

Great New Testament People

Mary, Highly Favored by God

The story of Mary begins in an obscure village in Galilee called Nazareth about 58 miles north of Jerusalem. She is betrothed to a man named Joseph of the house of David. A ranking angel, Gabriel, was sent by God to tell her she had "found favor with God" and would conceive and bring forth a Son, and he was to be called Jesus. This must have been a frightening experience for Mary.

She is perplexed and asks, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" Gabriel tells her that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and thus she would conceive a child. Of all the women in Palestine God could have chosen, we might think it would be someone of prominence, a princess, the wife of a high priest, a well educated person or a person from a prominent family but instead He chose a young peasant teen-ager.

Nathanael echoed the common belief of that day when he said in John 1:46, "can any good thing come out of Nazareth." The belief of that day was that the Messiah would be born of a king, not a peasant. When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth she exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear." No less than Gabriel one of the ranking angels announced to Mary, "Greetings, you who are highly favored, the Lord is with you." But why did God choose Mary?

Part of the answer may be found in the response Mary made to Gabriel. All this would be difficult for Mary to comprehend for she knew she was a virgin. It would not be long until it would be obvious she was pregnant and people would begin to talk.

Mary's faith in God drove her to say, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." It is this humble submission to God without questioning why she was being asked to take on this most unusual responsibility. Humble submission is a trait that God greatly delights in.

Many great Bible characters that were called upon to meet great challenges tried to back away from what God wanted them to do but Mary was submissive, although the announcement made to her by Gabriel must have been mind boggling. At this early stage in her life she would not have comprehended all that would be involved.

Mary was the type of woman who put her faith into action. She not only says, "Lord, your will be done," but she also "hurries" to see God at work in the life of her relative Elizabeth. The journey to Judea was not a simple walk to the next town; it was a difficult journey requiring at least three days. Thus we begin to see why God chose her above all the other Jewish women.

Mary's knowledge of the scriptures also impresses us. The burst of praise from her lips recorded when she went to visit Elizabeth reveals an intimate knowledge of God and the Holy Scriptures.

Luke 1:46–55 has been labeled "The Song of Mary." "And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant, for behold, from now on all generation will call me blessed. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and Holy is His name. And His mercy is on those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever."

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We may wonder how this young woman could speak such insightful words. This was a woman who deeply loved God to whom was given special understanding of what he was doing. As Mary journeyed from Nazareth to visit Elizabeth she would have had time to think about what she had heard from the angel.

For the next 33 or more years she would enjoy unparalleled rejoicing interspersed with indescribable sorrow. She would suffer the shame and humiliation of being pregnant out of wedlock. She would give birth to her son in a stable. She then would be forced to flee to a strange country to protect her son from an insane king. She would watch him grow up hearing strange things that came from his mouth, but she **"kept these sayings within her heart."**

Later she would watch him in his public ministry wondering how he had become such a great teacher. Ultimately she would stand under a Roman cross watching him agonize in pain and suffering for sins he had never committed. She would know the agony and grief of the dark hours following his death.

Next to Jesus himself, Mary may have paid a greater price for the salvation of man than any other person who has ever lived. Her reward came when the stone was rolled away from the tomb and it was discovered Jesus had arisen from the tomb. No doubt Jesus spoke to her during the 40 days before his ascension to heaven comforting her.

In **Luke 2:51** it is said that during Jesus' childhood he was subject to his parents and that he **"Increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."** He would have learned many of these personal traits from his mother. She evidently taught Him well. We must keep in mind he was human just as much as you and I.

Joseph and Mary in all probability were very young parents. According to rabbinical writings a boy should be married long before he reached twenty (**16 was considered an ideal age**) and girls after they reached the age of twelve or as soon as betrothal could be arranged. This arrangement took place usually between the parents of both parties. C. S. Lewis said he trembled at the thought that God entrusted His Son into the care of two teen-agers. However, God knew he could turn the rearing and training of His Son over to these young parents.

From one little incident given us it seems clear she was one who was ready to serve. She was present at a wedding in Cana where Jesus had been invited. Her concern about there not being enough wine indicates she was serving in some capacity.

There were both miraculous and normal things that happened to her and Jesus, something which no doubt astonished her and made her proud of Jesus but she never bragged or sought personal glory. She was one who **"kept these sayings within heart."** Again we see the characteristic of humility in Mary.

The Bible informs us that she was a Virgin. The conception of Jesus was by the Holy Spirit. However she did not remain a virgin the rest of her life as Catholic doctrine contends. We know that Jesus had at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters. **(See Matthew 13:55-56.)**

Also there was no bodily assumption into heaven. This is an assumption that is nowhere to be found in scripture. Neither are we taught to pray through her as an intercessor. It has been argued that a mother has a special way with a son and thus by praying to Mary she can be more persuasive with Christ than when we pray through Christ.

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Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:5 "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." This eliminates Mary as our intercessor.

The veneration of Mary calling her the "Mother of God," and "Queen of Heaven," plus making images of her, bowing before a statue of her, etc. is totally contrary to what the New Testament teaches concerning her. When Jesus ascended back to heaven Mary was no longer his mother. He was now her Lord and savior and she was His servant.

The fact she was chosen by God to bring His Son into the world and that she raised him from childhood to manhood shows that she was an extraordinary person but she was never elevated to the position the Catholic Church claims for her. The doctrine of Mariology is nowhere to be found in God's word.

John took her into his home as if she were his mother after the Lord's death. Tradition says that in later years when he moved to Ephesus she went with him. Nothing is said in scripture about how long she lived or what she did in the remaining part of her life. There is no information about her death. Returning to Nazareth from Jerusalem after being sought three days by his parents when he was a young boy, we are informed that he was subject to them (Luke 2:51).

We do not hear any more about Joseph. It is assumed he died before Jesus' public ministry. The virgin birth of our Lord has elevated womanhood more than any other event in the history of mankind. Motherhood is given a place of dignity, honor and respect that had been greatly lacking. God used a plain simple virtuous mother to bring the greatest blessing to come to this world.

Paul writes, "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen" (Romans 1:27).

The Women Who Ministered to Jesus

There are a number of women mentioned in the New Testament who ministered to Jesus. They were some of his strongest supporters. Without their help it would have been more difficult for Jesus and the apostles to carry out their mission of spreading the gospel. Many times it is the women who are the real heroes in many of the Bible stories.

First, there was the Mary who "who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him" (Matthew 27:55). In Matthew's gospel she is mentioned as the mother of "James and Joses." In Mark's gospel she is mentioned as "mother of James the less and of Joses." Then in Luke's gospel she is identified as "The mother of James," who seems to be the more distinguished of her two sons.

Finally in John's gospel she is mentioned as "Mary the wife of Cleophas." This Mary served Jesus in the hours of His greatest need. She was with those faithful few at the crucifixion of Jesus and "stood by the cross of Jesus" (John 19:25). She was among those who watched from afar to see where Jesus would be buried. She was one of the first to visit the tomb on the morning of His resurrection as she "came to see the sepulchre" (Matthew 28:1).

It is said "in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week," she was among them that "brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him" (Mark 16:1). She is one of those, "which told these things unto the apostles" (Luke 24:10). This woman, the wife of Cleophas and mother of James the Less had left her home and sought to follow Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem.

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It seems she willingly wanted to follow him all the way to Jerusalem. She might not be able to do the work of an apostle but she could minister to the Lord's needs. No doubt she was very proud that Jesus had chosen her son, James the Less to be one of His apostles. She was a good woman who embodied all the qualities of the good wife spoken of in [Proverbs 31:10-31](#).

Second, is Mary Magdalene. She is mentioned 14 times in the gospels. "Magdalene" refers to the town of Magdala, from which she came. Since medieval times she has been one of the most maligned women in the New Testament. This is largely because some scholars of earlier year have chosen to identify her with the unnamed sinful woman of [Luke 7:36-50](#).

The fact she is mentioned in [Luke. 8:2](#) closely after the account of the sinful woman has caused some to assume they are one and the same woman. There is no way to positively identify Mary Magdalene as the sinful woman. We do know that she was possessed of seven demons. We are not certain what effect this had on Mary but the important thing is that she was healed by Jesus and became one of His faithful and devoted followers.

It was Mary Magdalene and two other women who came early Sunday morning to discover the empty tomb of Jesus. She is the first to report this to Peter and John. She said, "[They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him](#)" ([John 20:2](#)). The two disciples run to the tomb. After seeing it empty it seems John "[saw and believed.](#)"

Both went back to their places of abode. She evidently reaches the tomb after they had left. Jesus now makes his first physical appearance and it is to Mary Magdalene. One of the most stirring narratives in literature is John's description of Mary's second visit to the empty tomb. This time she saw two angels in white sitting there, the one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

It is interesting that the first word spoken inside that empty tomb was "[Woman.](#)" Then there followed the angels' question: "[Why weepest thou?](#)" She answered, "[Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him](#)" ([John 20:1`3](#)). Then she turned, and Jesus stood before her.

Not until He spoke her name, "[Mary](#)" did she recognize that it was Jesus. She is instructed to tell the disciples, "[I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to God, and your God](#)" ([John 20:17](#)). Mary, awe stricken, hastened to tell the others that she had seen the Lord and that He had spoken these things to her. It is significant that a woman is the first to witness the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. What a great honor.

Then there was Salome. She is mentioned by name in Mark's gospel ([Mark 15:40](#)). Her two sons are belonged to the inner circle of disciples. She became ambitious for her sons to occupy prominent places in the kingdom of Jesus. Her request was, "[Grant that these my two sons may sit, and one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom](#)" ([Matthew 20:21](#)).

She was presumptuous enough to put her own human ambition for her sons James and John above their spiritual needs. She stands in contrast to Mary, mother of Jesus who never expressed any human ambition for her son. Even when great things were spoken to her about Him, she "[pondered these things in her heart.](#)"

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We cannot be too severe on Salome, for she remained one of the most faithful followers of Jesus to the end. We remember her for the fact that she gave of her substance as well as herself during the ministry of Jesus.

Next is Joanna the wife of Chuza a steward of Herod the Tetrarch. She had been healed either of a sickness or an evil spirit. She also is one of the women who went to Jesus' sepulcher to embalm the body of Jesus.

She along with the other women told the apostles that Christ had arisen. Although mention of her is brief we are convinced of the genuineness of her depth of love for Jesus and faithfulness in rendering service to Him.

Also there was Susanna mentioned in **Luke 8:3**. She was one who ministered to Jesus of her substance. In **Luke 8:2** she is mentioned among "certain women" which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities." Because she had been cured, she joyfully ministered of her substance and helped to spread the good news of Christ's gospel.

We should include the woman of **Matthew 26:6-12**. Jesus said that her deed of anointing his body with fragrant oil would be told wherever the gospel would be preached.

Matthew 27:55 tells us, "And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him." In the next verse two of these women are named, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses. We can be sure that among these "many women" there were many other nameless women with them. They had followed Jesus to the cross because He had blessed them and healed them, and their gratitude was great.

They did little but watch, but their watching had meaning and purpose. They showed unflinching courage and extreme faithfulness in remaining close to Jesus throughout the hours of His suffering upon the cross. While many of these women were at the foot of the cross as far as we know the apostle John was the only apostle or male there. These women were among the Lord's most faithful followers.

John the Baptist, God's Fearless Preacher

The mission of John the baptizer was that of a forerunner for Jesus. Isaiah said he would be, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight'" (Isaiah 40:3). Again in **Malachi 3:1** we are told, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."

John was of priestly descent. His mother, Elizabeth, was of the daughters of Aaron, while his father, Zacharias, was a priest of the course of Abija and did service at the temple in Jerusalem. It is said of them, "And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless".

While Zacharias was carrying out his responsibility at the altar of incense the angel Gabriel appeared to him and said, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." Both parents were up in age. Elizabeth was past the age of childbearing. His coming birth was foretold to Zacharias by an angel of God. At the same time he was told that his name would be John.

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It seems Zacharias could hardly believe what he was hearing. He said, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife well advanced in years". His birth was a miraculous act of God. Because of his doubt Zacharias was told, "Behold you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their season."

When he came out of the temple he could not speak. He was born in the hill country (where his mother had gone, probably for the sake of privacy). John was born six months before birth of Jesus. After John was born the neighbors and relatives wanted him to be called Zacharias after his father, but his mother said, "No, but he shall be called John."

After this Zacharias could speak. Because of the mystery surrounding John's birth people were saying, "What kind of child will this be?" Zacharias broke out into an amazing prophecy. We are told "The child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel."

It seems that John chose to live in seclusion until he began his ministry as the forerunner of Christ. Matthew tells us that his raiment was of camel's hair. This would be similar to sackcloth, which is very coarse and rough and baggy. He had a girdle, which was like a belt to bind the long loose fitting clothes. His food was locust and wild honey.

Locusts were similar to grasshoppers. They were considered clean and could be used for food. Sometimes roasted and sometimes boiled they were eaten by the poorer classes. The honey of wild bees was deposited in trees and rocks. Palestine was described in the Old Testament as a land "flowing with milk and honey."

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar (about A.D. 25), we are told the "Word of God came to John." He begins his work of preparing the people for the coming of the Lord. He left the wilderness and went to the Jordan River to preach. This was probably around the city of Jericho He attracted a great multitude from Jerusalem, Judea and the area around the Jordan River.

His message was, "Repent, for the he kingdom is at hand." He also preached "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Repentance involves a complete change of mind. Baptism is immersion. John preached near the Jordan because there was much water there to immerse people. His baptism was "Unto the remission of sins."

Baptism was connected with repentance and brought them into a state where they could receive forgiveness of sins. The Jews had been baptizing proselytes to Judaism, but John's baptism was new in that it required Jews who were descendants of Abraham to be baptized.

It was not the same as the baptism Jesus commanded in the great commission. It did not put one into Christ, nor bring one into contact with the blood of Jesus nor did it add one to the church or endow one with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came directly to John to be baptized of him "But John tried to prevent Him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?'" He came because it was God's will for Him to be baptized. John at first refused but Jesus said, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." The distance Jesus traveled indicates the importance of Jesus being baptized.

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Multitudes came to hear him preach. Some came out of curiosity but others were envious and jealous because he attracted large crowds. John addresses them as a "brood of vipers," which described their character. John's preaching pricked the hearts of many people. Many wanted to know what they should do. He told those who had food and clothing to share and not hoard, but give to those in need.

The Publicans who were tax collectors for the Romans were told to be honest. Soldiers were told not to give themselves to violence; neither accuses anyone wrongfully and learns to be satisfied with their wages. Many wondered if John were The Christ. He told them there was one who would come after him who would be greater.

He was so great John said he was not worthy to unloose the latches on his shoes. He also tells them while he baptized them in water but Jesus would baptize them in the Holy Spirit and fire. The first was fulfilled on Pentecost upon the apostles. The second refers to destruction in Hell.

Herod Antipas had taken Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. John rebuked him for his adulterous and incestuous marriage. Herod had John placed in prison. Death seemed imminent. He had time to sit and think.

Probably depression and doubt began to set in. Jesus did not seem to fit the contemporary expectations of a Messiah. At the same time Jesus was at the height of his popularity. John evidently was looking for a political Messiah too, just as did most of the Jews. He could not understand why Jesus was not taking proper action toward that end. His questions are probably not so much from doubt as from a feeling of impatience. [Why is He waiting?](#)

The men sent by John said, "John the Baptist has sent us to You, saying, Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" The disciples of John arrive at a good time. Luke says, "And in that same hour He cured many people of their infirmities, afflictions, and evil spirits; and to many who were blind He gave sight."

Their questions come at a time when Jesus was performing many of His miracles. Not only were they able to witness many of these miracles but also probably could have talked to a number of people who had already been healed by Jesus. Jesus tells them to report back to John what they had seen with their eyes and heard. He felt this was sufficient evidence of who He was.

After the messengers left, Jesus speaks of John. [Who do you think John was?](#) He was not "a weed shaken by the wind." John was no weakling. He was a man of strong convictions. As to looks He was not a "man clothed in soft garments." Jesus quotes from Malachi 3:1. "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."

John served as the forerunner of Christ. He broke four hundred years of prophetic silence. He drew a large group of baptized disciples who crowded around him. But in spite of his popularity he exalted Jesus. He declared, "He must increase but I must decrease" (John. 3:30).

Jesus now pays John the highest compliment anyone could pay an individual. "For I say to you, among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."

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This is a very significant statement considering the great prophets of the Old Testament such as Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, etc. As far as we know John never did perform any miracles. His work was that of preaching. [Would people of today tolerate his style of preaching?](#)

Ever since John had condemned Herod and Herodias living together in revenge she had worked to bring about John's death. Her daughter Salome had danced before Herod and pleased him so much he offered her anything she desired. Herodias took advantage of the situation and ordered the head of John. The king reluctantly complied and sent an executioner, who beheaded him in prison.

John's disciples, heard of his death, buried his body, and went and told the Lord. That John's work was extensive and his influence was lasting is shown by the fact that 20 years afterward Paul found in Ephesus certain disciples, including Apollos who knew no other baptism than that of John ([Acts 19:1-7](#)).

Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles EARLY YEARS OF PAUL

It is impossible to cover the life of Paul in one lesson. Paul was one of those great minds that appear every few centuries. He would have been a remarkable man if he had never become a Christian. When we have a great mind tempered by Christianity we see a truly great person. He was one of the foremost workers the church has ever known. We know several things about his family and background.

He writes in [Philippians 3:5](#) "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law a Pharisee." His father was a Pharisee. He once said, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee." He had a sister and a nephew. "Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, and he came and entered into the castle and told Paul" ([Acts 23:16](#)). He also had distant kinsmen according to [Romans 16:7, 11, 21](#).

Paul was from Tarsus the capital of the province of Cilicia. It was located a few miles from the coast in the midst of a plain. It was located on the river Cydnus that was navigable. Trade from countries of Central Asia Minor flowed through a mountain pass known as the Cilician Gates.

SAUL'S EDUCATION

He probably received his early education here and possibly was taught a trade here. Goat's hair was used to make tents. He may have learned tent making because Tarsus was a shipping center for Goats hair. Later on Paul was able to support himself in his mission work by being a tent maker.

At the age of six or seven a child would be sent to the elementary school or House of the Book, which was the local Synagogue. No doubt the Septuagint version ([a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek](#)) would have been used as Greek would have been the language of Tarsus. Children were instructed in the basic rudiments, and then at the age of ten, they learned the Law. If a boy showed exceptional intelligence he would often go on to be trained as a Rabbi.

This must have happened in Paul's case. He mentions his teacher Gamaliel in [Acts 22:3](#). He says, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today" ([Acts 22:3](#)). In [Galatians 1:14](#) he says, "And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions"

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SAUL THE PERSECUTOR

We are first introduced to Paul as "Saul of Tarsus" at the stoning of Stephen. "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts. 8:1). Saul worked under the sanction of the rulers. From them he received letters to go to Damascus in order to bring Jewish Christians to Jerusalem to be punished. Probably few men have been so furious in their persecution.

Later he would write, "I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it" (Galatians 1:13). His persecution included both men and women. He says, "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting down men and women into prisons" (Acts. 22:4). In spite of all his furious persecution against the church Paul could say that he did it in good conscience (Acts 23:1).

SAUL'S CONVERSION

Saul's conversion took place around 33 A.D. The conversion of Saul is given to us by Luke three times in the book of Acts (9:1; 22:5-16' 26:12-18). This indicates that special emphasis is given to this event. Saul approached Damascus about noontime when a "light from heaven flashed around him." It was brighter than the sun. Saul fell to the ground.

He heard a voice saying "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" No doubt being in shock he cries out, "Who art thou, Lord?" What a shock it must have been when he finds out it was the Lord Jesus. "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Saul the persecutor is now completely helpless. His world is suddenly shattered. The very one he has violently opposed had just spoken to him!

He is instructed to enter the city and he will be told what he must do. Ananias is called upon to visit Saul. He is reluctant to visit him. He finds where Saul was staying. Saul has been praying. He had not eaten or drunk for three days. Laying his hands on Saul he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit".

Saul is immediately baptized. Saul is still the same person but his energy will now be directed in another direction. Repentance makes the difference. It does in any conversion. It is probably the most difficult part of becoming a Christian.

He remains in the Damascus - Arabia area for three years preaching in the Synagogues that Christ is the Son of God. A plot was set up to have him killed but he escaped by night. Paul visits Jerusalem but cannot remain because of the opposition to him. His life is threatened. He has no choice but to return to his home in Tarsus.

FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY BY PAUL AND BARNABAS

After some years Paul appears again in Antioch at the urging of Barnabas. They were told by the Holy Spirit, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2). After prayer, fasting and the laying on of hands they begin what will be Paul's first missionary journey. Their travels covered 1300 miles, 500 by water and 800 by land. It was done over a three year period of time.

Over six churches were established. They experienced the heat of summer and the bitter cold of winter. Yet they could rejoice over what the power of the gospel had done in all those cities they visited.

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Luke says, "They began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles." Paul had begun his work as the apostle to the Gentiles as God had planned for him to do.

Men came from Jerusalem claiming to be sent by James and declaring that the Gentiles must also be circumcised to be saved. Paul and Barnabas along with others went down to Jerusalem to speak to the apostles and elders about this false doctrine. It has been 14 years since Paul had been in Jerusalem.

Following a full discussion of the issue it is agreed that no such requirement should be imposed on the Gentiles. A letter was composed to be taken to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia to deny what the false teachers were trying to require the Gentiles to do.

PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

"After some days" a decision is made to begin a second journey. Because of a disagreement over John Mark they split up with Paul taking Silas with him and Barnabas taking Mark with him. This journey takes Paul through Syria, Cilicia, Derbe and Lystra where Timothy joins them. They also go through Phrygia and the region of Galatia. Forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia, Mysia and Bithynia, Paul in a dream is called to go to Macedonia.

On their way it seems Luke joins them in Troas. They end up in Philippi a Roman Colony. Here the households of Lydia and the Jailer were baptized. They next go to Thessalonica and Berea. Finding opposition Paul moves on to Athens and delivers his famous sermon on Mars Hill.

He then moves to Corinth where he stays for a year and a half. Paul then returns to Antioch by way of Ephesus sailing to Caesarea. He goes up to Jerusalem where he is greeted by the church and then returns to Antioch. It had taken three years for this second missionary journey.

PAUL THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

After "some time" Paul leaves on his third journey. Like his second journey he revisits all the churches he had established previously. He arrives at Ephesus and finds some men who needed to be re-baptized having known only of John's baptism. He speaks for three months in the synagogue. Forced to leave he goes to the school of Tyrannus where he remains for two years.

It is said while there that all of Asia heard the gospel. He plans to go into Macedonia and on into Achaia and then on to Jerusalem. However problems develop in Corinth, which he deals with in two letters. Delayed he goes to Macedonia and then on to Corinth where he spends three months of wintertime.

Paul now decides to return to Jerusalem taking a contribution from Gentile churches to be given to the poor Jews in Jerusalem. On his journey he spends time in Philippi and has an emotional meeting with the elders in Ephesus. He then goes on to Jerusalem where the brethren gladly received him.

PAUL'S ARREST AND TRIP TO ROME

While in Jerusalem old grudges against Paul have not subsided. He had been in Jerusalem only seven days when he was mobbed. He is seized and dragged out of the temple but is rescued by a Roman captain. Paul seeks permission to speak to the mob.

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For his own protection he is taken to Caesarea and placed in prison. Felix the Governor of Judea resided there and Paul made his defense before Felix. His imprisonment would last for two years.

Paul appeals his case to Caesar and is sent to Rome. This proves to be a very difficult and dangerous trip. Their first stop was Sidon. Then they sailed "under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary." Here they change ships. They made very slow progress for many days the winds being contrary to them. They arrived off Cnidus. Turning southwest they sailed under the lee of Crete. Having spent much time because of bad weather they sail on.

Paul warns the voyage will end in disaster but the Centurion took the evaluation of the ship's master. Thus they set sail for Phoenix. The ship was soon at the mercy of the wind. For fourteen days they are tossed about in an angry sea. Then about midnight they realized they were near land. They end up being shipwrecked. The natives of the island showed them much kindness.

After three months they leave for Italy. Some brethren from Rome meet Paul outside Rome. Reaching Rome he is permitted to live in his own hired dwelling with soldiers guarding him. He was able to have many people come and visit with him which gave him the opportunity to teach many of the leaders of the church as well as non-Christians. Luke leaves us without telling us the final outcome of Paul. Most scholars believe he was released after the two year confinement.

Barnabus, the Lord's Encourager

Acts 4 refers to Barnabus as, "Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus." The apostles had named him this apparently because he exhibited the qualities of an encourager. We know he was a Levite meaning he was from the tribe of Levi. His home was the Island of Cyprus.

He was a cousin of John Mark. After Paul's conversion he had remained in the Damascus area for three years preaching in the synagogues. When he decided to return to Jerusalem the brethren there knew of his reputation as a persecutor of the church and were reluctant to meet with him.

Barnabus removes the distrust of the disciples at Jerusalem and secures the admission of the former persecutor into their fellowship. It is said that he "brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way."

The question arises was there some connection between Barnabus and Paul since he seems to have no hesitancy in defending the integrity of Paul. Barnabus was from the island of Cyprus. He would have lived within 70 miles of Tarsus the home of Paul. Cyprus had been annexed so as to form one province with Cilicia of which Tarsus was the capital city and Paul's home city.

Some suggests they both may have received their education there and had known each other previous to Paul becoming a Christian. Also it is probable that both had been educated in Jerusalem where they had been friends.

The fact that Barnabus knew about his conversion may indicate he had met Paul in Damascus at some time during the three year period Paul preached in that area. In some way there seems to be some connection since Barnabus has no hesitation about accepting Paul into the fellowship of the Jerusalem Christians.

Great New Testament People

Barnabas is also known for his generosity. We know that he owned property in Jerusalem and sold a field that he had and contributed its price to the support of the poorer members of the church laying it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:36). He is described as "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit" and a man "of faith" (Acts 11:24).

When persecution arose with the stoning of Stephen brethren "traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only." Some of these men were from Cyprus and Cyrene. They came to Antioch, and "spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus."

The Hellenists would be Jews who had lived outside of Palestine and spoke Greek as their native tongue. There would also have been Gentiles living there also and it had already been made clear that God wanted the Gentiles to be saved just as much of the Jews. The result was that a great number of people had become Christians.

The news reached Jerusalem and they decided to send Barnabas to Antioch to give it encouragement and direction. His being filled with the Holy Spirit would enable him to teach them accurately what God expected of them. We are told "who when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord" (Acts 11:22-24).

Acts does not tell us why Barnabas was selected ahead of others to visit Antioch, but we know that he was from Cyprus, and seems to be the proper person to deal with men of Cyprus who had come to Antioch. His gifts of exhortation and consolation well qualified him to render assistance to this new church.

His being a "a good man" would make him gentle and sympathetic in dealing with this new class of converts, namely, not those gathered from proselytes, as the eunuch and Cornelius, but from those with a idolatrous background. He would not have any of the narrow Jewish jealousy or prejudice that many Jews had toward non-Jewish Christians. When he arrived he rejoiced to see what had been taking place. We learn that "many people were added to the Lord."

After his arrival he saw that there was need for additional help. Thus he went to Tarsus (a short distance away) to bring him back with him to Antioch. They worked together for an entire year teaching many people. We learn that it was here in Antioch the "disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11:26).

We remember that Paul had been handpicked by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. No doubt he had been doing this back in Tarsus. Paul must have felt very much at ease teaching Gentiles in Antioch.

Being warned by Agabus, a prophet sent from Jerusalem, "that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar" the brethren in Antioch decided to send relief to their brethren in Judea.

It is said, "Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabus and Saul." Such a gift would break down a lot of prejudice the Jews had toward the Gentiles. This must have been an exciting trip. This is the first time Paul has returned to Jerusalem in several years.

Upon their return to Antioch the Holy Spirit made it known that he wanted Barnabas and Paul to travel preaching the gospel to areas where they had not been before.

Great New Testament People

Thus they proceeded with what has been called, "Paul's First Missionary Journey." Before their departure there was a period of fasting and prayer and then they "laid hands on them, they sent them away."

They took with them a young man named, John Mark, who was from the city of Jerusalem, his mother owning property there and whose house was used as a gathering place of the early Christians. This journey will take them first to the island of Cyprus then to the Pamphylia. When they reached Pamphylia John Mark, "departed from them, returned to Jerusalem." Why he made this decision we do not know.

From there they went into Pisidia and Lycaonia which were Roman Colonies. Then they returned to Antioch. There were at least six churches established on this journey. Up until Acts 13:43 Barnabas is named first. It was "Barnabas and Saul." As they proceed further it becomes "Paul and Barnabas" indicating that Paul took over the leadership and become the chief spokesman on this trip.

In Lystra they called Barnabas Zeus who was the father of the gods and Paul was called Mercury who was the messenger of the gods. The people evidently thought these gods were visiting them. Upon their return to Antioch they appoint elders in each of the churches they had established. Most synagogues had elders a relative easy move to become elders of the church.

Upon their return to Antioch they soon learn certain men came from Jerusalem saying the Gentiles should be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas along with others were dispatched to Jerusalem to settle this issue. After considerable discussion it was understood that Gentiles were not required to be circumcised.

Paul and Barnabas now return to Jerusalem. After "some days" Paul expressed his desire to go back and visit those churches that had been established on their first journey. Barnabas "determined to take with them John called Mark." Paul was opposed to this. "Paul insisted they not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work."

The result was that a sharp contention broke out with them. So much so that Barnabas took Mark and they sailed to Cyprus. The generosity of Barnabas was such that he was willing to give John Mark a second chance. Paul took Silas and they departed and went through Syria and Cilicia, "Strengthening the churches."

At this point Barnabas drops out of view and we hear no longer from him. On the other hand John Mark is mentioned later on and Paul calls for him to come and aid him in his work which shows Paul's confidence in Mark had been restored. Both Calvin and Luther regard 2 Corinthians 8:18-19 as referring to Barnabas as "the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the church" indicating there was there was subsequent joint work between Paul and Barnabas.

The only negative event involving Barnabas is referred to in Galatians 2:11-13. He allows himself to be carried away by Judizers and Peter's refusal to eat with the Gentiles. But as with all great characters none of them were perfect but had weak moment. Barnabas deserves to be listed as one of the great characters of the Bible.

Paul's Right Hand Men (Timothy)

We consider Paul as the greatest Christian evangelist that has ever lived.

Great New Testament People

However, Paul would not have been near as successful as he was had it not been for many of the men that assisted him in his great work. All of these were from different backgrounds. Each has his own individual personality but when blended with the power of the gospel they themselves could be classified as great characters of the Bible.

If Paul ever had a favorite person it would have been Timothy. To the Corinthians he wrote, "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:17). In 1 Timothy 1:2 he addresses him as "My true son in the faith." Then in 2 Timothy 1:2, "To Timothy, my beloved son."

It is clear that throughout the ministry of Paul he and Timothy maintained a father – son relationship. Timothy was probably one of Paul's own converts, which occurred on Paul's first missionary journey when he came to Lystra where Timothy lived. His mother was Eunice, a Jewess, who herself had been converted and was "a believer" meaning a Christian.

In Acts 16:1 Luke refers to her as "a Jewess who believed." Timothy also had a grandmother named Lois who seems to be a Christian also. Paul attributes Timothy's faith to the influence of his mother and grandmother. His father was a Greek but not a believer.

Timothy joined Paul on his second journey. Paul seeing his unfeigned faith, and that from a child he had known the Scriptures of the Old Testament (2 Timothy 3:15) and seeing also his Christian character, Paul wanted him to join him on this second journey. Because he had never been circumcised Paul took him and had this done. The reason why this had not already happened may be attributed to his father who was a Greek and not a believer in Jewish tradition.

This step was important in that Paul would be working among many Jews and Timothy being half Jew may have been rejected for not being circumcised. At some point Timothy was given the blessings of the elders through a prophecy uttered at some time.

This would encourage him to preach the gospel. We must remember that at this point the New Testament had not yet been written therefore various gifts were necessary for men like Timothy to preach the truth.

Paul would have bestowed any gifts of the Holy Spirit which were necessary. From this point on Timothy will become almost a constant companion of Paul assisting him in his work of evangelizing the Gentiles and establishing churches. Much information about Timothy can be learned from reading 1 & 2 Timothy.

A second person of great importance to Paul was Luke whom Paul calls, "the beloved physician." He is mentioned three times in Paul's epistles. In his gospel and the book of Acts which he authored he never mentions himself by name. His origin and home is unknown but it is clear he joins Paul on his second missionary journey at Troas.

Luke is a very valuable addition to this mission team of Paul. A noticeable mark of his accompanying Paul are the "we" passages which lets us know he was with Paul each time he uses "we." It seems clear that Luke was never an eyewitness to the life and preaching of Jesus.

He received information for his gospel from reliable sources however. Being with Paul he would have had reliable information for what he wrote in Acts.

Great New Testament People

He like Timothy became an almost constant companion of Paul from Troas till the end of the two years Paul spent in prison in Rome. He seems to be the sole companion with Paul for a while during Paul's second imprisonment. Considering Paul's physical abuse, sickness, his "thorn in the flesh," we wonder if Dr. Luke may have extended the life of Paul by the personal medical attention he could have given to Paul.

A third important worker with Paul was Silas. Since Paul had rejected Mark as a traveling companion Silas is the one selected to accompany him on his second missionary journey. He was probably a Roman citizen as was Paul. Silas was present at the meeting in Jerusalem over circumcision and was one of those selected to convey the conclusions of that meeting to the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia.

Silas accompanies Paul as he revisits churches in Syria, Cilicia, Galatia, Phrygia and Mysia where they delivered the decree written in Jerusalem and at the same time strengthening the churches. Upon the call of for help in Macedonia they set sail for Greece. At Philippi, Lydia, a seller of purple was converted with her household. They are invited to stay with her while in Philippi.

We probably remember Silas the best because he and Paul ended up in jail in Philippi after being scourged. That night they prayed and sang hymns. What a strange sound this must have been to the jailer and the prisoners. An earthquake in the middle of the night secured their miraculous release.

The final result of was that the jailer and his family were converted. When the magistrates learn that they had punished two Roman citizens they were afraid and asked them to depart from the city. After a short visit with Lydia they departed for Thessalonica.

Many were converted there but Paul is compelled to escape by night to Berea because of a mob. Paul was forced to move on to Athens leaving Silas and Timothy behind. They finally catch up with Paul in Corinth. No further mention is made of Silas in this second missionary journey.

A fourth person that was a great help to Paul was Titus. Interestingly he is not mentioned in Acts. We learn of him from other epistles Paul wrote. Paul refers to him as "my true son in our common faith" and "Titus my brother." He was with those who went up to Jerusalem to discuss circumcision as a requirement to becoming a Christian. Being a Gentile no one argued he should be circumcised.

We find him at Ephesus (Acts 19) where he was sent to Corinth to commence a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem and also to determine the effect Paul first epistle had on the Corinthians. He finally meets up with Paul in Macedonia. Titus brought a favorable report. Paul instructs him to proceed further in getting the contribution for Jerusalem ready.

He also becomes the bearer of the second letter to the Corinthians. Later on after the first imprisonment of Paul he writes to him with a charge, "for this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you" (Titus 1:5).

He also reminds Titus that he is to stop the mouth of false teachers, "whose mouth must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain." (Titus 1:5, 11). After this we lose sight of Titus.

Great New Testament People

Finally consideration should be given to Mark. Yes, he is the one who turned back on the first missionary journey. However, several years later he is with Paul in Rome. The breach had been healed. He is now one of the faithful few among the Jewish Christians who stand by Paul. Also remember Mark wrote one of the gospels.

In his gospel 14:51-52 he mentions "a certain young man followed Him, having a linen cloth thrown around his naked body. And the young men laid hold of him, and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked." Many think this was Mark himself. No doubt Mark had changed from what he had been when with Paul and Barnabas on that first journey. He became very valuable to Paul in the end.

Some think 2 Corinthians 8:18 refers to Mark. "And we have sent with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the church." Mark deserves to be called one of the great characters of the Bible. His greatest contribution to the cause of Christ was his Gospel to which he was probably an eyewitness of many events in the life of Jesus.