon the teaching that he had given them.

d) The crisis in the church of Corinth

We know about the trouble created in Corinth by means of the letters sent by Paul to that community. Authors today are all in agreement in holding that the two letters to the Corinthians are made up of at least six. True, it is not easy to establish their original content or the circumstances which impelled Paul to write them, but we can however propose a credible reconstruction.²⁶

Relatives of a woman from Corinth by the name of Chloe arrived in Ephesus and informed Paul about some fights and divisions that had arisen in that community along with certain moral scandals. This prompted the Apostle to write a letter in which he explains how all preachers of the gospel work in favor of the same community, for which it is necessary to be united. He scolds them for the sexual scandals and for the divisions in the celebration of the Eucharist. Finally he instructs them on the theme of the resurrection of the dead. He concludes by saying that he has in mind to return and visit them. The letter was sent with Titus.

Shortly after their arrival Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived with a letter in which the Corinthians asked Paul some important questions. Among these, the opportunity to bring their litigants before the pagan tribunals; the nature of matrimony and of virginity; the possibility or not of eating meat sacrificed to idols; the hierarchical order of the charisms. Paul answered each of these requests with a second letter which he ends with an invitation to the Corinthians to become engaged in the collection for Jerusalem; he renews his intention to visit them. The letter was sent with Titus.

Some months later Titus returned to Ephesus, telling Paul that in Corinth things had gotten a good deal worse. There were in fact missionaries foreign to the community intending to draw the faithful away from the teachings of Paul who among other things denied he had any authority whatsoever. The Apostle then wrote his third letter, fooling himself into thinking he could stop the hurricane. In it he defended his own apostolic ministry, repeating also everything that he had undergone to support the churches he had founded. He did not hesitate to threaten his coming in person to harshly punish whoever caused contention and division. This new letter was sent with Timothy.

After some time, Timothy returned from Achaia with bad news. Faced with the disturbing situation lived by the community of Corinth, Paul decided to take a trip to that city in the hope of putting an end to a conflict already too long in its duration. But nothing was resolved. Instead things got worse. Some went so far as to offend and mistreat the Apostle, so that he, bitterly disillusioned, could do nothing other than return to Ephesus.

He then wrote his fourth letter, defined as the “tearful letter.” It is a vehement and impassioned text, in regard to which Paul expressly affirmed that he had not written it to sadden his children, but rather to show the love which he held for them. The letter was sent with Titus.

²⁶ There is no agreement among the experts regarding the exact content of each single letter. One possible scenario could be this one: Corinthians A (1 Cor 1-5; 6:12-9:27; 10:23-11:1; 12:1-14:40; 16:1-12, 19-24); Corinthians B (1 Cor 6:1-11; 10:1-22; 11:2-34; 15; 16:13-18); Corinthians C (2 Cor 10-13); Corinthians D (2 Cor 1:14-7:4); Corinthians E (2 Cor 1:1-2, 13; 7:5-8, 24); Corinthians F (2 Cor 8-9).

On account of the conflicts entered into with the authorities of Ephesus, Paul saw himself forced to abandon the city. He headed toward Troas where he hoped to meet Titus and hence to have news on the results obtained by his last letter. But he did not find him, and this caused him great concern. He left then for Macedonia and it was there that his wait ended happily: he met Titus who told him that his letter had been received favorably by the Corinthians, that they were therefore reconciled with him. From Macedonia Paul wrote to the Corinthians his fifth letter called “the letter of reconciliation,” in which he expresses his joy at the positive effects produced by his earlier writings, and for the rebuilding of a good rapport with their community. He also wrote what is considered a sixth letter: a sort of circular to the communities of Achaia, with instructions on the collection to be organized in favor of the poor of Jerusalem.²⁷

e) The last visit to Corinth

By now, Paul had lived in Ephesus for around three years when a riot broke out which landed the Apostle in jail (Acts 19:23ff.). He had already been captured earlier, but this time there was reason to fear the very worst. He himself reported this from prison when, writing to the Philippians he went on to hypothesize regarding his own death, saying he was ready to leave this world to find himself definitively with Christ (Ph 1:21-23).

He was set free, however, with all probability on condition that he leave the city. Paul was also aware moreover that the leaders of the Christian communities in Asia were by this time able to lead their churches by themselves. One thing is certain and that is that he left toward Macedonia and Achaia to gather up the collection that he had exhorted them to prepare.

His long itinerary across those provinces concluded with his third and last visit to Corinth, that which had some time earlier been announced in his letters (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1). The book of Acts confirms that Paul stayed in that city for a period of three months (Acts 20:1-3); he was a guest, along with his closest collaborators, in the house of Gaius (Rm 16:23), one of the few who had been personally baptized by the Apostle (1 Cor 1:14).

During this stay he composed the letter to the Romans, his most wide-ranging writing, containing his theological and spiritual testament. Aware of having by this time brought to an end his mission in Asia, Paul held that the moment to open a new front of evangelization in the West had arrived, and in particular a journey to Spain (Rm 15:23-24). By means of this letter Paul intended to predispose the Christian community in Rome, whom he longed to visit as soon as possible, so that they might offer him material and logistic assistance in light of his new missionary activity. It is the only case in which the Apostle writes a letter to a community not founded by him. In it he reveals his principal theological ideas so that the Christians in Rome might know of what thought and of what gospel he is the bearer. He informs them also of the fact that before initiating his mission in the West he had to return to Jerusalem to hand over the collection taken up in Macedonia and in Achaia. Once this had been done he intends to definitively conclude his mission in that part of the Empire (Rm 15:25-32).

This is the last news of his life recoverable from his authentic letters.²⁸ From here on it will be possible to reconstruct the life of Paul solely on the basis of the Acts.

²⁷ This sixth message to the church of Corinth includes, as already stated, 2 Cor 8-9. Some authors, however, would see in this two distinct letters: one (c. 8) properly directed to the faithful of Corinth; the other (c. 9) for the faithful of Achaia, as the difference in the language used would make one think.

²⁸ In that period Paul also wrote another very brief letter, now contained in Romans 16, which students hold was originally addressed to the Christians of Ephesus, with the scope of recommending a warm reception for Phoebe, the deaconess (minister) of the church at Cenchreae, Corinth's eastern port.

f) His return to Jerusalem

Having concluded his stay in Corinth, Paul begins the return trip to Jerusalem. A small group made up of Christians from the community who had collected the money accompanied him. The book of Acts, while not mentioning the collection, furnishes the names of seven delegates: Sopater (from Beroea), Aristarchus and Secundus (from Thessalonica), Gaius (from Derbe), Timothy (from Lystra), Tychicus and Trophimus (from Ephesus).

Luke presents the entire trip from Corinth to Jerusalem in great detail. Paul touches the following places: Philippi (Acts 20:6), Troas (20:6), Assos (20:13), Mitylene (20:14), Chios (20:15), Samos (20:15), Trogillio (20:15), Miletus (20:15), Cos (21:1), Rhodes (21:1), Patara (21:1), Cyprus (21:3), Tyre (21:3), Ptolemais (21:7) and finally the port of Caesarea (21:8). In this way the author uses the diary of the trip of the anonymous companions of Paul already met earlier. Not having sufficient data to furnish details of every single stage, he describes this last Pauline journey placing it in parallel with the final ascent of Jesus to Jerusalem. We see therefore that Paul

- At Ephesus firmly decided to go to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21), as Jesus had expressly done;
- He said that the motive for his trip was to take part in a religious feast in Jerusalem (20:16), as Jesus had;
- At Troas he celebrates his last Eucharistic supper (20:7), just as Jesus did;
- He restores life to a young man who was dead (20:8-12), in the same way Jesus did;
- At Miletus he gave a farewell discourse (20:18-35), like Jesus;
- At Tyre and at Caesarea his friends tried to dissuade him from going to meet his death (21:3b-13), as the disciples of Jesus had done (Jn 17);
- Finally, all gave their “May the Lord’s will be done” (21:14), in imitation of Jesus in Gethsemane.²⁹

Having arrived in Jerusalem, Paul is arrested by the authorities, jailed and ultimately sent to Rome to be judged there by the emperor. He will die without being able to follow his project to go to Spain.

Without knowing it, he had finished his last missionary journey.

DR. ARIEL ÁLVAREZ VALDÉS

²⁹ The parallelism between Jesus and Paul continues after the arrival in Jerusalem: the appearance before the Sanhedrin, the convocation of the Roman Tribunal, the appearance before Herod, the triple declaration of innocence, etc.

The first apostolic activity of St. Paul



Map prepared by the author

Editor's Note: click on the links below to see maps of St. Paul's journeys (as traditionally presented) to compare with the article:

www.biblemap.org/events/

www.theopedia.com/Paul's_missionary_journeys

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