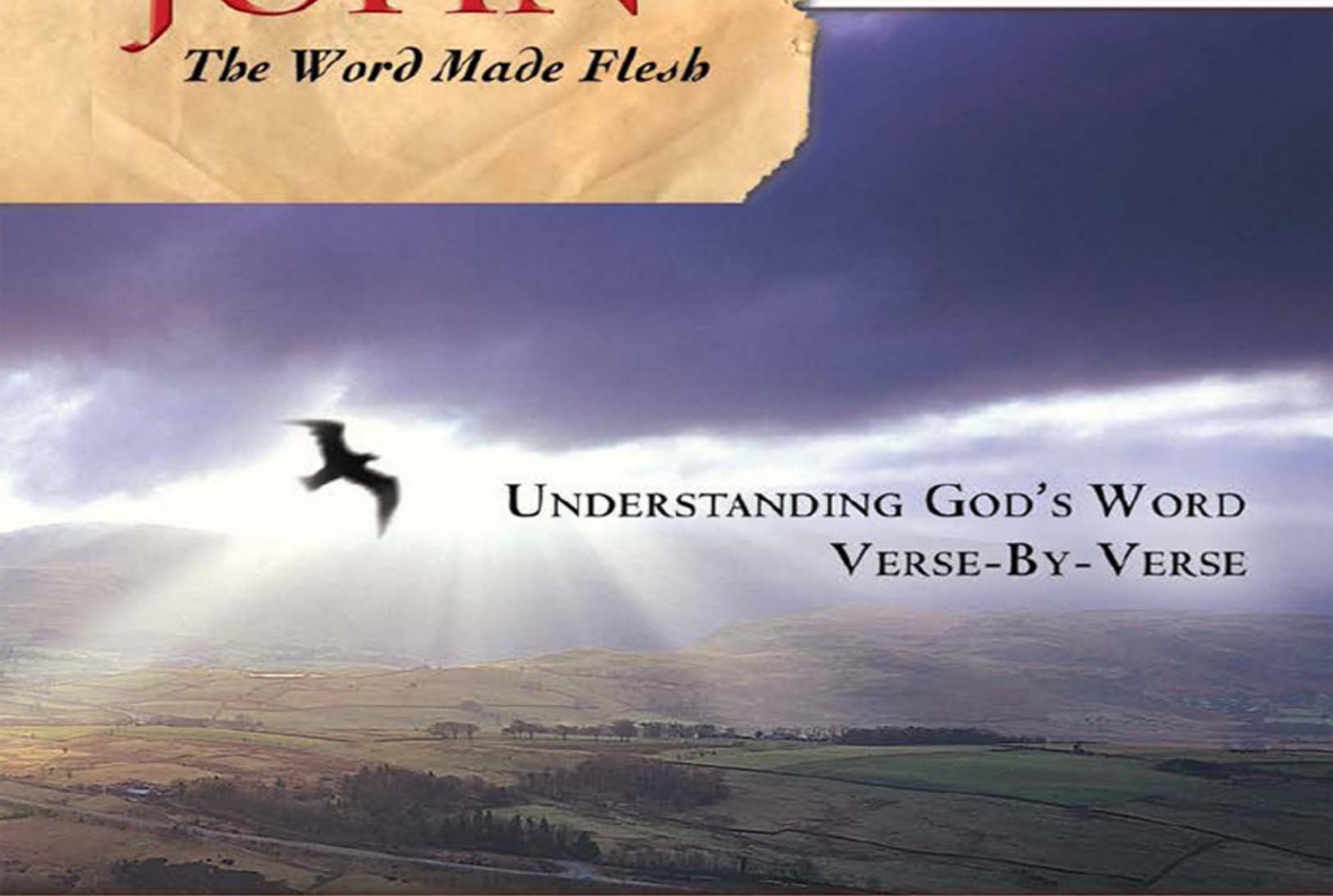


THE EASY-TO-READ
COMMENTARY SERIES



JOHN

The Word Made Flesh



UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD
VERSE-BY-VERSE

 GOD'S
WORD.
TRANSLATION

 PCF
Practical Christianity
Foundation

JOHN—THE WORD MADE FLESH
by Practical Christianity Foundation

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INTRODUCTION



The Gospel of John was written around A.D. 85–95 by a Jewish disciple who was chosen by Jesus Christ to share in His earthly ministry. He was the son of Zebedee and Salome and was the brother of **James**, whom Jesus had also called to be one of the twelve disciples. Jesus referred to the two brothers, **John** and James, as “sons of thunder.” (*Mark 3:17*) Along with **Peter**, these two brothers served as prominent leaders of the early **Jerusalem**([view image](#)) church.

Most evidence of the early church fathers ascribes this gospel account to John the **Apostle**, whom some refer to as “John the Elder” (*or “church leader;” 2 John 1 and 3 John 1*). John came to Ephesus after **Paul**([view image](#)) founded the church there. Irenaeus, who knew **Polycarp** and others who were John’s contemporaries, wrote, “John, the disciple of the Lord who also leaned upon His breast, did himself write a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.”¹ John served as their elder for many years. He lived a long life and was the only one of the twelve disciples who did not die as a martyr. Sometime during his tenure as elder of the Ephesus church, John wrote three letters (or “epistles”), which later became a part of the New Testament canon. Toward the end of his life, he was exiled to Patmos during a time of frequent persecution toward Christians. The Roman emperor Domitian, who died in A.D. 96, was breathing his vengeance against the Christians. While exiled on Patmos, John witnessed to a spectacular vision concerning the end of all things. This vision was recorded and transcribed, and it concludes the New Testament Canon in a book we know as *Revelation*. Thus, John is responsible for five of the twenty-seven books found in the New Testament—a gospel, three epistles, and Revelation.

John's gospel differs greatly from the first three gospels, which collectively are called "synoptic," literally meaning "seeing the same" or being in agreement. The purpose of this gospel, written twenty to forty years after the synoptic gospels, is precisely the same as those written by **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke**. Toward the end of his gospel, John says clearly, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (*John 20:30–31*). Although dramatically different than the other gospels in style and content, we are firmly assured that John's intention is to persuade every reader of the life-saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It seems as though John intended to provide information to his readers that the other gospels did not provide. There can be little doubt that John was fully aware of Matthew's writings since he had been his fellow disciple. He was also especially close to **Peter** so would most likely have known the contents of Mark's gospel. John followed **Paul** to Ephesus and likely personally knew Luke as the associate of Paul. The general omission of Jesus' **Galilean ministry**, the near absence of the parables, the definite reference to selectivity in the miracles (*John 20:30*), and the merging of some of John's historical data with that found in the synoptic gospels makes one feel that the author was trying to give to the public fresh information that had not previously been provided in earlier writings.²

John focuses all of his energy to the disclosure of Jesus, although a flesh and blood human being, as the eternal Son of God. His revelation of Jesus as the active, co-existent agent with the Father begins in the very first verse of the gospel, which establishes the firm foundation on which all of Jesus' humanity is constructed. His gospel, therefore, leans toward concepts and theological analysis rather than the actions and miracles that we see in the other gospels. These concepts are found and explained in Jesus' conversations with individuals rather than in **Matthew's** long discourses. Indeed, John's gospel reveals the gradual development of the theology surrounding Jesus Christ—His life, His death, and His resurrection. As we read the Gospel of John, we must always keep in mind that he wrote his record about Jesus some fifty to sixty years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Matthew starts his gospel with a discussion of the genealogy of Jesus' birth, creating the foundation for identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets. He thereby declares Jesus to be the rightful heir to the throne of **David**([view image](#)). **Mark's** gospel begins abruptly with the ministry of **John the Baptist**, anxiously moving toward that author's theme. He demonstrates the events of Jesus' miracles as the evidence of the **Son of Man's** unique place in human history. **Luke**, the historian, begins with Jesus' birth, His youth, and finally His ministry.

John, however, begins with a powerful theological statement that relates Jesus as the universal Word which is coexistent with God Himself. John is telling his readers that it is impossible to understand who Jesus is if they do not understand His eternality. Before Jesus manifested Himself as a historical human being, He existed as the eternal Word, the agent of all creation. This Word became flesh and entered into His creation. This eternal Word is Jesus, the Son of God. By introducing his gospel with the universal concept of the eternal Word, John relates the revelation of Jesus Christ to Greek thought structures where the universal mystery of God becomes physical reality in the person of Jesus. In so doing, the author relates the Creator to His Creation in flesh and blood, and thus, mankind can never deny the reality of God the Father. Furthermore, mankind can never deny the reality of God's love.

In John's gospel, there are no miracles. Rather, John calls them *signs* because they reveal the power of Jesus over areas of life where man is powerless. John records only seven of these signs, but they provide incontrovertible evidence that the historical Jesus of **Nazareth**([view image](#)) is the divine Son of God. They can be summarized as follows:

Changing water into wine (2:1–11)	quality of life
Healing the nobleman's son (4:46–54)	space
Healing the impotent man (5:1–9)	time
Feeding of the five thousand (6:1–14)	quantity
Walking on the water (6:16–21)	natural law
Healing of the blind man (9:1–12)	misfortune
Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1–46)	death

If the man called Jesus can control these elements of our human existence, then He certainly must be the Son of God.

John augments these seven signs with discourses that are interspersed throughout the gospel. The discourses are revelations in which Jesus attempts to reveal His true identity. These claims by Jesus are met with some success among His followers but are rejected completely and emphatically by the religious leaders of the Jewish faith. These are called the great “I AM” passages and may be summarized as follows:

- The Bread of Life (6:35)
- The Light of the World (8:12; 9:5)
- The Gate for the Sheep (10:7)
- The Good Shepherd (10:11, 14)
- The Resurrection and the Life (11:25)
- The Way, the Truth, and the Life (14:6)
- The True Vine (15:1)

In John’s gospel, there is great emphasis placed on Jesus’ discussions with individuals. Although there are passages in which Jesus addresses the huge crowds that follow Him, Jesus shows Himself to be profoundly interested in the individual. Twenty-seven such discussions provide for the reader some of the most intimate details of entering a relationship with the eternal God through belief in the flesh and blood Jesus. One of the best known of these is the story of Nicodemus, a member of the **Sanhedrin**, who approached Jesus under the cloak of darkness. When he asked Jesus how he could be saved, Jesus told him that He must be born again—born anew in the Holy Spirit. The context of this passage has both thrilled and discouraged those who try to understand it. It remains as a central core of controversy of what it means to be a Christian.

There is one overriding theme of the entire gospel—*belief*. This word *believe(s)* occurs ninety-eight times in twenty-one chapters. It is always used in its verb form and is most often used in the Greek tense that denotes the continuing process of belief, which suggests only the sense in which the believer is continually growing in his faith. It is also used in conjunction with the Greek preposition *ΕΙΣ* (eis), meaning “into.” We might expect to see the more common preposition *ΕΝ* (en), which simply means “in,” but by his use of the more intensive preposition, we again draw the conclusion

that John is emphasizing that the reader is to believe *into* Jesus Christ, again emphasizing the continual process of growing closer to the heart of the One Who has saved us. Remarkably, for all of John's exhortation to place one's trust in Jesus Christ, the noun form of this word, which is translated "faith," is not found in the pages of his gospel.

John's style of writing is simple and pure. There are very few conjoining sentences. Rather, most sentences are single, short phrases that tell the story of Jesus' life in elegant simplicity. John very often joins these sentences with terms that are meant to convey purpose. For John, nothing happens without a cause, and nothing happens without God's purpose.

The vibrant, glowing descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry among the human race have endeared this gospel to the hearts of Christians for centuries. This is the gospel that is generally recommended as the new convert's first assignment. Within its pages are the unparalleled revelations of an eternal God Who enters human history in the person of Jesus Christ to reconcile the world of lost humanity to fellowship with Him. Nowhere else in the New Testament is the good news made so simple and so clear. Here, our searching hearts can find release from the bondage of sin and abundant life when we finally become connected to the True Vine, Jesus Christ the Lord.

JAMES — James the Great was an apostle, the son of Zebedee and Salome and brother of John the Evangelist. Jesus called the two brothers *Boanerges* (Greek, "sons of thunder") because of their zeal (*Mark 3:17*). With Peter and John, James was one of the three privileged disciples who witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus (*Matthew 17:1*) and his agony in the garden of Gethsemane (*Matthew 26:37*). James was the first of the 12 apostles to be martyred (*Acts 12:12*); it is probable that he was condemned by the Sanhedrin on a charge of sedition, with the connivance of Herod Agrippa I, King of Judea. He is especially venerated in Spain because of an unsubstantiated tradition that he preached there shortly before his death. A 9th-century *martyrology*, or history of the martyrs, records that his mortal remains were transported to the city of Santiago de Compostela. During the Middle Ages (5th century to 15th century), the shrine of Saint James became the destination of pilgrimages from all parts of western Europe, rivaling Rome and Jerusalem in popularity. His feast day is July 25.¹

¹“James (saints),” *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000*. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

JOHN THE BAPTIST (JOHN THE BAPTIZER) — Forerunner and herald of the Christ. He was of the priestly race by both parents, for his father, Zacharias, was himself a priest of the course of Abia or Abijah (*1 Chronicles 24:10*), and Elisabeth was of the daughters of Aaron (*Luke 1:5*). His birth was foretold by an angel sent from God, and is related at length in Luke 1. The birth of John preceded by six months the birth of Jesus. John was ordained to be a Nazarite from his birth (*Luke 1:15*).

Dwelling by himself in the wild and thinly-peopled region westward of the Dead Sea, he prepared himself for the wonderful office to which he had been divinely called. His dress was that of the old prophets—a garment woven of camel’s hair (*2 Kings 1:8*), attached to the body by a leathern girdle. His food was what the desert provided—locusts (*Leviticus 11:22*), and wild honey (*Psalms 81:16*).

Then the long-secluded hermit came forth to the discharge of his office. His supernatural birth, his life, and the general expectation that some great one was about to appear, were sufficient to attract a great multitude to him from “every quarter” (*Matthew 3:5*). Many of every class pressed forward to confess their sins and to be baptized. Jesus himself came from Galilee to Jordan to be baptized of John.

From incidental notices we learn that John and his disciples continued to baptize for some time after our Lord entered his ministry (*John 3:23; 4:1; Acts 19:3*). John instructed his disciples in certain moral and religious duties, as fasting (*Matthew 9:14; Luke 5:33*), and prayer (*Luke 11:1*). But shortly after he had given his testimony to the Messiah, John’s public ministry was brought to a close.

In daring disregard of the divine laws, Herod Antipas had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip; and when John reproved him for this, as well as for other sins (*Luke 3:19*), Herod threw him into prison (ca. March, A.D. 28). The place of his confinement was the castle of Machaerus, a fortress on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. It was here that reports reached him of the miracles which Jesus did in Judea.

Nothing but the death of the Baptist would satisfy the resentment of Herodias. A court festival was kept at Machaerus in honor of the king’s birthday. After supper the daughter of Herodias came in and danced before the company, and so charmed was the king by her grace that he promised

with an oath to give her whatever she asked for. Salome, prompted by her mother, demanded the head of John the Baptist. Herod gave instructions to an officer of his guard, who went and executed John in the prison, and his head was brought to the adulteress whose sins he had denounced. His death is supposed to have occurred just before the third Passover, in the course of the Lord's ministry. (March, A.D. 29.)¹

¹ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

SIMON PETER — Prince of the Apostles. The original name of this disciple was Simon, *i.e.*, "hearer."

Peter was the son of a man named Jonas (*Matthew 16:17; John 1:42; 21:16*) and was brought up in his father's occupation, a fisherman. He and his brother Andrew were partners of John and James, the sons of Zebedee, who had hired servants. Peter did not live, as a mere laboring man, in a hut by the seaside, but first at Bethsaida, and afterward in a house at Capernaum belonging to himself or his mother-in-law, which must have been rather a large one, since he received in it not only our Lord and his fellow disciples, but multitudes who were attracted by the miracles and preaching of Jesus. Peter was probably between thirty and forty years of age when Jesus called him to discipleship. That call was preceded by a special preparation.

Peter and his brother Andrew, with their fishing partners James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were disciples of John the Baptist when he was first called by our Lord. The specifics are related in great detail by John. It was on this occasion that Jesus gave Peter the name Cephas, an Aramaic word relating to the Greek Peter, meaning a stone or rock (*John 1:35-42*). This first call did not immediately change Peter's external position. He and his fellow disciples looked to Jesus as their teacher, but did not follow him as regular disciples. They returned to Capernaum, where they pursued their usual business.

The second call is recorded by the other three evangelists; the narrative of Luke being supplementary to the brief and official accounts given by Matthew and Mark. It took place on the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum, where the four disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John, were fishing. Some time passed afterward in attendance upon the Lord's public ministry in Galilee, Decapolis, Peræa, and Judea. The special designation of Peter and his eleven fellow disciples took place some time afterward, when Jesus

set them apart to be His immediate attendants (*Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13*). At this time they formally received the title of apostles, and from that time forward Simon publicly bore the name Peter. From this time there can be no doubt that Peter held first place among the apostles. He is named first in every list of the apostles; he is generally addressed by our Lord as their representative; and on the most solemn occasions he speaks in their name.

The distinction which he received, due to his ability, energy, zeal, and absolute devotion to Christ's person, seems to have developed a natural tendency to rashness and forwardness bordering upon presumption. In his affection and self-confidence Peter ventured to reject the announcement of the sufferings and humiliation which Jesus predicted, and heard the sharp words, "Get behind me, Satan; you are an offence to me; for you do not want the things that come from God, but those that come from men." It is remarkable that on other occasions when Peter expressed his faith and devotion, he displayed at the time, or shortly afterward, an unusual deficiency in spiritual discernment and consistency.

Toward the close of our Lord's ministry Peter's characteristics become especially prominent. At the Last Supper Peter seems to have been particularly earnest in the request that the traitor might be pointed out. After supper, his exclamation drew out the meaning of our Lord in washing His disciples' feet. Then, too, he made those repeated protestations of unalterable fidelity, so soon falsified by his miserable failure. On the morning of the resurrection we have proof that Peter, though humbled, was not crushed by his fall. He and John were the first to visit the grave site; he was the first who entered it. Luke and Paul tell us that Christ appeared to him first among the apostles. It is interesting to note on that occasion he is called by his original name, Simon, not Peter; the higher designation was not restored until he had been publicly reinstated by his Master. That reinstatement—an event of the very highest import—took place at the Sea of Galilee (*John 21*).

The first part of the Acts of the Apostles records many events in which Peter stands forth as the recognized leader of the apostles. He is the most prominent person in the greatest event after the resurrection, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus' disciples on the day of Pentecost. When the Gospel was first preached beyond the precincts of Judea, he and John were at once sent by the apostles to confirm the converts at Samaria. Henceforth he

remains prominent, but not exclusively prominent, among the apostles of the Gospel. We have two accounts of the first meeting of Peter and Paul (*Acts 9:26; Galatians 1:17, 18*). This interview was followed by another event marking Peter's position—a general apostolic tour visiting the churches already established (*Acts 9:32*). The most significant event after Pentecost was the baptism of Cornelius. That was the crown and consummation of Peter's ministry. The establishment of a church in the Gentile region at Antioch, and the mission of Barnabas completed the work begun by Peter. This transaction was soon followed by his imprisonment. His miraculous deliverance marks the close of this second great period of his ministry. The special work assigned to him was completed. From that time we have no continuous history of him.

Peter was probably instrumental in building up and completing the organization of Christian communities in Palestine and the adjoining districts. There is, however, strong reason to believe that he visited Corinth at an early period. The name of Peter as founder is not associated with any local church except the churches of Corinth, Antioch, or Rome, by early church tradition. Peter may not have visited Rome before the last year of his life; but there is satisfactory evidence that he and Paul were the founders of the church at Rome, and died in that city.

The time and manner of the apostle's martyrdom are less certain. According to the early writers, he suffered at or about the same time as Paul in the persecution of Christians by Nero, A.D. 67, 68. All agree that he was crucified. Origen says that Peter felt himself to be unworthy to be put to death in the same manner as his Master, and was therefore, at his own request, crucified with his head downward. The apostle is said to have employed interpreters. Of far more importance is the statement that Mark wrote his Gospel under the teaching of Peter, or that he embodied in that Gospel the substance of our apostle's oral instructions. The only written documents which Peter has left are the First and Second Epistles, about which no doubt has ever been entertained in the Church.¹

¹ William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

JERUSALEM — Jerusalem is one of the world's famous cities. Under that name, it dates from at least the 3rd millennium BC; and today is considered sacred by the adherents of the three great monotheistic faiths, Judaism,

Christianity and Islam. The city is set high in the hills of Judah, about 50 km from the Mediterranean, and over 30 km west of the north end of the Dead Sea. It rests on a none-too-level plateau, which slopes noticeably towards the southeast. To the east lies the ridge of Olivet. Access to the city on all sides except the north is hampered by three deep ravines, which join in the Siloam Valley, near the well BirEyyub, southeast of the city. The eastern valley is Kidron; the western is now called the Wadi al-Rababi, and is probably to be equated with the Valley of Hinnom; and the third cuts the city in half before it runs south, and slightly east, to meet the other two. This latter ravine is not mentioned or named in Scripture (although Maktesh, Zephaniah 1:11, may well have been the name of part of it), so it is usually referred to as the Tyropoeon Valley, *i.e.*, the Valley of the Cheese-makers, after Josephus.¹

Image of Temple Model²

¹ D. F. Payne, "Jerusalem", *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer and D. J. Wiseman, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996). 557.

²*Bible Places Pictorial Library of the Bible Lands*, Copyright 2012 (Used with permission)

APOSTLE — Derivation of the Greek word *apostolos*, one who is sent. *Apostolos* was used to refer to a ship or a group of ships. Later it designated a bill, invoice, or passport.

In the New Testament, "apostle" has three broad uses. First, it referred to the Twelve whom Jesus chose to train for the task of carrying His message to the world. Following His resurrection, Jesus commissioned them for this task. These men had been with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry and were witnesses to His resurrection. Paul was an apostle in this sense because he had seen the risen Christ.

The second designation of apostle is a person authorized by a local congregation with the safe delivery of specific gifts for another Christian church (*2 Corinthians 8:23; Philipians 2:25*).

The third sense of apostle is those whom Jesus Christ has sent. Paul refers to a number of people as apostles in this sense (*Romans 16:7; 1 Corinthians 9:1, 5; 12:28; Galatians 1:17–19*).¹

¹ Steve Bond, “Apostle,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 88.

PAUL — Apostle to the Gentiles. Known as Saul of Tarsus before his conversion to Christianity and the most influential leader in the early days of the Christian church. Through his missionary journeys to Asia Minor and Europe, Paul was the primary instrument in the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles. Moreover, his letters to various churches and individuals contain the most thorough and deliberate theological formulations of the New Testament.

Most of the biographical material available comes from the Book of Acts. Though modern critics question the reliability of this narrative, there is every good reason to use it as the basis for outlining Paul’s life. Moreover, the teachings of Paul, as set forth in his letters, are best summarized within the historical framework provided by the Acts narrative.

Background and Conversion.

Date of Birth. Little is known of Paul’s life prior to the events discussed in Acts. He is first mentioned in chapter 7 in connection with the execution of Stephen. According to verse 58, “the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul.” The term “young man” probably indicates someone in his 20s, though this is uncertain.

The events mentioned in Acts 7 may have occurred as early as A.D. 31 if Jesus’ death took place during the Passover of A.D. 30. On the other hand, if Jesus’ death is dated in the year 33 then those events could have taken place no earlier than 34, but no later than 37. (2 Corinthians 11:32, 33 states that when Paul escaped from Damascus that city was being ruled by the Nabataean king Aretas, who died in the year 40. Since, according to Gal 1:17, 18, Paul left Damascus three years after his conversion, the year 37 must be regarded as the latest possible date for Stephen’s death.)

Using the year 34 as an approximate date for the time when Saul is described as a “young man,” and assuming that Saul was no older than 30 years at that time, then it can be concluded his birth took place no earlier than A.D. 4. And since it is very unlikely that he was younger than 20, A.D. 14 can be set as the latest possible date for his birth. This conclusion is supported by the knowledge that Paul studied under the famous Gamaliel I (*Acts 22:3*), who according to some scholars became a member of the Sanhedrin about A.D. 20. If Paul was 15 years old when he entered the school, the range of A.D. 4–14 for his birth fits all the information available.

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