

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

THE TRAINING OF PAUL

November 10, 2024
8th Sunday of Luke
Revision H

Gospel: Luke 10:25-37
Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

The Gospel lesson of the Good Samaritan returns to an often-occurring theme of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as us. This Gospel lesson is used in the Western Church in July.

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Today’s Gospel lesson is recorded only by Luke and occurred in the Fall of 29 AD. It begins with a lawyer (an expert in the Mosaic Law, not civil law) trying to justify himself with Jesus (Luke 10:29). He first asked Jesus, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25) Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law?” (Luke 10:26) The lawyer replied by quoting the Greatest Commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). The lawyer did not come up with this completely on his own. His statement was part of a creed used in the synagogue worship that was learned and memorized by school children¹. This is also a quote from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

The same issue came up again in the Spring of 30 AD during Holy Week, where the Pharisees and Scribes also asked Jesus which is the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-34). Jesus replied that all the (Mosaic) Law and the Prophets hang on this same statement that the lawyer made; that is, the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:40). One scribe² replied to Jesus, “to love Him with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:33). Jesus remarked then that he had answered wisely; so Jesus said to him, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mark 12:34). This is to say: you know what to do; all you need now is to go do it.

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¹ Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, p. 245, 101-104

Gower, New Manners and Customs of Bible Times, p. 79.

² Scribes were experts in the Mosaic Law and could be called lawyers.

Background: The Lawyer

In our Gospel lesson, when the lawyer quoted the Greatest Commandment, Jesus replied, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). Thus the opinion of the experts on the Mosaic Law (Scribes, Pharisees, lawyers) concur that the Greatest Commandment is the answer for obtaining eternal life, and the Lord agreed with them.

Clement of Alexandria discussed³ why Christ first asked the lawyer if he had kept the Commandments. Keeping them leads to eternal life in that the Commandments define sin and what God requires. Good deeds and the keeping of the Commandments are an acceptable prayer to God.

“God dispenses many treasures; some disclosed by the Law, others by the prophets; some by the mouth of God, and others by the Spirit singing accordingly. And the Lord is the same Instructor by all these. Here is then a comprehensive precept, and an exhortation of life, all embracing, ‘As you wish that men should do to you, do likewise to them’ (Luke 6:31). We may comprehend the Commandments in two parts, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength; and your neighbor as yourself’. From these He infers, ‘on this hang the Law and the prophets’ (Matthew 22:37-40). Further, to him that asked, ‘What good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?’, He answered, ‘Do you know the Commandments?’ And on him replying, Yes, He said, ‘This do⁴, and you shall be saved’ (Matthew 19:16-20). Especially conspicuous is the love of our Instructor set forth in various Commandments. We have the Ten Commandments given by Moses, an elementary principle, defining the designation of sins in a way conducive to salvation. These things are to be observed, and whatever else is commanded in reading the Bible. And He directs us, ‘Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord’ (Isaiah 1:16-18). We find many examples in other places, as, for instance, respecting prayer, where good works are an acceptable prayer to the Lord⁵. And the manner of prayer is described: ‘If you see the naked, cover him; and you shall not overlook those who belong to your seed. Then shall your light spring forth early, and your healing shall spring up quickly; and your righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of God shall encompass you’. What, then, is the fruit of such prayer? ‘Then shall you call, and God will hear you; while you are yet speaking, He will say, I am here’” (Isaiah 58:7-9).

Irenaeus of Lyon stated⁶ that when Jesus asked the lawyer if he had kept the Commandments, this was in keeping with what He had imposed on mankind from the beginning; but the lawyer hadn’t kept them, even though he said that he had. Jesus offered the lawyer the

³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, III, 12.

⁴ Clement has added a few of the expressions from Luke 10:25-28.

⁵ See for example the Judgment of Works (Matthew 25:31-46), where people are saved by virtue of their dedication to serving the Lord’s brethren.

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, IV, xii, 5.

reward of an Apostle if he would diligently pursue his question, but the lawyer turned Him down.

“The Law beforehand taught mankind the necessity of following Christ, and He made this clear, when He replied to him who asked Him what he should do that he might inherit eternal life. ‘If you want to enter into life, keep the Commandments’. When the lawyer asked ‘Which?’, again the Lord replied, ‘Do not commit adultery, kill, steal, or lie; honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 19:16-19). He set this as an ascending series of precepts before those who wished to follow Him, where the precepts of the Law are the entrance into life. What He said to this lawyer, He says to everyone. The former said, ‘All these have I done’, and most likely he had not kept them, for if he had, the Lord would not have said to him, ‘Keep the Commandments’ (Matthew 19:17). The Lord, exposing his covetousness, said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, sell all that you have, and distribute to the poor; and come, follow me’ (Matthew 19:21). He promised to those, who would act thus, the portion of the Apostles⁷. He did not preach to His followers another God the Father, besides Him, who was proclaimed by the Law from the beginning, nor the fables invented by the heretics. But He taught that they should obey the Commandments, which God imposed from the beginning, and do away with their former covetousness by good works, and follow after Christ. That possessions distributed to the poor annul former covetousness, Zacchaeus made clear, when he said, ‘Half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone, I restore fourfold’” (Luke 19:8).

The Temptation of the Lawyer

In our Gospel lesson, the lawyer wanted to justify himself and sought clarification on the word “neighbor” (Luke 10:29). The implication was that he was only interested in tempting Jesus (Luke 10:25), not in inheriting eternal life. Cyril of Alexandria⁸ comes out smoking against the lawyer, saying that he had no intention of learning from Him, but merely sought to tempt Him. Thus Jesus rightly returned his focus to that part of the Mosaic Law that might lead to his understanding and repentance.

“For a man to make a pretense of pleasant-spoken words, with a tongue anointed with the honey of deception, with a heart full of bitterness is double-dealing and hypocrisy in action and conduct. ‘Their tongue is a piercing arrow; the words of their mouth are deceitful; he speaks peacefully to his neighbor, and enmity is in his heart’ (Jeremiah 9:8 LXX). And again, ‘Their words are smoother than oil, yet they are arrows’ (Psalm 54:21 LXX); by which is meant that their words have the force of arrows shot from bows and striking violently.”

“As proof of my assertion let us examine the lawyer's words. ‘A certain lawyer stood up, and tempted Him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ (Luke 10:25) A lawyer, according to the custom of the Jews, was one acquainted with the Law, or at least having the reputation for knowing it; but

⁷ This is exactly what the Twelve Apostles did; they left everything (Matthew 19:29), and so did the entire Early Church after Pentecost (Acts 2:44-45).

⁸ Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Homily 68, Studion Publishers, 1983, pp 287-290,

in this case, he really didn't know it. This man imagined that he could trap Christ! Many people had accused Christ, saying that He taught that the commandments given by Moses were of no value, while He introduced new teachings, which were not in accordance with the Law. The lawyer, expecting to be able to trap Christ, and get Him to say something against Moses, tempted Him, saying, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"

"But he didn't know Who he was dealing with! How could he have ventured to tempt God, Who tries the hearts and reins (Psalm 7:9 LXX), and to Whom nothing in us is hid? He might have said, 'What shall I do to be saved, or to please God, and receive reward from Him?' But he passed by this, and used rather Christ's expressions, trying to pour ridicule upon His head. Since Jesus spoke constantly of eternal life to as many as drew near to Him, the haughty lawyer, to ridicule Him, made use of His own expressions."

"Now had he been truly desirous of learning, he would have heard from Him the things that lead on to eternal life; but as he wickedly tempted Him, he heard nothing more than those commands, which were given by Moses. Jesus said, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' (Luke 10:26) And on the lawyer's repeating what is enacted in the Law, as if to punish his wickedness, and reprove his malicious purpose, Christ, as knowing all things, said, 'You have answered rightly; do this, and you shall live' (Luke 10:28). At this point, the lawyer had missed his prey; his wickedness was unsuccessful, the net of deceit was torn apart. He was 'found and caught, because he contended against the Lord'" (Jeremiah 50:24).

"Having missed his prey, he fell headlong into vanity; hurried from one pitfall to another, he fell from deceit to pride. One kind of wickedness, as soon as it has seized him, thrusts him on to another, making him wander from destruction to destruction. He does not ask in order that he may learn, but wishing to justify himself. For observe how from self-love as well as pride he shamelessly called out, 'And who is my neighbor?' (Luke 10:29) There is no one like you, O lawyer? Do you raise yourself above everyone? Those who are able to judge themselves are wise (Proverbs 13:10 LXX). As he exalted himself and boasted in vain imaginations, he learned from Christ, that he was destitute of love towards his neighbors; the profession of being learned in the Law didn't profit him in any way whatever."

"Very skillfully Jesus weaved the parable of him who fell into the hands of thieves, saying, that when he was lying half dead, a priest passed by, and in like manner a Levite, without feeling towards him any sentiment of humanity, or dropping upon him the oil of compassionate love. But rather, their mind was unsympathetic and cruel towards him. But one of another race, a Samaritan, fulfilled the law of love. Justly He asked, which of these three, he thinks, was the sufferer's neighbor. He said, 'He that showed mercy to him'. And to this Christ added, 'Go also, and act in like manner' (Luke 10:37). You have seen, O lawyer, and it has been proved by the parable, that it is of no avail whatever to any man, to be set up by empty names, and to pride yourself with meaningless titles, so long as the excellence of deeds does not accompany them. The dignity of the priesthood is useless to its owners, and equally so being called learned in the Law,

unless they excel also in deeds. For a crown of love is being made for him who loves his neighbor; and he proves to be a Samaritan. As Peter testified, ‘I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him’ (Acts 10:34-35). For Christ, Who loves our virtues, accepts all who are diligent in good pursuits.”

Loving Our Neighbor as Ourselves

The command in the Mosaic Law to love one’s neighbor (Leviticus 19:18) uses the Hebrew word “*rea*” meaning friend or companion and thus implies a very close neighbor. But the Mosaic Law also says to treat the stranger among you as the native and to love the stranger as yourself, remembering that you were once strangers in Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34). The Hebrew word for stranger is “*ger*” meaning sojourner; in the Greek Septuagint, the corresponding word is “*proselutos*” meaning one who draws near; that is, a proselyte. So how far should loving one’s neighbor extend? Should it extend just to one’s friends and companions, to the members of one’s own tribe or people, as far as to Gentile proselytes or to any sojourner passing through? For a Mosaic Law scholar knowledgeable about minute details of the Law, this was a thought-provoking question that might be used to trap Jesus into saying something against Moses.

Jesus proceeded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan to clarify this. In the Parable the victim is:

- Robbed, stripped and wounded
- Ignored by a priest and a Levite
- Given first aid by a Samaritan
- Transported to the nearest inn and treated further by the Samaritan
- Given 1 to 2 weeks further paid medical care by the Samaritan.

In the context, it is implied that the victim was a Jew⁹. Being left half dead, he was likely bleeding to death from puncture wounds. By the time the Samaritan reached him, he had probably lost enough blood to make him very weak. Pouring wine on his wounds served as an antiseptic due to the alcohol in the wine. Pouring oil on his wounds also served as an ointment to further prevent infection.

The priest and Levite passing by had good excuses for not getting involved. They were probably either going to or coming from serving in the Temple in Jerusalem. Priests and Levites were divided up into 24 lots (1 Chronicles 24) where those in one lot served in the Temple in Jerusalem for one week, then went home. Twenty-three weeks later they served one week again. That way, service in the Temple was divided up among all the priests and Levites. The homes of the priests and Levites were confined to the “Levitical Cities” prescribed in the Mosaic Law (Numbers 35:1-8, Joshua 21:1-42). This lasted until the kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon and most Levites abandoned the Northern cities and returned to Judah. After the Babylonian captivity, Levitical cities were not distinct anymore and priests and Levites

⁹ 1st Century Jews and Samaritans generally despised each other (John 4:8, 20). If the Samaritan had helped another foreigner, it would be no big deal. But for him to stop to help a Jew was remarkable.

grouped together into what were called “Priestly Centers.” From these “Priestly Centers”, they traveled together to and from Jerusalem. One such “Priestly Center” was Nazareth¹⁰.

From the viewpoint of the priest or Levite, it was easy to rationalize not getting involved. The man was bleeding, and therefore he was unclean and so would they be if they touched him (Leviticus 15:2-13). And they couldn’t serve in the Temple if they were unclean (Leviticus 22:2-6). But yet, the Lord cut through this religiosity excuse by saying, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13, 2:7, both of which quote Hosea 6:6). Even the scribe understood this, saying that loving one’s neighbor is more important than sacrifice (Mark 12:33). God can raise up from stones children to Abraham who can offer sacrifices (Matthew 3:9, Luke 3:8, 19:40). What God really wants is someone who will be like Him and show mercy.

For the Samaritan to transport the wounded man to an inn was not a small task either. If the guy was unconscious or drifting in and out, he couldn’t ride. Somehow, the Samaritan “set him on his own animal” (Luke 20:34).

Finally, after taking care of the wounded man overnight, the Samaritan gave the innkeeper two denarii (this represented two days’ wages for a laborer!) to continue his medical care and promised more if more was needed.

Jesus concluded the story by asking the lawyer which of the three was a neighbor to him who fell among thieves (Luke 10:36). The lawyer got the message, “He who showed mercy on him” (Luke 10:37). Then Jesus said to him (and to us) “Go and do likewise.”

Ambrose of Milan stated¹¹ that there are “ordinary duties” and “perfect duties”. “Ordinary duties” are keeping the Commandments; everyone should do this without even thinking about it. “Perfect duties” refer to loving our enemies and showing mercy to the poor, whereby we receive more than we give. The righteous Job is a good example of this.

“Every duty is either ‘ordinary’ or ‘perfect’, a fact which we can also confirm by the authority of the Scriptures. For the Lord said, ‘If you will enter into life, keep the Commandments. The lawyer said, ‘Which?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Do not murder, commit adultery, steal, or bear false witness; honor your father and your mother, and love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 19:17-19). These are ordinary duties, to which something is lacking.”

“Upon this the young man said to Him, ‘All these things have I kept from my youth, what do I still lack? Jesus said to him, ‘If you will be perfect, go and sell all your goods and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow Me’ (Matthew 19:20-21). Earlier the same is written, where the Lord said that we must love our enemies, and pray for those that falsely accuse and persecute us, and bless those that curse us. This we are bound to do, if we want to be perfect as our Father Who is in heaven. He directs the sun to shed his rays over the evil and the good, and makes the lands of the whole earth fertile with rain and dew without any distinction (Matthew 5:45). This, then, is a perfect duty, whereby all things are put right, which could have any failings in them.”

¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody MA, 1995, pp. 36-37.

¹¹ Ambrose of Milan, Duties of the Clergy, I, xi, 36-39.

“Mercy is a good thing, for it makes men perfect, in that it imitates the perfect Father. Nothing graces the Christian soul so much as mercy; mercy as shown chiefly towards the poor, that you may treat them as sharers in common with you in the produce of nature, which brings forth the fruits of the earth for use to all. Thus, you may freely give to a poor man what you have, and in this way help him who is your brother and companion. You give silver; he receives life. You give money; he considers it his fortune. Your coin makes up all his property.”

“Further, he bestows more on you than you on him, since he is your debtor in regard to your salvation. How? If you clothe the naked, you clothe yourself with righteousness; if you bring the stranger under your roof, if you support the needy, he procures for you the friendship of the saints and eternal habitations. That is no small recompense. You sow earthly things and receive heavenly. Do you wonder at the judgment of God in the case of holy Job? Wonder rather at his virtue, in that he could say, ‘I was an eye to the blind, and a foot to the lame. I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the case *that* I did not know’ (Job 29:15-16). Their shoulders were made warm with the skins of my lambs. The stranger dwelt not at my gates, but my door was open to everyone that came. Clearly blessed is he from whose house a poor man has never gone with empty hand. Nor again is anyone more blessed than he who is sensible to the needs of the poor, and the hardships of the weak and helpless. In the Day of Judgment, he will receive salvation from the Lord, Whom he will have as his debtor for the mercy he has shown.”

John Chrysostom looked¹² very carefully at Paul’s words, “All the Commandments are summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’. Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love *is* the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:9-10). God puts love for our brethren on a par with love for God Himself; that is, one Commandment “is like” the other. There are two parts: abstinence from evil and doing good deeds. He considers us worthy to share His love, and He has been saying this even from ancient times.

“He does not say merely it is fulfilled, but ‘it is summed up’, that is, the whole work of the Commandments is concisely and, in a few words, completed. For the beginning and the end of virtue is love. This it has for its root and its groundwork, this for its summit. If then it is both beginning and fulfillment, what is there equal to it? But he does not seek love merely, but intense love. He does not say merely ‘love your neighbor’ but, ‘as yourself’. Christ also said that ‘the Law and the Prophets hang on it’. And in making two kinds of love, see how He has raised this! For after saying that the first commandment is, ‘You shall love the Lord your God’, He added a second; and He did not stop there, but added, ‘like it; You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37-40). What can be equal to this love for man, or this gentleness? When we were at infinite distance from Him, He brought the love for us into comparison with that toward Himself, and said that it ‘is like this’. He puts the measures of either as nearly the same, of the one He says, ‘with all your heart, and with all your soul’, but of the love towards one’s neighbor, He says, ‘as yourself’. When we are fond of

¹² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans, XXIII, vv. 9-10.

anyone, we say, if you love him, then you love me. So, He also showed this and said, 'is like it'; to Peter, He said, 'If you love Me, feed My sheep'" (John 21:16).

"Observe how the Law has two virtues: (1) abstinence from evils, for it 'works no harm', and (2) the working of good deeds. 'For it is', he says, 'the fulfilling (or filling up) of the Law' (Matthew 5:18). It does not bring before us instruction only on moral duties in a concise form, but makes the accomplishment of them easy also. He was not just careful that we should become acquainted with things that are profitable to us, but also the doing of them was a great assistance to us. He did not just accomplish some part of the Commandments, but the whole sum of virtue in us. Let us then love one another, since in this way we shall also love God, Who loves us. He considers you worthy to share His love, and hates you when you don't share it. For man's love is full of envy and grudging; but God's love is free from all passion; therefore, He seeks for those to share His love. For He says, love with Me, and then I will love you the more. These are the words of a vehement lover! If you love My brethren, then I will also reckon Myself to be greatly beloved of you. For He vehemently desires our salvation, and this He showed from ancient times. Hear what He said when He was forming man, 'Let Us make man in Our Image', and again, 'Let Us make a helper for him. It is not good for him to be alone' (Genesis 2:18). And when man had transgressed, He rebuked him, but observe how gently. He did not say, 'Wretch! After receiving so great benefits, have you trusted the devil, and left your Benefactor, to take up with the evil spirit?' But what did He say? 'Who told you that you were naked, unless you have eaten of the Tree, which is the only one I commanded you not to eat of?' (Genesis 3:11) This is as if a father were to say to a child, who was ordered not to touch a sword, and then disobeyed and got wounded, 'How did you come to be wounded? You came so by not listening to me'. You see they are the words of a friend rather than a master, of a friend despised, and not even then forsaking. Let us then imitate Him, and when we need to rebuke, let us preserve this moderation."

Tertullian stated¹³ that Adam, in the Garden, knew the Law given to Moses in a condensed form, and he gives evidence for this from the Scriptures. This condensed form certainly included loving God and neighbor.

"Why should people believe that God, the founder of the universe, the Governor of the whole world (Jeremiah 31:27 LXX (37:27), Hosea 2:23, Zechariah 10:9, Matthew 13:31-43), had given a Law through Moses to one people, and not to all nations? Unless He had given it to everyone, He would not have permitted proselytes out of the nations to have access to it. He gave to all nations the same Law, which at definite times He directed should be observed, when He willed, through whom He willed, and as He willed. In the beginning of the world, He gave to Adam and Eve a Law, that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree planted in the middle of Paradise; if they did otherwise, they were to die (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:2-3). In this Law given to Adam, we recognize in embryo all the precepts, which afterwards sprouted when given through Moses. If they had loved the Lord their God, they would not have disobeyed His precept

¹³ Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, I, vii, 2.

(Genesis 3:6). If they had loved their neighbor¹⁴, that is, themselves, they would not have believed the persuasion of the serpent, and thus would not have committed murder upon themselves, falling from immortality, by disobeying God's precept. They also would have abstained from theft, stealthily tasting the fruit of the tree (Genesis 3:12-13); they would not have been anxious to hide beneath a tree to escape the view of the Lord their God (Genesis 3:8-9). Further, they would not have made themselves partners with the lies of the devil, by believing him that they would be 'like God' (Genesis 3:4-5). And thus, they would not have offended God either, as their Father, if they had not coveted another's, they would not have tasted of the unlawful fruit."

"Therefore, in this general and primordial Law of God, we recognize all the precepts of the Mosaic Law, which germinated when disclosed at their proper times. For the subsequent addition of a Law is the work of the same Being who had before given a precept; it is His function subsequently to train those, whom He had formed as righteous creatures. Before the Law of Moses, I contend that there was a Law unwritten, which was habitually understood naturally, and by the fathers was habitually kept. How was Noah 'found righteous' (Genesis 6:9, 7:1, Hebrews 11:7), if in his case the righteousness of a natural Law had not preceded him? How was Abraham accounted 'a friend of God' (Isaiah 41:8, James 2:23), if not on the ground of righteousness, in the observance of a natural Law? How was Melchizedek named 'priest'¹⁵ of the Most High God', if before the Levitical priesthood, there were no Levites who offered sacrifices to God? It was after the above-mentioned patriarchs that the Law was given to Moses, 430 years after Abraham at their Exodus from Egypt (Genesis 15:13, Exodus 12:40-42, Acts 7:6). From this we understand that God's Law preceded Moses, and was not first given at Sinai but existed in Paradise. It was updated for the patriarchs, and again for the Jews, at definite periods and even set forth to the Gentiles."

We Are Like the Man Fallen Among Thieves

There are many ways where we are like the man who fell among thieves. Sin, the passions, covetousness have wounded us and the devil has beaten us up. As we get mired in sin, we feel like we are half dead. Christ, who was even called a Samaritan by His enemies (John 8:48), doesn't pass us by, but comes to help us. He pours wine and oil on our wounds: the wine is an antiseptic, like discipline, that may cause temporary pain as it does its work. The oil is soothing, like compassion, and seals the wounds to prevent further infection. After carrying us to a place, the Church, where we can be taken care of, our Good Samaritan gives us two denarii, which is like the servant who received two talents from his master. If we need more, He will provide more later.

Clement of Alexandria stated¹⁶ that true love, such as shown by the Samaritan, buds into well-doing, since "a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). Our love is directed first to God, then to our neighbor. Love shown to our neighbor, God accepts as if done

¹⁴ Compare Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:34-40, Matthew 19:19, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10 :25-28, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Exodus 20:12-17, Deuteronomy 5:16-21.

¹⁵ See Genesis 14:18, Psalm 110:4, Hebrews 5:10, 7:1-3, 10, 15, 17.

¹⁶ Clement of Alexandria, Salvation of the Rich Man, 27-30.

to Himself. On another level, we are like the wounded man lying on the road, and Christ is the Good Samaritan

“The Master accordingly, when asked, ‘Which is the greatest of the Commandments?’, said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul, and with all your strength’ (Matthew 22:36-38). That no commandment is greater than this, He says, with good reason; it commands us regarding the Greatest God Himself. Being loved by Him beforehand, it is impious for us to regard anything else older or more excellent.”

“The second in order, and not any less than this, He says, is, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:39); that is, God above yourself. When the lawyer inquired, ‘Who is my neighbor?’ (Luke 10:29), He did not specify the blood relation, the fellow-citizen, the proselyte, him that had been circumcised, or the man who uses the same Law. But He introduces one on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and represents him stabbed by robbers, thrown half-dead on the road, passed by the priest, looked sideways at by the Levite, but pitied by the vilified and excommunicated Samaritan. He did not, like those, pass casually, but provided such things as the man in danger required, such as oil, bandages, a beast of burden, money for the inn-keeper, part given now, and part promised. ‘Which of them was neighbor to him that suffered these things?’ On his answering, ‘He that showed mercy to him’ (Luke 10:36-37), He replied, ‘Go, therefore, and do likewise’, since love buds into well-doing.”

“In both the Commandments, then, He introduces love; but distinguishes it in order. He assigns to God the first part of love, and allots the second to our neighbor. He has pitied us most of all, we who were all but put to death with many wounds, fears, lusts, passions, pains, deceits, and pleasures by the rulers of darkness? Of these wounds the only physician is Jesus, who cuts out the passions thoroughly by the root. He does not do as the Law does, with bare effects¹⁷, but applies His ax to the roots of wickedness. He it is that poured wine on our wounded souls that brought the oil, which flows from the compassions of the Father, and gave it abundantly. He it is that produced the bindings of health and salvation that cannot be undone, Faith, Hope, Love. He it is that subjected angels, and principalities, and powers to serve us. They also shall be delivered from the vanity of the world through the revelation of the glory of the sons of God. We are therefore to love Him equally with God. And he who loves Christ Jesus does His will and keeps His Commandments. ‘For not everyone that said to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father’ (Matthew 7:21). And ‘Why call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?’ (Luke 6:46) ‘And blessed are you who see and hear what neither righteous men nor prophets’ have seen or heard (Matthew 13:16-17), if you do what I say.”

“He then is first who loves Christ; and second, he who loves and cares for those who have believed on Him. For whatever is done to a disciple, the Lord accepts as done to Himself, and reckons the whole as His. ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat’ (Matthew 25:35 etc.). And in

¹⁷ That is, He does not just say, “Thou shall not” to a stiff-necked people, but calls to those who have a willing heart.

another place, ‘He that receives you; receives Me; and he that doesn’t receive you, rejects Me’” (Matthew 10:40, Luke 10:16).

Ambrose of Milan applied¹⁸ the imagery of the wounded man, who was helped by the Samaritan, to those who have lapsed (denied the Faith) under persecution and succumbed to the pleasures and comforts of this life. In this way, he is wounded and half dead, and he needs both the comfort of the oil and the discipline or disinfectant of the wine.

“It is a twofold grace that everyone who believes might, in addition, suffer for the Lord Jesus. He who believes receives His grace, but he receives a second, if his faith is crowned by suffering. Peter received grace before he suffered, but when he suffered he received a second gift. And many who have not had the grace to suffer for Christ have nevertheless had the grace of believing on Him.”

“Therefore, ‘everyone that believes in Him should not perish’ (John 3:15-16). Let no one, whatever his condition, fear that he will perish, even after a fall. It may come to pass that the Good Samaritan may find someone going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; that is, falling back from the martyr’s conflict to the pleasures of this life and the comforts of the world. We may be wounded by robbers, that is, by persecutors, and left half dead. That Good Samaritan, Who is the Guardian of our souls -- for the word ‘Samaritan’ means Guardian -- won’t pass him by, but tend and heal him.”

“He doesn’t pass him by, because He sees in him some signs of life, so that there is hope that he may recover. Doesn’t it seem to you that he who has fallen is half alive if faith sustains any breath of life? He is dead who completely casts God out of his heart. He who does not completely cast Him out, but under pressure from torments has denied Him for a time, is half dead. If he is dead, you cannot ask him to repent, seeing he cannot be healed? If he is half dead, pour in oil and wine, not wine without oil, oil for comforting and wine for the sting of disinfectant. Place him on your beast, give him over to the host, lay out two denarii for his cure, be a neighbor to him. You cannot be a neighbor unless you have compassion on him; for no one can be called a neighbor unless he has healed, not killed, another. If you wish to be called a neighbor, Christ says to you, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:37).

Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, wrote¹⁹ to shepherds in the Church regarding the balance between compassion and discipline, where both are necessary. One extreme is the High Priest Eli, who was unable to discipline his sons out of excess compassion and lost everything. On the other hand, harsh discipline without compassion represents a lack of love. The Good Samaritan exhibits a balance in that he poured wine on the man’s wounds as an antiseptic (discipline) but also poured oil on the wounds to soothe them (compassion).

“Eli, overcome by false affection, would not punish his delinquent sons, and smote himself along with his sons before the strict Judge (1 Samuel 4:17, 18). God said to him, ‘You have honored your sons more than Me’ (1 Samuel 2:29). The Lord also criticized the shepherds of Israel saying, ‘That which was broken you have not bound up, and that which was cast away you have not brought back’

¹⁸ Ambrose of Milan, Two Books Concerning Repentance, I, xi, 50-52.

¹⁹ Gregory the Great, Book of Pastoral Rule, II, 6.

(Ezekiel 34:4). One who has fallen away is brought back when anyone who has fallen into sin is recalled to a state of righteousness by pastoral diligence. For binding a fracture is similar to discipline subduing a sin; if not done, the injured might bleed to death for lack of the wound being compressed and constrained adequately.

But often a fracture is made worse, when it is bound too tight, so that the cut is more severely felt from being constrained improperly. Wounds of sin in subordinates should be done with great carefulness, so that it exercises discipline against delinquents, but retains loving-kindness. Care should be taken that a ruler shows himself to his subjects as a mother in loving-kindness, and as a father in discipline. It should be done with anxious overview, so that neither discipline is rigid nor loving-kindness is lax. There is much lacking both to discipline and to compassion, if one is used without the other. Rulers ought to exercise both compassion justly considerate, and discipline affectionately severe towards their subjects. For the Truth teaches, the man is brought by the care of the Samaritan half dead into the inn, and both wine and oil are applied to his wounds (Luke 10:34); the wine to make them smart, the oil to soothe them. For whoever superintends the healing of wounds needs to administer the wine to the smart of pain, and in oil the softness of loving-kindness. Through wine what is festering may be purged, and through oil what is curable may be soothed. Gentleness must be mingled with severity; a sort of compound must be made of both, so that subjects are neither overcome by too much severity, nor relaxed by too great kindness. This is well signified by that ark of the tabernacle, in which, together with the tablets, there was a rod and manna (Hebrews 9:4). With knowledge of sacred Scripture in the good ruler's heart there is the rod of constraint, there should be also the manna of sweetness. David said, 'Your rod and Your staff, they have comforted me' (Psalm 23:4). For with a rod we are disciplined, with a staff we are supported. If, then, there is the constraint of the rod for striking, there should be also the comfort of the staff for supporting. Therefore, let there be love, but not weakness; let there be vigor, but not aggravation; let there be zeal, but not senseless burning; let there be pity; but not sparing more than is expedient. Justice and mercy blend themselves together in the best rule.

Irenaeus likened²⁰ the dew on the fleece for Gideon to the Holy Spirit diffusing throughout the world. We are the ones who had fallen among thieves that the Holy Spirit cares for; we receive the two denarii for our care to make us fruitful and bring an increase to our Master

“Gideon, foreseeing the gracious gift of God, changed his request, and prophesied that there would be dryness upon the fleece of wool (a type of the people), on which alone at first there had been dew (Judges 6:36-40). This indicates that those people should no longer have the Holy Spirit from God, as Isaiah said, 'I will also command the clouds, that they rain no rain upon it' (Isaiah 5:6). But that the dew, which is the Spirit of God, who descended upon the Lord, should be diffused throughout the earth. This is 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and piety,

²⁰ Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies*, III, xvii, 3.

the spirit of the fear of God' (Isaiah 11:2). This Spirit He conferred on the Church, sending the Comforter from heaven throughout the entire world. The Lord also told us that the devil, like lightning, was thrown down from heaven. We need the dew of God, that we might not be consumed by fire, nor rendered unfruitful. Where we have an accuser, there we need an Advocate, the Lord commending to the Holy Spirit His own man, who had fallen among thieves. He Himself had compassion, and bound up his wounds, giving two royal denarii. We, receiving by the Spirit the image and superscription of the Father and the Son, might cause the denarius entrusted to us to be fruitful, counting out the increase to the Lord."

John Chrysostom stated²¹ that we should not be overly curious about the spiritual condition of those that we give help to. The Samaritan didn't do this to the wounded man, but gave him help immediately. Being overly curious and selective can take away the greater part of charity. Even if we are dealing with an unbeliever, he may be sanctified by someone else.

"I beseech you, brethren, to minister to the saints. For every believer is a saint in that he is a believer. Though he is a person living in the world, he is a saint. 'The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband' (1 Corinthians 7:14). See how the faith makes the saint? If then we see even a secular person in misfortune, let us stretch out a hand to him. Let us not be zealous for those only who dwell in the mountains; they are indeed saints both in manner of life and in faith; these others however are saints by their faith, and some of them also in manner of life. Let us not, if we see a monk thrown into prison, in that case go in to visit; but if it is a secular person, refuse to go in. He also is a saint and a brother."

"What then, you say, if he is unclean and polluted? Listen to Christ saying, 'Judge not that you be not judged' (Matthew 7:1). Help him for God's sake! Even if we see a heathen in misfortune, we ought to show kindness to him, and to every man without exception who is in misfortunes, and much more to a believer who is in the world. Listen to Paul, saying, 'Do good to all men, but especially to those who are of the household of faith' (Galatians 6:10).

I don't know why this notion has been introduced, or where this custom has prevailed. For he that only helps monks, and with others is over-curious in his inquiries, and says, 'unless he be worthy, unless he be righteous, unless he work miracles, I won't stretch out my hand'; such a one has taken away the greater part of charity. In time he will destroy the act of charity itself. And yet that is charity, which is shown towards sinners, towards the guilty. This is charity, not the pitying those who have done well, but those who have done wrong."

"Listen to the Parable! 'A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves' (Luke 10:30-37). When they had beaten him, they left him next to the road, having badly bruised him. A certain Levite came, and when he saw him, he passed by; a priest came, and when he saw him, he hurried past. A certain Samaritan came, and showed great care for him. He 'bandaged his wounds' (Luke 10:34), dropped oil on them, set him upon his

²¹ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Hebrews, X, 7-8.

donkey, 'brought him to the inn, said to the host, Take care of him' (Luke 10:35). Observe his great liberality, 'I will give you whatever you shall spend'. Who then is his neighbor? 'He that showed mercy on him! Go then also and do likewise' (Luke 10:37). What a parable He spoke! He didn't say that a Jew did this to a Samaritan, but that a Samaritan showed all that liberality. Having then heard these things, let us not care only for 'those that are of the household of faith' (Galatians 6:10), and neglect others. If you see any one in affliction, do not be curious to inquire further. His being in affliction involves a just claim to your aid. For if you see a donkey choking, you raise him up, and do not curiously inquire whose he is. Much more about a man, one ought not to be over-curious in inquiring whose he is. He is God's, whether he is heathen or Jew; since even if he is an unbeliever, still he needs help. If it had been committed to you to inquire and to judge, you would have had something to say. But, as it is, his misfortune does not allow you to search out these things. Even about men in good health, it is not right to be over-curious, or to be a busybody in other men's matters; much less about those that are in affliction."

THE TRAINING OF PAUL

November 10, 2024
20th Sunday after Pentecost
Revision E

Epistle: Galatians 1:11-19

Today's Epistle lesson is also used in the Eastern lectionary Sunday after Christmas. In the West, the Epistle text is sometimes used for the 5th Sunday of Trinity.

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The subject of today's Epistle is the early life of the Apostle Paul between his conversion and the beginning of his First Missionary Journey where the Church in Antioch sent him out. During this time, Paul also had a "flight to Egypt" experience where he had to escape from a garrison of soldiers (about 400 men, Acts 21:31, 23:23).

The context of the Epistle lesson is just how the Apostle Paul came to be an Apostle and how he got to know what he knew. To explain this, we need to go beyond just the Epistle text and cover Paul's life prior to 45 AD.

Some Dates as References

Paul's life as an Apostle began in 45 AD when Barnabas went to Tarsus to get him and brought him to Antioch. Paul and Barnabas then taught in the Church in Antioch for a year (Acts 11:25-26) before being sent out by the Church on their First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-4) in about 46 AD. Upon their return, they went up to Jerusalem for the Council of Jerusalem in 48 AD (Acts 15, Galatians 2:1-10).

There are three places in Paul's epistles that give us some dates prior to 45 AD. Two of them involve the context of the Epistle lesson:

- Galatians 2:1 - Paul's conversion occurred 14 years before the Council of Jerusalem or 34 AD²²

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²² The context is his going up to Jerusalem. He didn't go up to Jerusalem immediately following his conversion (Galatians 1:17), but he did three years later (Galatians 1:18) and 14 years later (Galatians 2:1).

- Galatians 1:18 - Paul went to see Peter and James in Jerusalem 3 years after his conversion or 37 AD
- 2 Corinthians 12:2 - Paul had a vision of heaven 14 years prior to writing 2 Corinthians. Since 2 Corinthians was written in 55 AD, his vision occurred in 41 AD

Let us look at these periods in the life of the Apostle Paul more closely.

Birth to 34 AD; Prior to Conversion

Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia probably between 5 AD and 10 AD, and was a Pharisee along with his father (Acts 23:3, 23:6). His father was a Roman citizen, and thus Paul was also (Acts 22:27-28). As was customary, all Jewish boys learned a trade as part of their education. Paul's trade was tent making (Acts 18:1-3); this would prove very helpful later on (Acts 20:32-35, 1 Corinthians 9:6-12). Paul continued his education in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, the most respected Rabbi of that day (Acts 22:3, 5:34). This higher education usually began about age 16-17 for Jewish boys where some type of formal education usually began at age 6. Paul was an excellent student and advanced beyond many of his contemporaries, being "exceedingly zealous for the traditions of his fathers" (Galatians 1:14). In the late 20's AD, it is possible that Paul came with other Pharisees to be baptized by John the Baptist. John refused to baptize the Pharisees (Luke 7:30) and called them a brood of vipers (Matthew 3:7).

In 30 AD, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Paul began to persecute the Church. Paul may have been a junior member of the Sanhedrin; he mentions that he cast his vote in favor of putting some Christians to death (Acts 26:10). In 31 AD (almost a year after Pentecost), Paul was present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 22:19-20, Acts 7:59-8:3).

The martyrdom of Stephen began as a dispute with the Synagogue of the Freedmen (people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia). They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spoke (Acts 6:9-10). Since Paul was from Cilicia, he may have been personally involved in this dispute. According to tradition²³, Paul was also a relative of Stephen.

For the next three years, Paul "persecuted the Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4). He "punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, he persecuted them even to foreign cities" (Acts 26:11).

John Chrysostom pointed out²⁴ some interesting contrasts in the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul persecuted the Church out of ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13), but yet he was extremely knowledgeable in the Law. The Jewish leaders persecuted the Christians out of love for power, but Paul did it out of zeal for doctrine. Paul's teacher, Gamaliel, was not like the other Jewish leaders, and does not seem to have a love for power like them; perhaps he instilled this in Paul. Paul was given mercy because of his ignorance; the other Jewish leaders were not given mercy because they did things willfully.

²³ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

²⁴ John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Timothy, III, v. 13.

“But I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief’. Why then did other Jews not obtain mercy? Because what they did, they didn’t do ignorantly, but willfully, well knowing what they did. For this we have the testimony of John, ‘Many of the Jews believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God’ (John 12:43). And Christ again said to them, ‘How can you believe, who receive honor one of another’ (John 5:44)? The parents of the blind man ‘said these things for fear of the Jews, lest they should be put out of the synagogue’ (John 9:22). The Jews themselves said, ‘Perceive you how we avail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after Him’ (John 12:19). Thus their love of power was everywhere in their way. When they admitted that no one can forgive sins but God only, and Christ immediately did that very thing, which they had confessed to be a sign of divinity, this could not be a case of ignorance. But where was Paul then? Perhaps one should say he was sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, and took no part with the multitude who conspired against Jesus. For Gamaliel does not appear to have been an ambitious man. Then how is it that afterwards Paul was found joining with the multitude? He saw the doctrine growing, and on the point of prevailing, and being generally embraced. For in the lifetime of Christ, the disciples consorted with Him, and afterwards with their teachers, but when they were completely separated, Paul did not act as the other Jews did, from the love of power, but from zeal. For what was the motive of his journey to Damascus? He thought the doctrine was pernicious, and was afraid that the preaching of it would spread everywhere. But with the Jews it was no concern for the multitude, but the love of power, that influenced their actions. Hence they say, ‘The Romans will come and take away both our place and nation’ (John 11:48). What fear was this that agitated them, but that of man? But it is worthy of inquiry, how one so skillful in the Law as Paul could be ignorant? It is he who says, ‘which He had promised before by His holy prophets’ (Romans 1:2). How is it then that you know not, you who are zealous of the Law of their fathers, who were brought up at the feet of Gamaliel? Yet those who spent their days on lakes and rivers, and the publicans, have embraced the Gospel, while those that studied the Law are persecuting it! It is for this he condemns himself, saying, ‘I am not fit to be called an Apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:9). It is for this he confesses his ignorance, which was produced by unbelief. For this reason, he says, he obtained ‘mercy’ (1 Timothy 2:16). What then does he mean when he says, ‘He counted me faithful?’ (1 Timothy 1:12) He would give up no right of his Master’s; even his own part he ascribed to Him, and assumed nothing to himself, nor claimed for his own the glory which was due to God. Hence in another place we find him exclaiming, ‘Sirs, why do you these things to us? We also are men of like passions with you’ (Acts 14:15). So again, ‘He counted me faithful’. And again, ‘I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me’ (1 Corinthians 15:10). And again, ‘It is He that works in us both to will and to do’ (Philippians 2:13). In acknowledging that he ‘obtained mercy’, he admits that he deserved punishment, since mercy is for such. And again in another place he says of the Jews, ‘Blindness in part is happened to Israel’” (Romans 11:25).

Chrysostom noted²⁵ that even though Paul had done some great things as an Apostle, Paul himself emphasized his unworthiness since he had persecuted the Church. Paul ranked himself lower than all the Apostles, both the Twelve, the Seventy and those who came later.

“Paul, after the Cross, persecuted Christ, and stoned His martyr Stephen by those many hands (Acts 7:59-8:1); but he repented, and condemned his former sins, and ran to Him whom he had persecuted. Christ immediately enrolled him among His friends, and the chief of them, having appointed him a herald and teacher of all the world, who had been ‘a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man’ (1 Timothy 1:13). Paul rejoiced at the loving-kindness of God, proclaimed it aloud, and has not been ashamed, but having recorded in his writings, as on a pillar, the deeds formerly dared by him, and has exhibited them to all. Paul thought it better that his former life should be placarded in sight of all, so that the greatness of the free gift of God might appear. He didn’t want to obscure Christ’s ineffable and indescribable loving-kindness by hesitating to parade before all men his own error. Paul continually treats of his persecution, his plotting, his wars against the Church, at one time saying, ‘I am the least of the apostles²⁶, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God’ (1 Corinthians 15:9); at another, ‘Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief’ (1 Timothy 1:15). And again, ‘You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to destroy it*’” (Galatians 1:13).

“For making as it were a kind of return to Christ for His long-suffering towards him, by showing who it was, what a hater and enemy that He saved. Paul declared with much openness the warfare which at the first with all zeal he warred against Christ; and with this he holds forth good hopes to those who despaired of their condition. For he says, that Christ accepted him, in order that in him first ‘Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life’ (Timothy 1:16), and the abundant riches of His goodness.”

Paul said, “But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now, we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Corinthians 13:10-12). This suggests that Paul was saying that his earlier experience in Judaism was marked by childishness.

Paul’s Conversion

²⁵ John Chrysostom, Homilies on John, X, 1-2.

²⁶ Not the least of the Twelve, but the least of ALL the Apostles. See John Chrysostom, Homilies on 1 Corinthians, XXXVIII, 6. This is quite a statement, since most of the Seventy Apostles worked for Paul at some point on his various missionary journeys. For more details on who and when, see Mark Kern, The Life of the Apostle Paul, St Athanasius Press, 2014. This is available at <https://www.stathanasius.org/resources/e-books/>.

Armed with letters from the high priest to the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:1-2), Paul headed north to seek out Christians that had scattered because of his persecution (Acts 8:4). On the road to Damascus, Paul met the Lord and was struck blind (Acts 9:3-8). In that encounter, the Lord told Paul to go into the city of Damascus where he would be told what to do. The Lord also told Paul that He would send him to the Gentiles that they also might have an inheritance among the faithful (Acts 26:16-18).

Meanwhile in Damascus, the Apostle Ananias also had a vision (Acts 9:10-12). Ananias was one of the original Seventy and was one of the people Paul was looking for, and Ananias knew it (Acts 9:13-14). The Lord told Ananias that Paul was coming and that:

- Paul had been told that a man named Ananias would lay hands on him to restore his sight (Acts 9:12).
- Paul would evangelize the Gentiles and proclaim Christ to kings and to Israel (Acts 9:15).
- The Lord would show Paul how much he needed to suffer for the Lord's Name's sake (Acts 9:16).

Ananias went right away to the house on the street called Straight where Paul was staying and laid hands on him, restored his sight and baptized him. Located at this address today is the Patriarchate of the Church of Antioch.

John Chrysostom noted²⁷ that God called Paul at just the right time on account of Paul's excellent capacity. However, Paul himself in his humility, always spoke of this as grace and the mercy of God towards someone who didn't deserve it.

“Paul's object is to show, that it was by some secret providence that he was left for a time to himself (Galatians 1:16). Paul he was set apart from his mother's womb to be an Apostle and to be called to that ministry (Galatians 1:15). Yet he was not actually called until that time on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-16), which summons he instantly obeyed. It is evident that God had some hidden reason for this delay.”

“God indeed says that He called him on account of his excellent capacity, as He said to Ananias, ‘He is a chosen vessel of Mine, to bear my name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel’ (Acts 9:15). That is to say, capable of service, and the accomplishment of great deeds. God gives this as the reason for Paul's call! But Paul himself everywhere ascribes it to grace, and to God's inexpressible mercy, as in the words, ‘However for this reason I obtained mercy’, not that I was sufficient or even serviceable, but ‘that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life’ (1 Timothy 1:16). Behold his overflowing humility; I obtained mercy, says he, that no one might despair, when the worst of men had shared His bounty. For this is the force of the words, ‘that Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him’”.

34 AD to 37 AD; Immediately after Conversion

²⁷ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, vv. 15-16.

Paul spent some days with the disciples of Damascus after his baptism (Acts 9:19-20). Undoubtedly, Ananias and Paul talked about their visions: that Paul was a chosen vessel to evangelize the Gentiles and would suffer a lot. In our Epistle reading, Paul stated that he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood (Galatians 1:16), but he went to Arabia for a while (Galatians 1:17). The implication is that he spent the greater part of three years (34-37 AD) in Arabia (Galatians 1:18). See Figure 1 for a map of Paul's movement in and around Damascus and Arabia.

To a Jew in the 1st Century "Arabia" did not necessarily mean the entire Arabian Peninsula. Josephus wrote that Arabia could be seen to the East from a tower in Jerusalem. In the 2nd Century, the kingdom of Nabatea was established as generally to the East of Palestine. This area was generally referred to as Arabia by residents of Palestine (see map). Note that Nabatea includes both the area surrounding Damascus and the area of Decapolis evangelized by the healed demoniacs in Mark 5:20 (see also Matthew 8:28).

The politics of this area was somewhat in turmoil at the time of Paul's conversion. From an article²⁸ in [Bible Review](#) that gives a historical perspective to Nabatea:

"Although the mother of Herod the Great came from an eminent Nabatean family, he later fought the Nabateans in a war that he won only after suffering heavy losses. The Nabateans, in return, enthusiastically provided auxiliary troops to aid the Roman governor of Syria in brutally suppressing the Jewish revolt that followed Herod's death" (about 4 BC).

"In order to calm the tensions between the two peoples, one of Herod's sons, Herod Antipas, married the daughter of the Nabatean king, Aretas IV. However, in about 23 AD he divorced her in order to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. John the Baptist criticized this marriage, as reported both by Josephus and the Gospels, with the result that John was imprisoned and then beheaded (Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:17-29, Luke 4:19-20). Using a disputed border as an excuse, the Nabatean king attacked Galilee to avenge the insult to his daughter."

"The Nabatean king knew from experience that Rome had little patience with warlike actions between the client kings who guarded the eastern frontier of the empire. He thus had every reason to feel anxious not only about Jewish reaction, but about Roman reaction to his attack on Galilee. The Roman emperor was perfectly capable of reacting quickly and decisively. All he had to do was to give an order to the governor of Syria, who had four legions at his disposition."

Just as the Nabatean King Aretas was expecting the reaction from Rome, Paul [a Jew, a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee] went to live in this area of Arabia.

Prior to leaving for Arabia, Paul had begun to preach Christ in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:20). Those who heard him were amazed since they knew that Paul tried to destroy Christians in Jerusalem, and had come to Damascus to do the same (Acts 9:21-22). After his return to Damascus from Arabia, the amazement and consternation turned into a murder plot against Paul. The Jews hatched the plot (Acts 9:24) and got the governor of Damascus under

²⁸ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "What Was Paul Doing in Arabia?" [Bible Review](#), October 1994

King Aretas to go along (2 Corinthians 11:32). With an Ethnarch²⁹ guarding the city looking for Paul, the Christians let Paul down in a basket through a window in the city wall (Acts 9:25, 2 Corinthians 11:32-33) and he escaped, heading for Jerusalem.

John Chrysostom noted³⁰ that the calling of Paul was a huge event in the history of the people of God. The enemy of the people of God just became their champion and chief spokesman!

“Paul alludes to the prediction addressed to Ananias concerning him at Damascus, when the Lord said to Ananias, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel’ (Acts 9:15). By ‘dispensation of the grace of God’ (Ephesians 3:2), Paul means the revelation made to him. As much as to say, ‘I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it’ (Galatians 1:12). God Himself said to Paul, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21). ‘This dispensation was a mighty one; to call someone, uninfluenced from any other quarter, immediately from above, and to say, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ (Acts 9:4). At this time, Paul was struck blind with that ineffable light!”

Tertullian noted³¹ that the Apostles in Jerusalem had heard of the remarkable things that occurred on Paul’s 1st Missionary Journey, and they welcomed him with open arms on his return. Even just 3 years after Paul’s conversion, when he went to see Peter, he was welcomed by the brethren in Jerusalem.

“Having been converted from a persecutor to a preacher, Paul was introduced as one of the brethren to brethren, by brethren — to them, indeed, by men who had put on faith from the Apostles’ hands. Afterwards, as Paul himself narrates, he ‘went up to Jerusalem to see Peter’ (Galatians 1:18), because of his office, no doubt, and by right of a common belief and preaching. Now they certainly would not have been surprised at Paul’s having become a preacher instead of a persecutor, if his preaching were of something contrary. They would not have ‘glorified the Lord’ (Galatians 1:24), because Paul had presented himself as an adversary to Christ. They accordingly even gave him ‘the right hand of fellowship’ (Galatians 2:9), as a sign of their agreement with him, and arranged among themselves a distribution of office, not a diversity of Gospel. The intent was that they should severally preach not a different Gospel, but the same Gospel, to different persons, Peter to the circumcision, Paul to the Gentiles.”

Paul said, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood” (Galatians 1:15-16). We might ask, if God separated Paul already from his mother’s womb, why did He wait so long to call Paul?

²⁹ An Ethnarch was the ruler of an entire province. By contrast Herod Antipas and his brother Philip (Luke 3:1) were only tetrarchs, who governed a fourth of a province.

³⁰ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VI, v. 2.

³¹ Tertullian, Prescription Against Heretics, 23.

John Chrysostom pointed out³² that Paul was in a similar place as the laborers in Christ's parable of the landowner who called laborers at different hours of the day. Not all the laborers were willing to come at the first hour. But God waited until they were ready.

“Why can it have been that the landowner (God) did not hire all the laborers at once? As far as concerned Him, He did hire all; but if all did not listen at once, the difference was made by the disposition of them that were called. For this reason, some are called early in the morning, some at the third hour, some at the sixth, some at the ninth, some at the eleventh, when they would obey (Matthew 20:1-16). Paul also declared this when he said, ‘When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles’ (Galatians 1:15-16). When did it please God? When Paul was ready to obey!! For God willed it even from the beginning, but because Paul would not have yielded, then it pleased Him, when Paul also was ready to obey. Thus, also did He call the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43); although He was able to have called him before, but the thief would not have obeyed. If Paul at the beginning would not have obeyed, much more the thief. And if someone says, ‘No one has hired us’ (Matthew 20:7), in the first place, we must not be curious about all the points in the parables. For that He called all, as far as lay in Him, from the first, even the parable shows, saying, that ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard’” (Matthew 20:1).

The Twelve had divided the world up into different regions, and then they drew lots to see who would go where. The Apostle John had drawn the region of Asia Minor³³, but he couldn't go there until after the death of the Virgin Mary, since the Lord had directed him to care for her (John 19:25-27). On Paul's missionary journeys, he filled in for John in Asia Minor until John could get there. Paul did something similar during his first three years as a believer in Arabia. Timon, of the Seventy and of the first seven deacons, was later Bishop of Bostra in Arabia. Paul laid the groundwork for Timon. John Chrysostom noted³⁴ Paul's fervent, yet extremely humble, character, as he began his life as an Apostle. He desired to go to places that the Twelve and the Seventy hadn't taken up the preaching of the Word yet.

“Paul was a fervent soul! He desired to go to regions not yet cultivated, which were in a wild state. Had he remained with the Apostles, since he had nothing to learn, his preaching would have been limited, for they needed to spread the Word everywhere. Thus this blessed man, fervent in spirit, undertook to teach wild barbarians, choosing a life full of battle and labor. He said, ‘I went into Arabia’, and added, ‘and again I returned to Damascus’ (Galatians 1:17). Observe his humility; he doesn't speak of his successes, or whom or the many he instructed. Yet such was his zeal, immediately after his baptism, that he confounded the Jews, and so exasperated them, that they and the Greeks lay in wait for him to kill him. This would not have been the case, had he not greatly added to the numbers of the faithful. Since the Jews were defeated in doctrine, they resorted to murder, which was a clear sign of Paul's superiority. But Christ

³² John Chrysostom, Homilies on Matthew, LXIV, 3.

³³ We can see this from Revelation 2 and 3, where John addresses some of the Churches in this region.

³⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Galatians, Chapter 1, v. 17

did not allow him to be put to death, preserving him for his mission. Of these successes, however, Paul says nothing. In all his writings, his motive is not ambition, nor to be honored more highly than the Apostles, nor because he is embarrassed at being taken lightly. He calls himself, ‘one born³⁵ out of due time’, and, ‘the first of sinners’, and ‘the last of the Apostles’, and, ‘not fit to be called an Apostle’ (1 Corinthians 15:8). The one who said this had labored more than all of them; which is real humility. For he, who is conscious of no excellence, and speaks humbly of himself, is candid but not humble; but for Paul to say so after such accomplishments, is to be practiced in self-control.”

“What great things did he achieve in the city of Damascus? He tells us that the governor³⁶ under Aretas the king set guards about the whole city, hoping to trap this blessed man. This is a proof of the strongest kind that he was violently persecuted by the Jews. He says nothing of this, but, mentioning his arrival and departure, is silent concerning the events which occurred, nor would he have mentioned them (2 Corinthians 11:32) had not circumstances required it.”

“He said that after three years he went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas’ (Galatians 1:18). What can be lowlier than such a soul? After such successes, lacking nothing of Peter, not even his assent, but being of equal dignity with him, he went to him as his elder and superior. The only object of this journey was to visit Peter; thus he pays due respect to the Apostles, and regards himself as not even their equal. Which is plain from this journey, for Paul visited Peter for the same reason many of our brethren today visit with holy men. Or rather by a humbler feeling, for today they do so for their own benefit, but Paul, not for his own instruction or correction, but merely for the sake of honoring Peter by his presence. He says, ‘to visit Peter’; he does not say to see (Greek: *ideio*), but to inquire about, (Greek: *istoresai*) a word, which those, who seek to become acquainted with great and splendid cities, apply to themselves. Worthy of such trouble did he consider the very sight of Peter. Paul did this again on his arrival at Jerusalem, after having converted many Gentiles; having reformed and brought to Christ Pamphylia, Lycaonia, Cilicia, and all nations in that quarter of the world, he first addressed himself with great humility to James, as to his elder and superior (Acts 21:17-19). Next he submitted to his counsel, and that counsel contrary to this Epistle. ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those which have believed; therefore shave your head, and purify yourself’ (Acts 21:20-24). Accordingly he shaved his head, and observed all the Jewish ceremonies; for where the Gospel was not affected, he was the humblest of all men. But where by such humility he saw any injured, he gave it up, for that was no longer being humble, but that could destroy the disciples.”

Chrysostom continued³⁷ to say that Paul, in his humility, referred to himself as “less than the least of all the saints” (Ephesians 3:8). In spite of being a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man (1 Timothy 1:13), he was given the grace to communicate the unsearchable riches

³⁵ The Greek word *ektroma* means literally “an abortion”.

³⁶ The “governor” under Aretas was an Ethnarch. Archelaus (Matthew 2:22) was an Ethnarch, which is a higher position than a Tetrarch, such as Herod Antipas, Philip and Lysanias (Luke 3:1). Thus it was a higher ranking official who was after Paul, trying to kill him, than was after Peter (Acts 12:3).

³⁷ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, VII.

of Christ to the Gentiles. Paul didn't call himself the least of the Apostles, but less than the least of all the saints. In his humility, Paul mourned his former sins, even though they were blotted out.

37 AD to 45 AD; in Tarsus, Before Missionary Journeys

Arriving in Jerusalem, Paul met with Peter and James, the Lord's brother (Galatians 1:18-19). This was his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion and he only stayed 15 days. At first, the disciples in Jerusalem were afraid of him and didn't believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas, who had also studied³⁸ under Gamaliel, took Paul in, introduced him to the Apostles, and declared to them concerning Paul's conversion (Acts 9:26-27). When Paul spoke boldly in the Name of Jesus and disputed with the Greek-speaking Jews, they also hatched a murder plot (Acts 9:29). This is why he only stayed 15 days in Jerusalem. When the brethren in Jerusalem found out about the murder plot, they hustled Paul down to Caesarea and off to his hometown of Tarsus (Acts 9:30). With Paul out of the way and no longer organizing the persecution of the Church, Judea, Galilee and Samaria had peace and multiplied considerably (Acts 9:31). This peace lasted until about 44 AD when Herod (Agrippa) killed James, the son of Zebedee, and tried to kill Peter also (Acts 12:1ff) because it pleased the Jews.

Before leaving Jerusalem, Paul had another vision from the Lord that confirmed the one he had at his conversion (Acts 22:17-21). In this vision, which occurred while Paul was praying in the Temple, the Lord warned him to get out of Jerusalem quickly because:

- They will not receive your testimony in Jerusalem
- The Lord would send him far from there to the Gentiles.

Paul spent the next 8 years in Tarsus (37 AD - 45 AD). During this time Paul had at least one other vision, this one greater than all the others. This vision occurred in 41 AD (14 years before the writing of 2 Corinthians in 55 AD). In this vision Paul was caught up into Paradise and heard things that he couldn't even speak about (2 Corinthians 12:2-4). This vision prepared Paul for his role as an Apostle since the Churches on earth are modeled after the Assembly of the Saints in heaven just as the Tabernacle in the wilderness was modeled after the Tabernacle in heaven (Exodus 25:9, 20; 26:30, Acts 7:44, Hebrews 8:5).

There was other foundational work that Paul did while he was in Tarsus that we don't notice until later. A number of the members of Paul's immediate family either came to know the Lord; or if they already did, the breach between them and Paul was repaired. According to tradition³⁹, Stephen, one of the first seven deacons was a kinsman of Paul and therefore some repair work on family relationships may have been necessary.

Some of Paul's kinsmen that are mentioned in the Scriptures are Herodion (Romans 16:11), Andronicus and Junius (Romans 16:7), Lucius, Jason and Sosipater (Romans 16:21). Herodian, Andronicus⁴⁰, both members of the Seventy, and Junius were in Rome in 55 AD when Paul wrote Romans. According to tradition, they had been sent there by Peter and Paul to help

³⁸ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, June 11.

³⁹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, December 27.

⁴⁰ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 8, May 17.

get the Church started, and Paul addressed them by name in Romans 16. Herodian was later Bishop of Neoparthia and Andronicus was later Bishop of Pannonia (North of Dalmatia).

When Paul wrote Romans, he was in the middle of his Third Missionary Journey and was staying in Corinth at the time. With him in Corinth were Lucius, Jason and Sosipater (Romans 16:21), all members of the original Seventy and now doing apostolic work with Paul. Jason is also mentioned as working with Paul on Paul's Second Missionary Journey in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-7). According to tradition⁴¹, Jason was later Bishop of Tarsus; Lucius, Bishop of Laodicea; and Sosipater, Bishop of Iconium. Jason and Sosipater later teamed up as apostles and evangelized the Island of Corfu (West coast of Greece).

After spending about 8 years in Tarsus, Barnabas arrived in 45 AD looking for Paul (Acts 11:25). The Church in Antioch had gotten started recently by some men from Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20). The men we know from the Scripture that were from Cyprus are Barnabas (Acts 4:36) and his brother Aristobulus (Romans 16:10). According to tradition⁴², Aristobulus was also Peter's father-in-law and later Bishop of Britain. Those from Cyrene were Simon of Cyrene and his sons Rufus and Alexander (Mark 15:21). Simon was pressed into service to carry Jesus' cross at the crucifixion. Rufus worked with the apostle Paul, was in Rome when Paul wrote Romans (Romans 16:13), and was later Bishop of Thebes⁴³. Simon's other son, Alexander, became a traitor to the Faith and was largely responsible for Paul's martyrdom (2 Timothy 4:14, 1 Timothy 1:20). Another man from Cyrene was Lucius of Cyrene who was one of the prophets and teachers at the Church of Antioch (Acts 13:1).

When Barnabas found Paul in Tarsus, he brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:26). Along with the others, Paul and Barnabas taught at the Church in Antioch for a year before they went off on their First Missionary Journey. During this one-year period, Agabus, a prophet and one of the Seventy, predicted that there would be a great famine. During the famine, Barnabas and Paul hand-carried alms from Antioch to the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27-30).

As one can see from this brief history of the Apostle Paul's early life, there was considerable preparation and training he went through prior to his being sent out as an Apostle. He didn't have the opportunity to follow Jesus for three years like the Twelve and the Seventy. However, the Lord did speak to him personally and specifically in directing him what to do. When he said in Galatians, "I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood" (Galatians 1:16) following his conversion, he is not putting down the Twelve, nor is he saying one shouldn't confer with one's elders. He is simply referring to the visions he had that were necessary for him to be able to do what he had done.

John Chrysostom pointed out⁴⁴: when Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the Church of Antioch on their 1st Missionary, they did not immediately confer with flesh and blood in Jerusalem.

⁴¹ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 28, September 10.

⁴² Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, March 16.

⁴³ Nickolai Velimirovic, Prologue From Ochrid, Lazarica Press, Birmingham, 1986, April 8.

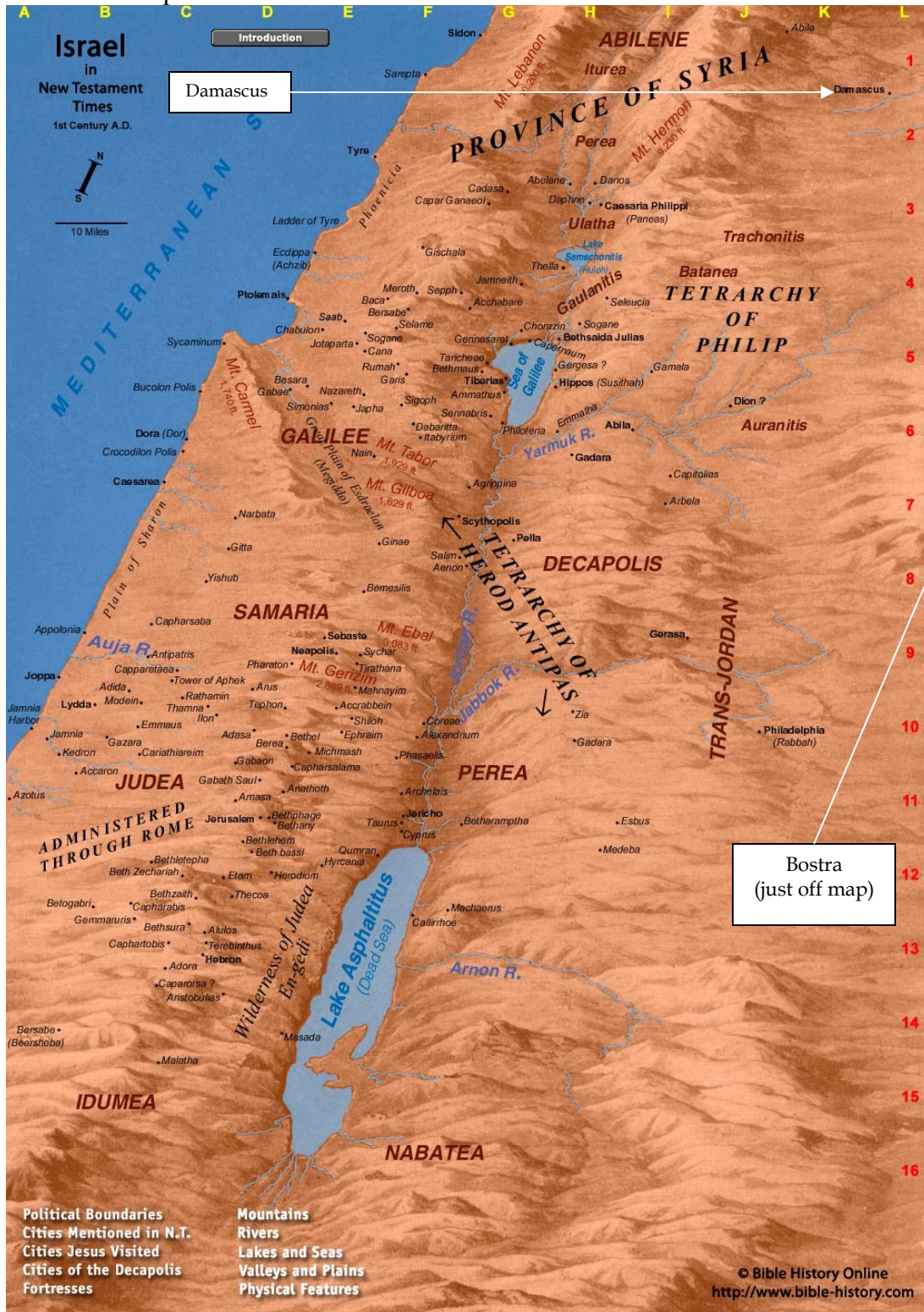
⁴⁴ John Chrysostom, Commentary on Acts, XXXI, v. 27.

“The Apostles came to the Gentiles teaching them that with good reason they had been ordained by the Spirit. They did not say what they themselves thought, but ‘what God had done with them’ (Acts 14:26). It seems to me, that they mean their trials. It was not for nothing that they came, but providentially guided by the Spirit, that the preaching to the Gentiles might be firmly established. Notice Paul’s ardor. He does not ask whether it is right to speak to Gentiles, but he straightway speaks⁴⁵. Therefore, Paul says, ‘When God revealed His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood’ (Galatians 1:16). For it is indeed a great thing, a great, a generous soul (like this)! How many have since believed, and none of them all has shone like Paul! What we want is earnestness, exceeding ardor, a soul ready to encounter death.”

⁴⁵

We might note that Paul had had an earlier vision in the Temple in Jerusalem where the Lord stated that He would send Paul to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21). That occurred in 37 AD, three years after Paul’s conversion. But Paul didn’t do anything about that vision until he was sent out as an Apostle by the Church in Antioch in 46 AD.

Figure 1
 Map⁴⁶ of Paul's Movement Around Arabia and Damascus



⁴⁶ © Bible History Online <http://www.bible-history.com>. Other maps also available.

