
Paul's Education

From "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul" by W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, Eerdmans

Paul is Sent to Jerusalem

The first time anyone leaves the land of his birth to visit a foreign and distant country is an important epoch in his life. In the case of one who has taken this first journey at an early age, and whose character is enthusiastic and susceptible of lively impressions from without, this epoch is usually remembered with peculiar distinctness. But when the country which is thus visited has furnished the imagery for the dreams of childhood, and is felt to be more truly the young traveler's home than the land he is leaving, then the journey assumes the sacred character of a pilgrimage. The nearest parallel which can be found to the visits of the scattered Jews to Jerusalem is in the periodical expedition of the Mohammedan pilgrims to the sanctuary at Mecca. Nor is there anything which ought to shock the mind in such a comparison; for that localizing spirit was the same thing to the Jews under the highest sanction, which it is to the Mohammedans through the memory of a prophet who was the enemy and not the forerunner of Christ.

As the disciples of Islam may be seen at stated seasons flocking towards Cairo or Damascus, the meeting places of the African and Asiatic caravans, so Saul had often seen the Hebrew pilgrims from the interior of Asia Minor come down through the passes of the mountains and join others at Tarsus who were bound for Jerusalem. They returned when the festivals were over; and he heard them talk of the Holy City, of Herod, and the New Temple and of the great teachers and doctors of the Law. And at length Saul himself was to go, to see the land of promise and the City of David, and grow up a learned Rabbi "at the feet of Gamaliel."

With his father, or under the care of some other friend older than himself, he left Tarsus and went to Jerusalem. It is not probable that they traveled by the long and laborious land journey which leads from the Cilician plain through the defiles of Mount Amanus to Antioch, and thence along the rugged Phoenician shore through Tyre and Sidon to Judea. The Jews, when they went to the festivals, or to carry contributions, like the

Mahomedans of modern days, would follow the lines of natural traffic;¹ and now that the Eastern Sea had been cleared of its pirates, the obvious course would be to travel by water. The Jews, though merchants, were not seamen. We may imagine Saul, therefore, setting sail from the Cydnus on his first voyage, in a Phoenician trader, under the patronage of the gods of Tyre, or in company with Greek mariners in a vessel adorned with some mythological emblem, like that Alexandrian corn ship which subsequently brought him to Italy, "whose sign was Castor and Pollux." (Acts 28:11)

Gradually they lost sight of Taurus, and the heights of Lebanon came into view. The one had sheltered his early home, but the other had been a familiar form to his Jews forefathers. How histories would crowd into his mind as the vessel -moved on over the waves, and he gazed upon the furrowed flanks of the great Hebrew mountain! Had the voyage been taken fifty years earlier, the vessel would probably been bound for Ptolemais, which still bore the name of the Greek kings of Egypt;² but in the reign of Augustus or Tiberius it is more likely that she sailed round the headland of Carmel and came to anchor in the new harbor of Caesarea, the handsome city which Herod had rebuilt and named in honor of the Emperor.

To imagine incidents when none are recorded, and confidently to lay down a route without any authority, would be inexcusable in writing on this subject. But to imagine the feelings of a Hebrew boy on his first visit to the Holy Land is neither difficult nor blamable. During this journey Saul had around him a different scenery and different cultivation from what he had been accustomed to, not a river and a wide plain covered with harvests of corn, but a succession of hills and valleys, with terraced vineyards watered by artificial irrigation.

¹ That he came from Tarsus at an early age is implied by Acts 26:4, "My manner of life *from my youth*, which was *at the first* among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning."

² See, for instance, 1 Macc. 5:15; 10:1. Ptolemais was still a busy seaport in St. Paul's day, though Caesarea had become the more important harbor, and indeed, politically, the most important city in Palestine. See Acts 21:7.

If it was the time of a festival, many pilgrims were moving in the same direction, with music and the songs of Zion. The ordinary road would probably be that mentioned in the Acts, which led from Caesarea through the town of Antipatris (Acts 23:31). But neither of these places would possess much interest for a "Hebrew of the Hebrews." The one was associated with the thoughts of the Romans and of modern times; the other had been built by Herod in memory of Antipater, his Idumean father. But objects were not wanting of the deepest interest to a child of Benjamin. Those far hilltops on the left were close upon Mount Gilboa, even if the very place could not be seen where "the Philistines fought against Israel...and the battle went sore against Saul...and he fell on his sword...and died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, that same day together." (1 Sam. 31:1-6).

After passing through the lots of the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, the traveler from Caesarea came to the borders of Benjamin. The children of Rachel were together in Canaan as they had been in the desert. The lot of Benjamin was entered near Bethel, memorable for the piety of Jacob, the songs of Deborah, the sin of Jeroboam, and the zeal of Josiah. (Gen. 28:19; Jud. 4:5; 1 Kings 12:29; 2 Kings 23:15) Onward a short distance was Gibeah, the home of Saul when he was anointed king (1 Sam 10:26; 15:34), and the scene of the crime and desolation of the tribe which made it the smallest of the tribes of Israel. (Judges 20:43 ff) Might it not be too truly said concerning the Israelites even of that period: "They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah; therefore the Lord will remember their iniquity, He will visit their sins?" (Hos. 9:9)

At a later stage of his life, such thoughts of the unbelief and iniquity of Israel accompanied St. Paul wherever he went. At the early age of twelve years, all his enthusiasm could find an adequate object in the earthly Jerusalem, the first view of which would be descried about this part of the journey. From the time with the line of the city wall was seen all else was forgotten. The further border of Benjamin was almost reached. The Rabbis said that the boundary line of Benjamin and Judah, the two faithful tribes, passed through the Temple. And this City and Temple was the common sanctuary of all Israelites. "Thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, to testify unto Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the

Lord. There is little Benjamin their ruler, and the princes of Judah their council, the princes of Zebulon and the princes of Naphtali; for there is the seat of judgment, even the seat of the house of David." And now the Temple's glittering roof was seen, with the buildings of Zion crowning the eminence above it, and the ridge of the Mount of Olives rising high over all. And now the city gate was passed, with that thrill of the heart which none but a Jew could know. "Our feet stood within thy gates, O Jerusalem. O pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls; and plenteousness within thy palaces. O God, wonderful art thou in thy holy places; even the God of Israel. He will give strength and power unto His people. Blessed by God." (Psalms 68 and 122)

And now that this young enthusiastic Jew is come into the land of his forefathers and is about to receive his education in the schools of the Holy city, we may pause to give some description of the state of Judea and Jerusalem. We have seen that it is impossible to fix the exact date of his arrival, but we know the general features of the period; and we can easily form to ourselves some idea of the political and religious conditions of Palestine.

Herod was now dead. The tyrant had been called to his last account; and that eventful reign, which had destroyed the nationality of the Jews, while it maintained their apparent independence, was over. It is most likely that Archelaus also had ceased to govern and was already in exile. His accession to power had been attended with dreadful fighting in the streets, with bloodshed at sacred festivals, and with wholesale crucifixions; his reign of ten years was one continued season of disorder and discontent; and at last he was banished to Vienna on the Rhone, that Judea might be formally constituted into a Roman province.³ We suppose Saul to have come from Tarsus to Jerusalem when one of the four governors who preceded Pontius Pilate was in power, either Coponius, or Marcus Ambivius, or Annius Rufus, or Valerius Gratus. The governor

³ While the questions of succession was pending, the Roman soldiers under Sabinus had a desperate conflict with the Jews. Fighting and sacrificing went on together. Varus, the governor of Syria, marched from Antioch to Jerusalem, and 2000 Jews were crucified. The Herodian family, after their father's death, had gone to Rome, where Augustus receive them in the Temple of Apollo. Archelaus had never the title of king, though his father had desired it.

resided in the town of Caesarea. Soldiers were quartered there and at Jerusalem and throughout Judea, wherever the turbulence of the people made garrisons necessary. Centurions were in the country towns (Luke 7:1-10); soldiers on the banks of the Jordan (Luke 3:14). There was no longer even the show of independence. The revolution, of which Herod had sown the seeds, now came to maturity.

The only change since his death in the appearance of the country was that everything became more Roman than before. Roman money was current in the markets. Roman words were incorporated in the popular language. Roman buildings were conspicuous in all the towns. Even those two independent principalities which two sons of Herod governed, between the provinces of Judea and Syria, exhibited all the general character of the epoch. Philip, the tetrarch of Gaulonitis, called Bethsaida, on the north of the lake of Gennesareth, by the name of Julias, in honor of the emperor who about this time (AD 14) succeeded his illustrious step-father.

These political changes had been attended with a gradual alteration in the national feelings of the Jews with regard to their religion. That the sentiment of political nationality was not extinguished was proved too well by all the horrors of Vespasian's and Hadrian's reigns; but there was a growing tendency to cling rather to their Law and Religion as the center of their unity. The great conquests of the Heathen powers may have been intended by Divine Providence to prepare this change in the Jewish mind. Even under the Maccabees, the idea of the state began to give place, in some degree, to the idea of religious life. Under Herod, the old unity was utterly broken to pieces. The high priests were set up and put down at his caprice; and the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin was invaded by the more arbitrary interference.

Under the governors the power of the Sanhedrin was still more abridged; and high priests were raised and deposed, as the Christian patriarchs of Constantinople have for some ages been raised and deposed by the Sultan; so that it is often a matter of great difficulty to ascertain who was high priest of Jerusalem in any given year at this period. (See Acts 23:5) Thus the hearts of the Jews turned more and more towards the fulfillment of Prophecy, to the practice of religion, to the interpretation of the Law. All else was now

hopeless. The Pharisees, the Scribes, and the Lawyers were growing into a more important body even than the Priests and Levites;⁴ and that system of Rabbinism was beginning which, supplanting the original religion of the Jews, became, after the ruin of the Temple and the extinction of the public worship, a new bond of national union, the great distinctive feature in the character of modern Judaism.

The Apostolic Age was remarkable for the growth of learned Rabbinical schools; but of these the most eminent were the rival schools of Hillel and Schammai. These sages of the law were spoken of by the Jews, and the proverbs quoted, as the seven wise men were quoted by the Greeks. Their traditional systems run through all the Talmudical writings, as the doctrines of the Scotists and Thomists run through the Middle Ages. Both were Pharisaic schools; but the former upheld the honor of tradition as even superior to the law; the latter despised the traditionalists when they clashed with Moses. The antagonism between them was so great that it was said that even "Elijah the Tishbite would never be able to reconcile the disciples of Hillel and Schammai."

Topic: Gamaliel

Topic: Rabbinical Schools

Student Life and Early Manhood

While thus he was passing through the busy years of his student life, nursing his religious enthusiasm and growing in self-righteousness, others were advancing towards their manhood, not far from Jerusalem, of whom then he knew nothing, but for whose cause he was destined to count that loss which now was his highest gain. (See Phil. 3:5-7) There was one at Hebron, the son of a priest "of the course of Abia," who was soon to make his voice heard through Israel as the preacher of repentance; there were boys by the Lake of Galilee, mending their fathers' nets, who were hereafter to be the teachers of the world; and there was One, at Nazareth, for the sake of whose love they, and Saul himself, and thousands of faithful hearts throughout all future ages, should

⁴ In earlier periods of Jewish history, the prophets seem often to have been a more influential body than the priests. It is remarkable that we do not read of "Schools of the Prophets" in any of the Levitical cities. In these schools some were Levites, as Samuel; and some belonged to other tribes, as did Saul and David.

unite in saying, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

It is possible that Gamaliel may have been one of those doctors with whom Jesus was found conversing in the Temple. It is possible that Saul may have been within the precincts of the Temple at some festival when Mary and Joseph came up from Galilee. It is certain that the eyes of the Savior and of His future disciple must often have rested on the same objects, the same crowd of pilgrims and worshippers, the same walls of the Holy City, the same olives on the other side of the valley of Jehoshaphat. But at present they were strangers. The mysterious human life of Jesus was silently advancing towards its great consummation. Saul was growing more and more familiar with the outward observances of the Law, and gaining that experience of the "spirit of bondage" which should enable him to understand himself, and to teach to others, the blessings of the "spirit of adoption." He was feeling the pressure of that yoke, which, in the words of St. Peter, "neither his fathers nor he were able to bear." He was learning (in proportion as his conscientiousness increased) to tremble at the slightest deviation from the Law as jeopardizing salvation, "whence arose that tormenting scrupulosity which invented a number of limitations, in order (by such self-imposed restraint) to guard against every possible transgression of the Law.

The struggles of this period of his life he has himself described in the 7th chapter of Romans. Meanwhile, year after year passed away. John the Baptist appeared by the waters of the Jordan. The greatest event of the world's history was finished on Calvary. The sacrifice for sin was offered at a time when sin appeared to be the most triumphant. At the period of the Crucifixion, three of the principal persons who demand the historian's attention are: the Emperor Tiberius, spending his life of shameless lust on the island of Capri, his vile minister, Sejanus, reveling in cruelty at Rome; and Pontius Pilate, at Jerusalem, mingling with the sacrifices the blood of the Galileans. (Luke 13:1) How refreshing is it to turn from these characters to such scenes as that where St. John receives his Lord's dying words from the cross, or where St. Thomas meets Him after the resurrection, to have his doubts turned into faith, or where St. Stephen sheds the first blood of martyrdom, praying for his murderers?

The first martyrdom has the deepest interest for us, since it is the first occasion when Saul comes before us in his early manhood. Where had he been during these years which we have rapidly passed over in a few lines, the years in which the foundations of Christianity were laid? We cannot assume that he had remained continuously in Jerusalem. Many years had elapsed since he came as a boy from his home in Tarsus. He must have attained the age of twenty-five or thirty years when our Lord's public ministry began. His education was completed, and we may conjecture, with much probability, that he returned to Tarsus. When he says, in the first letter to the Corinthians (9:1), "Have I not seen the Lord?" and when he speaks in the second (5:16) of having "known Christ after the flesh," he seems only to allude, in the first case, to his vision on the road to Damascus, and in the second to his carnal opinions concerning the Messiah. It is hardly conceivable that if he had been at Jerusalem during our Lord's public ministration there, he should never allude to the fact.⁵ In this case he would surely have been among the persecutors of Jesus and have referred to this as the ground of his remorse, instead of expressing his repentance for his opposition merely to the Savior's followers.⁶

If he returned to the banks of the Cydnus, he would find that many changes had taken place among his friends in the interval which had brought him from boyhood to manhood. But the only change in himself was that he brought back with him, to gratify the pride of his parents, if they were still living, a mature knowledge of the Law, a stricter life, a more fervent zeal. And here, in the schools of Tarsus, he had abundant opportunity for becoming acquainted with that Greek literature, the taste for which he had caught from Gamaliel, and for studying the writings of Philo and the Hellenistic Jews.

⁵ In the absence of more information it is difficult to write with confidence concerning this part of St. Paul's life. Benson thinks he was a young student during our Lord's ministry, and places a considerable interval between the Ascension of Christ and the persecution of Stephen. Lardner thinks that the restraint and retirement of a student might have kept him in ignorance of what was going on in the world.

⁶ 1 Cor. 15:9; Acts 22:20.