

St Paul's mission to the world

MORE is known about St Paul than any other figure mentioned in the Bible. Firstly, we have his New Testament letters in which, along with his teachings on the mystery of Christ and the Christian community, he reveals a great deal about himself: his conversion, his inner character, his spirituality, his problems and anxieties. Luke's Acts of the Apostles also provides a great deal of information about Paul.

Born into a Jewish family at Tarsus around 7-10 AD, the son of a Roman citizen, Saul (as he was called prior to his conversion) was sent to Jerusalem to be trained in the famous rabbinical school of Gamaliel. As a young man he also learned a trade: making the mohair out of which tents were made.

Growing up in Tarsus, Saul experienced the prevalent Greco-Roman culture. His later letters reveal knowledge of the philosophies of the Stoics, the Cynics and Epicureans. Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures were all a part of Paul's formation making him an ideal person to preach Christ's Gospel to the entire ancient world.

In about the year 35 Saul came

to prominence in Jerusalem as a self-righteous young Pharisee, strongly anti-Christian. He believed that the trouble-making new sect should be stamped out and its adherents punished. We are told in Acts 8 that he was present, although not a participator, at the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr.

Soon afterwards Paul experienced the revelation that was to transform his life. On the road to Damascus, where he was going to arrest Christians, he was blinded and heard the voice of Christ asking: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

In Damascus, he was baptised by the disciple Ananias and his sight was restored. He then withdrew from the world to spend three years in 'Arabia' in meditation and prayer. From the moment of his return, Paul – for he had now assumed this Roman name – never paused in his labors to make Jesus Christ known. He embarked on a remarkable mission of preaching, writing, and church-founding. Many of his extensive adventure-filled travels by land and sea are recorded in the New Testament.

Paul encountered a great deal of suspicion and even rejection by the Christian community when he began preaching Jesus Christ. Many could not believe that the one-time persecutor of Christians was now a Christian himself. He was gradually accepted, due largely to the endorsement of Barnabas, a respected member of the early Church. Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch in Syria where they successfully proclaimed the Good News.

Later, from Antioch, they set sail on what came to be known as Paul's first missionary journey. After stopping on the island of Cyprus, they visited many towns in Asia Minor, particularly those having Jewish settlements. It was Paul's general practice in such places first to visit the synagogues and preach to the Jews; if rejected by them, he would then preach to the Gentiles. Frequent rejection by the Jews helped Paul to see Christ was calling him to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The second missionary journey, which lasted from about 50 to 52 AD, took Paul and Silas, his new

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OneBuild Constructions would like to congratulate the Society of St Paul on its ministry and join the celebration of the 2000th anniversary of the birth of St Paul



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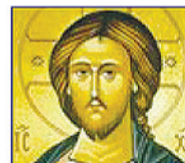
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