

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 47: The Apostle Paul & His Times

The Apostle Paul and His Times: A Gallery of Paul's Inner Circle

What happened to the people who worked most closely with him?

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Priscilla and Aquila (died c. 80?) *Tri-city tentmakers*

What the Roman emperor Claudius meant for evil turned out for good for Priscilla and Aquila. They were living in Rome in 49 when Claudius expelled all the Jews because of a riot over a certain "Chrestus," probably an allusion to Jewish arguments over Christ. Jewish Christians like Priscilla and Aquila were also forced to leave.

So the couple moved to Corinth, where they set up their tentmaking business. When Paul arrived, Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to him and invited him to work with them. The trio later worked and ministered together in Ephesus, which may be where Priscilla and Aquila "risked their necks" for Paul, possibly when he "fought with beasts at Ephesus." Priscilla is sometimes pictured with two lions who refuse to attack her, lending credence to this tradition.

When Claudius died in 55, Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome and again hosted a church in their home, to whom Paul sent greetings in his letter to the Romans. A tradition of the sixth century claims that the Roman church "Prisca" on the Aventine Hill stands over their original house-church.

Silas (died c. 75?) *Co-author of three New Testament books?*

Silas is first mentioned at the Council of Jerusalem (49). As "one of the leading men among the brethren," he was chosen as diplomatic envoy to the Antioch church to announce the council's decisions (specifically, the requirements for non-Jews to join The Way).

For some reason, he remained in Antioch, so that when Paul was looking for replacements for Barnabas and Mark, who had broken with him, Silas was available. On their three-year journey, he preached, was stoned, and was jailed with Paul. They made their way, with Timothy and Luke, through Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. Silas found his niche in Corinth and remained there, preaching and teaching, after Paul departed for Ephesus. He may have helped compose Paul's letters to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 2:1).

Also called Silvanus, Silas later joined Peter in Rome and may have served as Peter's secretary and co-authored 1 Peter (1 Peter 5:12). Legend has him returning to Corinth, where he became the city's first bishop. He reportedly died in northern Greece.

Luke (died c. 90?) *Paul's biographer*

"Only Luke is with me." So wrote Paul late in life from a Roman prison, just one evidence of their close

relationship.

Early tradition suggests that Luke was born a Greek in Antioch and became a physician before being converted and joining Paul, Silas, and Timothy in Troas on Paul's second missionary journey (early 50s). Luke was later shipwrecked with Paul on Malta and jailed with Paul in Rome.

He went to Greece around the time of Paul's death and from there wrote his two-volume history of Jesus and the early church. The second volume, *The Acts of the Apostles*, is mostly about Paul's missionary journeys, and in four passages, Luke includes himself in the story, using the pronoun "we" to narrate various events.

One second-century prologue to the Gospel of Luke claims:

"Having neither wife nor child, [Luke] served the Lord without distraction. He fell asleep in Boeotia, at the age of 84, full of the Holy Spirit."

Constantine the Great transported Luke's remains to Constantinople in 356, where they are said to be preserved in the Church of the Apostles.

Timothy
(died 97)
Trusted confidant

Despite his youth, Timothy quickly gained Paul's confidence and served as his trusted companion and emissary for 17 years.

Timothy was born in Lystra in Asia Minor to a Greek father and a Jewish mother, Eunice. He, his mother, and grandmother probably became Christians when Paul and Barnabas preached in Lystra during their first missionary journey. When Paul returned a year or so later, he invited Timothy to join him and Silas.

Somehow, he managed to stay out of harm's way—he was not jailed with Paul and Silas in Philippi, and he avoided the riot in Thessalonica. But when Paul needed an envoy to return to Thessalonica to encourage the new believers there, he sent young Timothy. Later, Paul sent Timothy as emissary to Corinth, where he preached for some time.

Paul called Timothy his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord." When Paul was imprisoned in Rome, it's Timothy he asked to "come before winter" to comfort him.

Eusebius, the fourth century historian, says that after Paul's death, Timothy became the first bishop of Ephesus, probably at around age 40. He outlived Paul by 30 years, and according to one tradition, was present at the death of the Virgin Mary, whose tomb is said to be near Ephesus.

This tradition also says that because he protested festivities honoring Artemis, he was stoned to death in 97. His relics were brought to Constantinople in 356.

Barnabas
(died 61)
Advocate for the despised

"Barnabas" was actually his nickname, given him by the apostles. It meant "Son of Encouragement," and it was most appropriate.

He was actually born Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus. He was probably one of many Jews who migrated back to Jerusalem, where he became one of the earliest converts to Christianity. He sold a field shortly afterwards and gave the money to the Jerusalem church.

Unlike most Christians, Barnabas believed Paul's conversion story, and he smoothed the way for the former persecutor to be accepted by the Jerusalem church.

Barnabas then went to pastor the growing church in Antioch, and Paul returned to Tarsus. Barnabas later invited Paul to come and co-pastor the Antioch church.

In 48, Barnabas set off with his cousin Mark and Paul to evangelize cities in Asia Minor. Though Mark deserted the party early on, Barnabas and Paul preached, performed miracles, and endured persecution together.

One early tradition, recorded by Clement of Alexandria, says Barnabas worked briefly with Jesus, being one of the 70 sent out to evangelize Palestine. Another tradition says he preached in Alexandria and Rome after leaving Paul, founded the church on Cyprus, and was finally stoned and then burned to death in about 61 in Syria. Though three early church works claim his name—The *Epistle of Barnabas*, the *Gospel of Barnabas*, and the *Acts of Barnabas*—none are considered to be written by him.

John Mark
(died c. 80)
First Gospel writer

Was Mark one of the first people in history to be raised in a Christian home? His mother's home in Jerusalem, where Mark was likely born and raised, was a gathering place for early Christians; it was the house to which Peter fled after he miraculously escaped from prison. A Byzantine tradition says the house was also used for the Last Supper, and the Church of John Mark in Jerusalem is said to mark the site.

Sometime after Pentecost, Mark moved to Antioch, and when the church there commissioned Paul and Barnabas to carry the gospel to Asia Minor, Mark was invited to assist them. For some reason, at Perga, Mark left the mission and returned to Jerusalem—a move that eroded Paul's confidence in Mark.

When plans were laid for the next missionary journey, Paul argued vehemently with Barnabas against taking Mark again. The disagreement was so sharp, the group split up, and Mark went with Barnabas to Cyprus.

Later, Mark and Paul must have resolved their rift, for Paul calls Mark his "fellow-worker" and tells the Colossians: "If [Mark] comes to you, welcome him."

Mark eventually made his way to Rome, where he became a companion to Peter—indeed, Peter calls him "my son Mark." Early Christian writers Papias and Irenaeus say Mark "handed down to us in writing the things that Peter had proclaimed" about Jesus. This Gospel of Mark was the first published account of the life of Jesus.

Church historian Eusebius says Mark eventually went to Alexandria to become its first bishop. Tradition claims Mark was martyred there; in the ninth century, his relics were carried off as war booty to Venice, where they are said to rest in the Cathedral of St. Mark.

Titus
(died 96)

Paul's troubleshooter

Titus probably gets the Pauline service award with 20 years as Paul's co-worker.

Titus was born a Gentile, and when he became a Christian he did not get circumcised. When Titus accompanied Paul on a visit to Jerusalem, some Jewish Christians insisted Paul's companion be circumcised according to Jewish law. As Paul put it, he "did not yield submission even for a moment," and Titus remained uncircumcised. Titus thus served as a powerful symbol of justification by grace, not by law.

Titus served with Paul during his extended stay in Ephesus as a "partner and fellow-worker," and from there Titus tackled his toughest assignment: to combat grave immorality in the Corinthian church and mediate their reconciliation with Paul.

Titus put his pastoral skills to work and reported back to a nervously-waiting Paul that Paul's severe third Corinthian letter (lost or possibly contained in 2 Corinthians 10–13) had led to their repentance.

Titus was later appointed the first bishop of the troubled church at Crete, where Paul wrote him about the qualities of a good bishop. Eusebius reports that Titus died there in 96 and was buried in the ancient capital, Gortyna. His head was supposedly removed in 823 by Saracens and later enshrined at St. Mark's Cathedral, Venice.

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