



Summary :

Apostle Paul made two grand tours into Asia Minor. During the first one (c. 43-46) he was accompanied by Barnabas, and he toured Lycaonia, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Galatia and Phrygia. During the second one (c. 52-56) he visited the Churches he had founded and then made his way to Ephesus, where he remained for approximately three years. Following a short journey to Corinth and mainland Greece he headed to Jerusalem, making a stop at some cities of Asia Minor, the last of which was Miletus.

Date

Mid-1st c. AD

Geographical Location

Asia Minor

1. The problem of the sources

The dissemination of the Christ's teachings was for the Apostles an undertaking that never proved easy and always proceeded via unexpected routes. Often the conditions, under which this was done, as well as the deeper reasons that necessitated it, remain unclear to us, mainly because of the abundance of later Christian sources and legends surrounding the early Christian years.

We can be almost certain, however, that the spread of Christianity in Asia Minor started with Apostle [Paul](#) and his followers' evangelical march, which led to the creation of the [seven dominant Churches](#) and occasioned the development of philosophical-theological tendencies as well as the heroic defence of the Christian ideals by ardent adherents, who were later sanctified and adored as the first Christian martyrs.

We can draw information on the preaching of Christianity from the *Acts of the Apostles* and Paul's own epistles. Precious evidence concerning the establishment of the first Christian communities and ecclesiastical structures can be drawn from martyrological texts, episcopal epistles, as well as from the correspondence of Roman officials with the central administration on the way this new religion was to be dealt with.

Most of these literary sources have been repeatedly scrutinized in order to bridge the chasms and contradictions in an attempt to separate the truly historical core from the theological beliefs and exaggerations of their authors. This process, not aided by archaeological data, which are sparse and extremely scattered during the first two Christian centuries, renders research on this subject toilsome yet fascinating.

2. Paul's travels in Asia Minor

Asia Minor was an extremely fertile ground for Paul's missionary work. Firstly, he was familiar with the intellectual milieu and culture of these cities, as he was born and raised in [Tarsus](#). The spread of the Greek language allowed Paul, who was very fluent in Greek, to express and develop his ideas with ease. Furthermore, many cities of Asia Minor contained prosperous [Jewish communities](#), and this fact encouraged him to launch his mission. Thus Paul, who spent his early years as a faithful of the new religion in Syria and Palestine, especially in Damascus, Jerusalem and [Antioch](#), made two great journeys into the lands of Asia Minor.



3. The first journey

Apostle Paul's first journey into Asia Minor took place in 44 or 45. For the largest part of this journey he was accompanied by Barnabas.¹ Before travelling to Asia Minor, the two men spent a long period in Antioch of Syria. They did not, however, travel north, crossing the Cilician Gates into the region of Asia Minor, but first sailed to Cyprus. According to the *Acts of the Apostles*, there they tried to proselytize the Roman proconsul himself, Sergius Paulus, but their attempt and their general preaching of Christianity was rather unsuccessful.

3a. Pamphylian Perge – Pisidian Antioch

Paul and Barnabas crossed the sea again, this time sailing for the estuary of the river Cestrus, close to which lay the Pamphylian city of [Perge](#). The fact that [Attaleia](#), Perge's harbour and an important commercial port, is not mentioned leads to the assumption that the two Christian missionaries used a secondary port, perhaps in order to make their arrival inconspicuous. They did not stay long in Perge and engaged in no proselytizing there. Crossing the Pamphylian countryside, perhaps moving along the [Via Sebaste](#), they made their way to [Pisidian Antioch](#), the most important of the [Roman colonies](#) (coloniae) in the southern part of Asia Minor. Here we should mention that the stops in Paul's and his students' itinerary were in a sense predetermined or depended on the presence of local Jewish communities. The place where they usually preached was the synagogue and their audience was composed of Jewish people.²

During its first steps, Christianity aimed at reforming Jewish faith, at becoming a dominant [monotheistic creed](#) by combating the polytheism prevalent throughout the Roman Empire. And it was the Jews that first opposed and persecuted the representatives of this novel teaching. The Roman officials, on the other hand, were second in this, and did so only when they realized that this new sect did not accept the sacrifice of animals, part and parcel of the [Imperial cult](#) which had been established as a bond of cohesion in the immense Roman state.

The negative reception of the preachers of Christianity by their co-religionists becomes vividly apparent in the case of Antioch.³ Paul's preaching in the synagogue of this city which featured a prosperous Jewish community, initially was well received by some of the Jews. Some members of the audience, however, were enraged and managed to gain the support of the most important members of the community,⁴ the priesthood and, apparently, the city's authorities.⁵ As a result, Paul and Barnabas were forced out of the city. It is possible that the two Apostles were also beaten by the city's police forces, the *lictors*. According to a later source, Paul's preaching in Antioch managed to attract two new followers, Demas and Hermogenes.

3b. Iconium

The two Apostles then headed to [Iconium](#), an ethnically Phrygian city, which stood, however, on the border with [Lycaonia](#), while administratively belonging to [Galatia](#).⁶ There they already had a follower, Onesiphorus, who accommodated them in his house where Paul began his teaching.

According to tradition, [Thekla](#), a neighbour of Onesiphorus, overheard Paul's preaching through her open window and was so deeply stricken that she tried to become his disciple, going against the laws and the will of her family. She became his most ardent follower and after many adventures she ended up in the city of [Seleuceia](#) in Trachea Cilicia.



where she became a nun, dedicating herself to curing diseases.⁷

As in Antioch, however, Paul's teaching was not well received in Iconium. Jews and pagans alike were infuriated and turned the city's authorities against them. Once more, the two Apostles were forced out of the city.⁸

3c. Lystra – Derbe

Their next step was to turn back south, crossing Lycaonia along the Via Sebaste; they travelled to [Lystra](#), a city which in 25 had become a Roman colony. The veterans that had settled there were few and the dominant element of the city was the autochthonous population, who had not been thoroughly hellenized. Their main language was Lycaonian, and the crowds started cheering the two Apostles in that language when they cured a paralytic.⁹

Without having understood Paul's preaching, the locals immediately identified the two men as the region's dominant divine duality, [Zeus](#) and [Hermes](#), who corresponded to pre-Greek indigenous divinities, perhaps the Cabiri or the Great Gods, benefactors of humanity. The priest of Zeus exited his temple to perform a sacrifice in their honour. When the two men realized what was about to happen, they tried to avert the sacrifice and preach God's word. At first they were rather successful, managing to attract enough followers. Later, though, people arrived from Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and accused them of being crooks; as a result a large part of the populace turned against them and pelted them with stones as they were being dragged out of the city, knocking them unconscious. When the two Apostles regained their senses they decided to head to the nearby city of [Derbe](#), where they managed to convert several people.

3d. Assessment of the first travel

Before making their way into other areas, Paul and Barnabas returned successively to Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch in order to strengthen the newly founded communities there by appointing the heads of the Churches.¹⁰ By this last action we may suppose that they did not simply wanted to preach the Christian teaching, but also to create autochthonous centres for the continuation of the Christian faith. This betokens a well-thought out attempt, which perhaps comes in contrast with the fact that in their first try to approach the populations of Asia Minor they chose not thoroughly hellenized areas. Lystra and Derbe in particular were places almost devoid of administrative or cultural significance.

On the other hand, the four cities where they taught were situated on central roadways connecting the eastern and western parts of Asia Minor, on the roads of Taurus, which one would have to cross when travelling to the Euphrates River. So if their choices were not random, dictated by the needs of the moment and the necessity of finding a refuge from their zealous pursuers, it is possible that they were made taking into consideration the potential of these places of becoming centres for the further dissemination of Christ's teaching.¹¹

4. The meantime

We cannot precisely determine the time span of Paul's first travel into Asia Minor. We do know that the Apostle returned to Antioch of Syria. A probable date for his return is 47. In the Syrian capital, which was already the most important of the Christian Churches, he stayed for approximately two years, a period of time apparently hard and full



of turmoil. A crisis within the Church was already becoming evident; it revolved around the question of whether Christianity was to remain a strictly Jewish affair, the opinion of Apostle Peter and Jacob's followers, or become more expansive so as to include all hellenized Jews and pagans alike.

In the spring of 49, Paul set off again, heading this time to mainland Greece. Passing through Phillipi, a wealthy city that would prove a useful missionary centre later, he criss-crossed through Macedonia, making a short stop at Athens; he then reached Corinth, where he remained for eighteen months until the fall of 51.

He then returned to Jerusalem to attend a council convened by the agents of the Jewish camp over the demand to establish the obligatory circumcision of all hellenized Jews and any pagans that chose to embrace Christianity. Paul, Titus and Barnabas attempted to avert this outcome that would severely hamper the proselytizing attempts in non-Jewish social and ethnic groups. After this council, Paul and Peter returned to Antioch, carrying with them, however, this controversy.

5. The second journey

The news that the Churches which Paul had founded in Galatia during his first major travel experienced a crisis -due to the general ideological dispute and the negative reception by the local societies, as well as because of the emergence of heretic (Gnostic) tendencies- launched Paul into his second tour, which was foreshadowed by an epistle he sent to the Galatians.

The itinerary he followed originally would have been similar to that of his first journey: Cilicia, Lycaonia, Pisidia. Then he would have probably headed to the central highlands of Anatolia, towards [Phrygia](#) and Galatia. It appears that his time he went to another major city, [Ephesus](#). We do not know whether he reached Ephesus by following the road leading from [Ankara](#) to [Gordium](#), [Pessinus](#), Iesus and [Sardis](#). Perhaps his itinerary included other cities as well, which contained Christian communities that later evolved into prominent ecclesiastical centres, like [Philadelphia](#), [Thyateira](#), [Laodicea ad Lycum](#), Colossae and [Hierapolis](#) and, finally, [Smyrna](#).

Having founded new Churches to strengthen the existing ones in the valleys of Hermus and Maeander, Paul finally reached Ephesus late in 52 or early in 53. This city was doubly interesting. It was a pagan centre -the cult of [Ephesian Artemis](#) was ancient and had spread throughout the empire- but also a hotbed of corruption, like all ports, and this presented a challenge to a missionary. Its role as a commercial and administrative centre guaranteed the quick spread of Christ's message. [Aquila and Priscilla](#), tentmakers from Corinth, had already relocated to Ephesus: these two had been converted by Paul during his sojourn there.

Paul remained in Ephesus until 56, when he left for a short travel to Corinth, sailing off from the port of [Alexandria Troas](#). He returned via Macedonia and soon after he set off again to celebrate the Pentecost in Jerusalem, together with other faithful from all the Churches. This journey was complicated, as he first travelled to [Assos](#), whence he sailed to Mytilene, [Chios](#), and [Samos](#)¹² and [Miletus](#), the other great centre of Hellenism and a financially important city. In Miletus Paul stayed for a few days, yet he had the time to invite the leading members of the Ephesus Church for an important speech, aiming to strengthen the Church there, but also to apparently bid farewell to the [province of Asia](#).

6. Epilogue



Paul never returned to Asia Minor. The machinations of his adversaries in Jerusalem resulted in his arrest by the Roman authorities, and on the charge of being a trouble-maker he was transported to Rome. Some of his epistles to the Churches of Asia Minor, however, which were composed during his captivity and journey to Rome, indicate that his care over the continuation of his work there remained unabated.

1. Barnabas is often mentioned as a disciple of Paul. In the *Acts*, however, especially in ch. 11 and 12, he referred to as a central figure and his name is always mentioned before that of Paul. Later on, though, in ch. 13 and 14, which describe Paul's travel to Cyprus, Paul's name precedes that of Barnabas, and it appears that Paul is now has the central role in missionary work.
2. The expression "God-fearing Jews" or "God-fearing" appears often in the *Acts of the Apostles*. It is possible that the phrase 'god-fearing' does not refer to the Jews as a people that worship the One God, as contrasted to the pagans that worship a variety of divinities or rather 'daemons', but pertains to a number of people proselytized to Judaism. This indicates that the Jewish religion, contrary to what happens today, welcomed into its bosom even those who did not possess blood ties with the people of Israel.
3. *Acts* 13.50.
4. At this point a special reference is being made to the devout women of the community, who were apparently the first be won over by Paul's adversaries.
5. The *Acts of the Apostles* are unclear on this matter. They refer to the "first of the city", which is a typical address for the "dekaprotoi" or the "eikosaprotoi" of the Greek city, but not for the "duumviri" of the Roman colonies. It is therefore possible that the "first of the city" actually refers to the governors of the town using a term familiar to the majority of the Greek cities of Asia Minor; alternatively it could refer to the heads of the Jewish community. If it does refer to the ruling Roman citizens, this means that the Jews denounced Paul and Barnabas to the authorities as enemies of law and order and as a threat to the dominant cult of that region, that of Menos. For a detailed description of the views concerning this passage see Ramsay, W.M., *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (London 1930), p. 105-107, and Sherwin-White, A.N., *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford 1963), p. 97.
6. Taylor, J.S.M., "St. Paul and the Roman Empire: Acts of the Apostles 13-14", *ANRW* 26.2 (1995), p. 1212-1213.
7. On the life and deeds of St Thecla see Dagron, G., *Vie et Miracles de St. Thecle* (Bruxelles 1975). Of course, the hagiological texts concerning the life of St Thecla date to the 5th century, although philological scrutiny has shown them to be based on originals and traditions of the 2nd century. Thus their true historical core remains unknown to us.
8. It emerges, however, from the sources, but also from what we know about Roman legislation, that the city's authorities could only 'suggest' to the personae non-gratae that they should leave the city's limits. They did not possess the power to arrest them without the express command of the Roman authorities, or forbid their return to the city in the future.
9. *Acts* 14.11-14.
10. *Acts* 14.14.
11. This is a far-fetched yet fascinating hypothesis by Justin Taylor. See Taylor, J.S.M., "St. Paul and the Roman Empire: Acts of the Apostles 13-14", *ANRW* 26.2 (1995), p. 1227-1228.
12. According to the local tradition, the ship that carried Paul did not call in to the port of Samos, but on the opposite coast of Asia Minor, the Straits of Mycale, in a small cove close to the Trogilus promontory, which was later renamed to 'St Paul's port'. This is probably a case of Christian fiction.



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Glossary :

	Via Sebaste The road connecting the roman provinces of Pisidia with the road connecting Pisidia with Pamphylia, Lycaonia and Cilicia. It was constructed during the reign of Augustus.
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Sources

Acts of the Apostles