

Paul's Five Visits to Jerusalem

From Fugitive to Courier to Defender of the Gospel to Prisoner

c. AD 37 – c. AD 57

Primary Source: Holy Scripture · noblemind.study/apostle-paul/

*This is a focused timeline. For the broader chronology of Paul's life, consult the parent timeline
([Paul_Life_Timeline.pdf](#)).*

Visit 1 — The Fugitive Disciple (c. AD 37)

~AD 37

First Visit

Saul arrives in Jerusalem; disciples afraid; Barnabas vouches for him

 Acts 9:26–27; Gal 1:18

Three years after his conversion (Gal 1:18) — having escaped Damascus by being lowered through the wall in a basket — Saul came to Jerusalem and tried to associate with the disciples. They were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, how the Lord had spoken to him, and how he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus. Without Barnabas, the door to the Jerusalem church might not have opened.

The Aretas anchor (2 Cor 11:32–33; the ethnarch of Aretas IV in Damascus must precede Aretas's death in AD 40) places the escape from Damascus no later than AD 39 and most plausibly c. AD 37.

~AD 37

First Visit

Saul meets Peter and James the Lord's brother; stays fifteen days

 Gal 1:18–19; cf. Acts 9:28

Paul's own account in Galatians narrows what Acts gives in summary: he went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas (Peter), stayed with him fifteen days, and saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. Two weeks. That was the substance of his contact with the Jerusalem apostles before he disappeared into Syria and Cilicia for nearly a decade. The point Paul presses in Galatians is precisely the brevity: he had not received his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles — he had spent only fifteen days with them.

~AD 37

First Visit

Hellenist plot; brethren send Saul to Tarsus via Caesarea

 Acts 9:29–30; Gal 1:21–24

While in Jerusalem, Saul spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord and argued with the Hellenistic Jews — the same group that had stoned Stephen, in whose death Saul had once consented. They tried to put him to death. When the brethren learned of this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him away to Tarsus, his home city. He would not return to Jerusalem for nearly a decade. Galatians describes the same period: "I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ, but only kept hearing, 'He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they were glorifying God because of me" (Gal 1:22–24).

~AD 46

Famine Relief

Agabus prophesies a great famine over the whole world

 Acts 11:27–30

Prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them, named Agabus, stood up and indicated by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. The famine took place in the days of Claudius. The Antioch church, freshly established and full of teaching from Barnabas and Saul, immediately resolved to send relief to their brethren in Judea — each according to his means. Each disciple in proportion to his ability to give.

The Claudian famine in Judea is attested by Josephus (Antiquities 20.51–53) and dated c. AD 46–48. Suetonius, Life of Claudius 18.2, mentions repeated famines under Claudius across the empire.

~AD 46

Famine Relief

Antioch sends Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem with the relief

 Acts 11:29–30; 12:25

The disciples at Antioch, in proportion to their means, sent it to the brethren living in Judea by the hand of Barnabas and Saul. This is Paul's second visit to Jerusalem and the first deliberate inter-church benevolence in the New Testament — a Gentile-rich congregation in Syria sending material aid to the Jewish mother church under famine conditions. Acts 12:25 notes that Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they had fulfilled their mission, taking John (also called Mark) with them — the same John Mark who would later cause the rupture between Paul and Barnabas.

Some scholars identify this visit with the “after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem” of Galatians 2:1; others identify Gal 2:1 with the Jerusalem Council visit (Acts 15). The harmonization question is open.

~AD 49

Council

The circumcision crisis sends Paul and Barnabas up from Antioch

 Acts 15:1-4

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them. The church determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. On the way, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.

Galatians 2:1-10 likely describes this same visit (the “fourteen years” reckoned from Paul’s conversion). Paul there names a private meeting before the public council, in which Titus — uncircumcised — was not compelled to be circumcised, settling the test case.

~AD 49

Council

The Council deliberates: Peter, James, and Paul speak; the Gentile mission is affirmed

 Acts 15:6-21

The apostles and the elders came together to look into the matter. After much debate, Peter stood up — reminded the council that God had chosen him to preach to the Gentiles (the Cornelius episode, Acts 10), that God had borne witness by giving them the Holy Spirit just as to the Jews, and that God had made no distinction between the two groups, cleansing their hearts by faith. “Now therefore,” Peter said, “why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” After Barnabas and Paul described the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles, James the Lord’s brother delivered the judgment: that they should not trouble those who were turning to God from among the Gentiles, but write to them to abstain from things contaminated by idols, from fornication, from what is strangled, and from blood.

~AD 49

Council

The decree letter; Judas Barsabbas and Silas carry it back to Antioch

 Acts 15:22-35

The apostles and the elders, with the whole church, chose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas — leading men among the brethren. They sent the decree by their hand. The letter named the false teaching as unauthorized (“some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you”), affirmed the Council’s findings (“it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”), and listed only the four abstentions necessary for table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers. When the church at Antioch read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement.

~AD 49

Antioch Sidebar

Sidebar: Peter at Antioch — Paul’s public rebuke

 Gal 2:11-14

When Peter came to Antioch, Paul opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. Before certain men came from James, Peter had been eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. When Paul saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, he said to Peter in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” The Antioch incident is included here as a sidebar because it directly answered — in deed — the same question the Council had answered in word: whether the gospel for the Gentiles required becoming Jewish first.

The chronological order of the Antioch incident relative to the Council is debated. Most place it shortly after the Council (Acts 15); a minority place it before. The reading offered here follows the Galatians order, which lists the Council-like meeting (Gal 2:1–10) and then the Antioch incident (Gal 2:11–14).

Visit 4 — A Single Verse (c. AD 52)

~AD 52

Brief Visit

A single verse: “Went up and greeted the church; then went down to Antioch”

 Acts 18:22

Returning from his Second Missionary Journey by way of Ephesus and Caesarea, Paul went up and greeted the church, then went down to Antioch. Acts gives only that one verse to this visit — no debate, no controversy, no recorded address. It is the briefest visit of the five. By this point Paul has traveled through Macedonia and Achaia, founded the churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth; he has stood in Athens at the Areopagus; he has lived eighteen months at Corinth and met Aquila and Priscilla. The fact that the visit warrants only one verse suggests Paul’s relationship with the Jerusalem church was, at this point, simply maintained — not yet either celebrated or contested.

The bare “went up” is the standard Lucan idiom for going to Jerusalem; the bare “went down” is standard for leaving it. Both are present here, locating the otherwise unmentioned visit.

Visit 5 — The Pentecost Visit, Ending in Arrest (c. AD 57)

~AD 57

Final Visit

Through Tyre and Caesarea on the way up; warnings at every stop

 Acts 21:1-9

Paul’s journey to Jerusalem for Pentecost was a slow approach through warnings. At Tyre, the disciples kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem. After spending the days with them, the whole congregation — with wives and children — escorted them out to the seashore, where they knelt on the beach and prayed. At Ptolemais. Then at Caesarea, in the home of Philip the evangelist (one of the original seven, Acts 6:5), they stayed many days. Philip’s four virgin daughters were prophetesses. The pattern is plain: every leg of the trip carried a warning from the Spirit, and Paul kept going.

~AD 57

Final Visit

Agabus binds Paul's belt; the prophecy of arrest at Jerusalem

 *Acts 21:10-14*

While staying many days at Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea — the same Agabus who had foretold the famine eleven years earlier (Acts 11:28). He took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When the disciples and Paul's companions heard this, they pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Paul answered: "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be persuaded, they fell silent, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

~AD 57

Final Visit

Arrival; meets James and the elders; the report on the Gentile mission

 *Acts 21:17-20a*

After arrival, the brethren received them gladly. The next day Paul went in with them to James, and all the elders were present. Paul greeted them and began to relate one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard it, they began glorifying God. The trip's primary purpose was the delivery of the collection — the funds the Gentile churches of Macedonia, Galatia, Achaia, and Asia had gathered over several years for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem (cf. Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9). Curiously, Acts does not narrate the delivery itself; only Paul's own letters and his later defense (Acts 24:17) refer to it.

~AD 57

Temple & Arrest

Pressured to take a vow with four men in the temple

 *Acts 21:20b-26*

The elders said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law. And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs." They proposed a solution: there were four men under a vow; let Paul join them, undergo the purification rites, and pay the temple expenses for them. Then all would know that the rumors were nothing but Paul himself walked orderly, keeping the Law. As to the Gentiles, the Council's decree still stood. Paul agreed.

~AD 57

Temple & Arrest

Arrested in the temple after seven days

 Acts 21:27-36

When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, on seeing Paul in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd, laying hands on him and crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and supposed Paul had brought him into the temple. The city was provoked; the people rushed together; they dragged Paul out of the temple and the doors were shut. As they were seeking to kill him, the Roman commander of the cohort was reported to. He took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. So began the chain of legal custody — Jerusalem barracks, Caesarea, voyage, Rome — that would close Paul’s free missionary career and put him under guard for the rest of his life.

Trophimus is one of the Ephesians named at Acts 20:4 as a delegate of the Gentile churches accompanying Paul with the collection. The accusation that Paul brought him into the temple was based on appearance only — Acts is explicit that they “supposed” it (Acts 21:29).

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