

Meet Paul – a man with a mission

Who is Paul?

Before you start exploring the weekly readings from Paul's letters, introduce the children and young people to Paul. We don't know a lot about him, but we know enough to get a sense of this very committed and dedicated follower of Jesus.

Below you will find some information about Paul, based on what we learn from his own writings, and what Luke wrote in Acts, about 15–20 years after Paul died. You could select from this information to create a picture of Paul in your own words for younger children. You can download the text [WEB](#) to hand it out to older children and young people.

There is also a short animated presentation downloadable from the website, suitable for older children and young people.

St Paul (his Jewish name was Saul) was the first person to write anything down about Jesus. His letters were written up to 20 years before the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were produced.



Early life

Saul was born around AD 10, into a Jewish family in the city of Tarsus (now in Turkey), which was part of the Roman Empire and ruled from Rome, hundreds of miles away. Saul was brought up speaking Greek and although he learned other languages during his life, he wrote in Greek.

Education



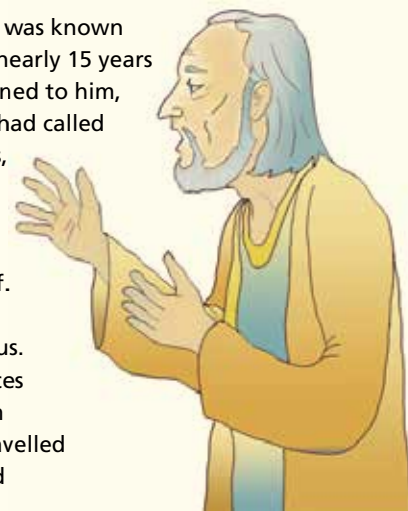
As a young man, Saul was sent to Jerusalem to study with a well-known and respected Jewish teacher called Gamaliel. Gamaliel was tolerant of others, and expressed moderate opinions, but Saul didn't always agree with his teacher! He was not tolerant of others and got particularly angry with the new followers of Jesus. Saul was a fanatic and wanted to stop these Christians – he even wanted to kill them. He held people's coats as they stoned to death a young Christian called Stephen.

An encounter with Jesus

But then something extraordinary happened to Saul. Something that changed his life for ever. He was on his way to Damascus, determined to murder more Christians, when he had an amazing revelation from God. We don't know exactly what took place. Saul himself says that he saw Jesus. In the book of Acts, Luke says that Saul heard the voice of Jesus, saying, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' Whatever happened, it turned Saul's life upside down. Everything he felt certain about didn't make sense any more. He had to work out what it meant, and what he was supposed to do now.

Missionary consequences

Saul, who after this 'conversion' was known by his Roman name Paul, spent nearly 15 years thinking about what had happened to him, and he finally understood. God had called him to teach people about Jesus, so he spent the rest of his life doing just that. He learned to be a tentmaker so he could earn money and support himself. He would talk to people as he worked and tell them about Jesus. Paul lived in many different places and walked huge distances from place to place. Sometimes he travelled by boat and he was shipwrecked more than once.



Letters to church communities

Small groups of people who believed in Jesus began to meet and worship in each other's houses. These groups of people, in cities like Corinth and Ephesus, were the very first 'churches'. Buildings called churches came much later. When Paul moved on to a new place, he wrote letters back to these Christian communities, encouraging them to live in the ways Jesus had taught. Sometimes Paul gave them advice and guidance. Sometimes he told them off for things he'd heard they'd been doing. But he always told them that God loved them and that they were saved through Jesus' death and resurrection. The 13 surviving letters that St Paul wrote can be found in the New Testament section of the Bible, after the Gospels and the Book of Acts.