

Summary of Session I: Overview of the Life of Paul

The World of Paul

I. Context of Paul's world

- A) Three major aspects: Jewish religion & culture (Judaism), Roman Empire, & the Hellenistic world
 - 1) Jewish religion & culture (Judaism)
 - (a) Paul: born, raised, died a Jew, albeit one who accepted Jesus as the Messiah
 - (b) Lived outside Palestine, the "diaspora" (dispersion)
 - (c) Judaism was not a monolithic religion
 - (d) Complex reality among Jews
 - (e) Place of the Pharisees (of which Paul was one)
 - (f) Sadducees, one of the Jewish groups
 - Aristocratic & priestly in background
 - Compromised with Romans
 - (g) Essenes: separatists who went into the desert
 - 2) Roman Empire
 - (a) Ruled entire Middle East
 - (b) Relatively liberal view of self-governing
 - (c) Pax Romana ("Roman peace")
 - (d) Roads and travel
 - (e) Romans were pagans in eyes of Jews
 - (f) Romans were rather accepting of other religions
 - 3) Hellenism (Greek influence)
 - (a) Back to 4th century B.C.E.
 - (b) The gymnasium was scandalous to the Jews
 - (c) Many philosophies
 - (d) Mystery religions
 - (e) Social groups of the day
 - 4) Comparable world of today
 - (a) Gap between rich and poor
 - (b) Multi-cultural, multi-lingual world

The Life of Paul

I. Basic outline

- A) Parameters of his life
- B) No specific biographical information
 - 1) Hidden early life
 - 2) Paul surmised his birth date
 - 3) No encounter between the historical Jesus and Paul
 - 4) Suggested birth date of Paul between 5 & 10 C.E.
- C) Education of Paul
 - 1) Childhood in Tarsus
 - 2) To Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel
 - 3) Years of education: 10-33 C.E.
- D) Conversion: 33-35 C.E.
- E) Mysterious period: Arabia
 - 1) After conversion, 36-38 C.E.

- 2) Nabatia: southeast of Damascus
 - (a) As Christian, danger in Damascus
 - (b) Perhaps received some Christian education

II. Short visit to Jerusalem

- A) Importance of communicating
- B) Met with Peter and James
- C) Recognizes his call to the Gentiles

III. Intense missionary activity

- A) Silicia, Galatia, Antioch
- B) 45-46 C.E. to Cyprus, led by Barnabas
- C) 46-49 C.E. Council of Jerusalem
 - 1) Not formal "council" as in later tradition
 - 2) Gathering of leaders of the Church
 - 3) Lacks certain clarity in some issues
 - 4) Primary issues
 - (a) Acceptance of Gentiles
 - (b) Importance of circumcision
 - (c) Accepted Paul's mission to Gentiles
- D) 49-60 C.E.: Paul's missionary journeys are sometimes estimated to have been some 10,000 miles (Acts 16-20)
 - 1) Consider mode of travel
 - 2) From Asia Minor to European continent
 - 3) Last visit to Jerusalem
 - (a) Imprisonment
 - (b) Appeal to the emperor
 - 4) To Rome & prison
 - (a) Death not recorded in the Bible
 - (b) Ancient tradition: death in 60's by beheading under Emperor Nero

IV. Paul's Remarkable life

- A) Philippians 3 & Romans 11: Paul's self identification as a Jew from his birth
- B) Catalogue of narrow escapes: 2 Corinthians 11 & Acts 9: 23-25
- C) Acts – Saul also known as Paul: not a name change
- D) Tentmaker
- E) Inspirational life story: Acts and Letters of Paul