



## Question: "What happened on Paul's first missionary journey?"

**Answer:** The apostle Paul went on three pioneering missionary journeys, followed by a trip to Rome. His first missionary journey, most likely in the years AD 47 through 48, started in Syria and took him to Cyprus and Asia Minor.

After Paul witnessed the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), was confronted and converted by Jesus (Acts 9), and visited Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–30), the church leadership tucked him safely away in his home town of Tarsus on the southeastern coast of modern Turkey. Meanwhile, the persecution in Jerusalem grew, and believers fled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syrian Antioch, which wasn't too far from Tarsus (Acts 11:19–30). The dispersed Christians brought the gospel with them, and when the leaders in Jerusalem learned how quickly the church was growing, they sent Barnabas to Antioch to verify what was happening.

Barnabas confirmed that the gospel was spreading and that the church in Syrian Antioch was indeed a work of God (Acts 11:23). Barnabas then went to Tarsus to collect Paul, whom he had earlier mentored in Jerusalem. Paul returned to Antioch with Barnabas to provide leadership for the fledgling church. After about a year, the prophet Agabus foretold a great famine. The believers in Antioch raised support for the church in Judea and sent it to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:19–30). After delivering the gift, Barnabas and Paul traveled back to Antioch with John Mark, Barnabas's cousin (verse 25). While the church in Antioch was worshiping and fasting, the Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to a special work in spreading the gospel (Acts 13:2). After more fasting and prayer, the church laid their hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them off with John Mark (verse 3). Thus began the first missionary journey, led by the Holy Spirit (verse 4).

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark walked to Seleucia on the coast, then sailed southwest to Salamis on the island of Cyprus, where Barnabas was from. They preached in the synagogue there and traveled the whole island, apparently without seeing much fruit, until they arrived at the city of Paphos in the southwest. The island's Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus, summoned the missionaries to listen to their message. Unfortunately, the proconsul's associate, Bar-Jesus (aka Elymas), was a magician and Jewish false prophet who contradicted the gospel message and tried to keep Sergius Paulus from converting. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Paul made Bar-Jesus go blind, and Sergius Paulus believed in Christ (Acts 13:4–12).

Paul, Barnabas, and John-Mark sailed from Paphos to Perga in the region of Pamphylia in south-central Asia Minor. For reasons the Bible does not detail, John Mark left the other two missionaries and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). It doesn't seem Paul and Barnabas spent much time in Perga but headed north to Pisidian Antioch and preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In his sermon, Paul, a credentialed Pharisee, gave a synopsis of the Israelites' exile in Egypt, the judges, Kings Saul and David, and John the Baptist. He showed the Jews in Antioch how only Jesus, who died and rose again, fulfilled the Jewish prophecies. Many believed, and they asked Paul and Barnabas to return the next Sabbath. The next week, almost the entire city showed up, but the Jewish leadership was jealous of the crowds and tried to silence their message with abusive language. Paul and Barnabas pointed out that the Jews had had their chance and had rejected Jesus, so Jesus' message was going to be brought to the Gentiles. The gospel spread through the whole region, but, eventually, despite the new converts' enthusiasm, the Jews in Pisidian Antioch stirred up persecution of the missionaries, and Paul and Barnabas traveled east to Iconium in Galatia (Acts 13:14–52).

Paul and Barnabas stayed quite a while in the city of Iconium, preaching boldly and performing

miracles. Many Jews and Greeks believed, but many didn't. The missionaries caught word that the unbelieving Jews, Gentiles, and city leadership were planning on stoning them, so they fled to the nearby cities of Lystra and Derbe in Lycia (Acts 14:1–7).

While Paul was preaching at the gates of Lystra, he noticed a lame man listening intently. He healed the man, and the crowd declared that Barnabas must be Zeus and Paul Hermes, as Hermes was the messenger and chief spokesman of the gods. The priests of the temple of Zeus joined the crowds and attempted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas—sacrifices that were barely prevented by Paul and Barnabas's insistence that they were just men. As a counterpoint, the unbelieving Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived at Lystra and stirred up the crowds against the gospel. The resulting mob stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city. When the disciples gathered around his lifeless body, Paul stood up, completely well, and went back into the city (Acts 14:8–20).

The next day, Paul and Barnabas went east to Derbe, situated across the mountain range from Tarsus, and made many disciples. It was in the region of Lystra and Derbe that young Timothy heard the gospel from Paul and was saved. From Derbe, Paul and Barnabas backtracked through Asia Minor, visiting Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch and strengthening the young churches and appointing elders (Acts 14:21–23).

Paul and Barnabas returned to the seaport city of Perga to preach, and then they hopped over to Attalia, a few miles west, and preached there, as well (Acts 14:24–26). They then sailed back to Syrian Antioch. “On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (verse 27).

On his second missionary journey, Paul travelled through Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch again on his way to Troas. He visited the cities again on his third missionary journey on his way to Ephesus. Sometime between Paul's first and second missionary journeys (and after the Jerusalem Council), Paul wrote the epistle of Galatians to these cities of southern Galatia.

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