

Appendix D: Paul or James' Church: Who Was The Most Successful Evangelist?

Introduction Was Paul a highly successful evangelist? If you look at maps of his travels which are called 'Missionary Journeys,' you would assume this to be the case. However, Luke in Acts hardly mentions any significant success in evangelism by Paul. In fairness to Paul, Luke's focus is on the *problems* Paul encountered repeatedly wherever he went. So Paul's success might be understated somewhat. Yet, what is indisputable is that in Acts, relatively few people are described as having been converted by Paul.

By contrast, Acts portrays the church under James as leading "many tens of thousands" to Christ before Paul's conversion. This was thanks in no small part to Peter, of course.

Thus, who was the most successful evangelist in the early period of Christianity? If it is James and Peter prior to Paul's emergence, why do you think a modern myth was created making it appear Paul was the most successful evangelist? Could doctrinal bias have something to do with taking the lustre away from James and Peter and giving it to Paul?

Let's examine Luke's accounts in Acts in detail to assess Paul's success in evangelism.

Paul's First Recorded Conversion Paul's first post-conversion appearance is in Acts 13:9 at Salamis. He casts out a demon. Luke then records Paul's message at a synagogue. Paul leaves without any mention of success. (Acts 13:42.)

Then Paul in Acts 14:9-11 heals a lame man. The audience thinks Paul is a god. (Acts 14:11-12.) Paul tries to restrain them by rebuking them. (Acts 14:15.) No converts are noted thus far.

Paul is then dragged out to be stoned by Jews. (Acts 14:19.) Paul passes to Derbe where it cryptically says "he made many disciples." (Acts 14:21.) ***These are the very first converts Luke records made by Paul!*** These are the only converts mentioned prior to the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15. This is important because according to Paul's account, this is *fourteen years after Paul's own conversion!* (Gal. 2:1.)

- Lydia & The Jailer and His Family** Paul's next success is with Lydia of Thyatira at Philippi. (Acts 16:14.) This leads to Paul's imprisonment there. Then the earthquake is mentioned which leads to the conversion of the jailer and his household. (Acts 16:33.)
- So far Paul's converts are the unnumbered 'many' at Derbe and Lydia along with the jailer and his family at Philippi. If Luke is trying to emphasize Paul's success at evangelism after about 17 years of service, the numbers are meager.
- Thessalonica** Next Paul goes to a synagogue in Thessalonica and preaches on three Sabbaths. "Some of them believed," mostly God-fearing Gentiles and some women. (Acts 17:4.)
- Athens** Friends of Paul then whisk him away from angry Jews by taking him to Athens. (Acts 17:15.) Paul there preaches at the Areopagus. The only response was that some mocked him, while others said: "We will hear you again concerning this." Paul leaves with no record of success. (Acts 17:32.)
- Corinth** Next, in Corinth, things improve. It says Paul was preaching and "persuading Jews and Greeks." (Acts 18:4.) But the text then says the Jews rejected him. As a result, Paul vowed from that day forth to go only to Gentiles. (Acts 18:6.) Then presumably by Paul's preaching, Crispus, the synagogue leader at Corinth and "many Corinthians" believed. (Acts 18:8.) Then Paul settles there for a year-and-a-half. No mention is made of how many more come to the Lord.
- Ephesus** Then Paul goes to Ephesus. (Acts 18:21.) There Paul baptizes a group of twelve men who already were semi-converts, but they only had the baptism of John. (Acts 19:1-7.) Then Paul spoke three months at the local Ephesus' synagogue, "reasoning and *persuading concerning the kingdom of God.*" (Acts 19:8.) Some presumably were persuaded to faith. Some, however, were "hardened" and rejected the Way (as taught by Paul). Paul then took his disciples from that synagogue and met in a schoolhouse. (Acts 19:9.) This went on for two years. No mention is made of how many were converted. Yet, possibly by Paul's influence, a "considerable number" of magic-arts practioners later converted. (Acts 19:19.)
- Various events follow at Ephesus. Paul's next evangelistic speech is at Acts 21:40. But before he finished, the crowd erupted against

him. (Acts 22:22.) No converts are noted. This event led to a court proceeding by the Roman authorities.

Felix, Festus and Agrippa

In this proceeding, Felix for two years kept asking Paul to come out from his cell at Caesarea to talk, in hopes Paul would pay a bribe. (Acts 24:22-28.) Felix never is mentioned as being converted.

Then Festus took over the case. He asks Paul if he wants him to decide the case. Paul responds that he wants Caesar to make the decision, and he appeals. (Acts 25:11.)

King Agrippa then came to Caesarea and for some reason wanted to hear what Paul had to say. (Acts 25:13,22.) During the talk of Paul, Agrippa jokes that Paul is trying to convert him, but he doesn't convert. (Acts 26:28.)

En route to Rome for a hearing, Paul is shipwrecked on Malta. (Acts 28:1.) No mention is made of any crewmember accepting Christ.

On the island, Paul is then bitten by a viper but does not die, which makes the Maltese think he is a god. (Acts 28:6.) Paul heals the father of Publius. (Acts 28:8.) No mention is made of the conversion of anyone at Malta. Instead, Luke mentions the Maltese were very grateful for healings by Paul. They give gifts of food to the soldiers and Paul for their trip to Rome. (Acts 28:10.)

Then in Rome, Paul found Christians already there, greeting them. (Acts 28:15.) At Paul's lodging, "some indeed were being persuaded," and some not. (Acts 28:24.) This concludes the accounts of Paul's missionary journeys in Acts.

Paul's own letters do not note any successful conversions.

Paul's Evangelism is Rather Ineffective

Hence the converts of Paul that Luke mentioned are few and far between. This does not mean it is impossible there were more. In fairness to Paul, Luke's focus in Acts is not on Paul's success in evangelism. Yet, one has to do a lot of presupposing to think Paul was very successful. To recap, his converts mentioned in Acts are:

- 1 Derbe: "he made many disciples." (Acts 14:21.)
- 2 Philippi: Lydia and the Jailer and his family. (Acts 16:14, 33.)

- 3 Thessalonica : “Some of them believed.” (Acts 17:4.)
- 4 Athens: none recorded.
- 5 Corinth: “many Corinthians” believed. (Acts 18:8.)
- 6 Ephesus: Paul was “*persuading [some] concerning the kingdom of God.*” (Acts 19:8.)
- 7 Caesarea none.
- 8 Rome: “some” were persuaded. (Acts 28:24.)

The Numbers Converted?

The number of people Paul led to Christ, based on Luke’s account, would approximate 41 people, if we used fair assumptions. The description ‘many’ would appear to signify a handful. If the numbers were greater than ten people each time ‘many’ were used, Luke surely would note them so as to make Paul look good. This can be deduced also from the one time Luke gives a number. Luke says *twelve* quasi-Christians who had the baptism of John were rebaptized into Christ. Thus, if Luke elsewhere doesn’t use a number and instead uses the word *many*, the reasonable inference is that it is less than twelve. Luke’s mention of the *twelve* quasi-Christians needing rebaptism means that number is *more significant* than the numbers which ‘many’ represented. This is why Luke mentions *twelve*—representing a higher number than when *many* is used.

Accordingly, if you reasonably assume ‘many’ means ten persons each time, and ‘some’ means five persons each time Luke uses it, and you assume the jailer’s family were five people, then Luke records a total of 41 people led to Jesus by Paul. Not an amazing number, but still a worthy accomplishment that the angels rejoice over.

The Truly Greatest Evangelist

Compare this to James who tells Paul that “many” *myriades*, *i.e.*, “tens of thousands”¹ of Jews have come to Christ at Jerusalem alone where James is bishop. (Acts 21:20.) James must mean a minimum of 30,000 (“many *myriades*”) at Jerusalem had come to Christ. *Two* myriades would not be *many*. Thus, the number must at minimum be 30,000. It could be much greater.

1. Inexplicably, most translations render this “thousands.” The Greek word has a very specific meaning: a *myriad* means 10,000. It comes from *myrios* that means “numberless, countless, 10,000” as an adjective. As a noun, it means specifically *ten thousand*. See “Myriad,” <http://dictionary.reference.com/wordoftheday/archive/2004/09/03.html>

This is a realistic number too. Peter's very first sermon led 3,000 to Christ at Jerusalem. (Acts 2:41.) Thus, a 30,000 figure fourteen years later makes sense. While there are no end of claims that Paul was the "most successful evangelist," the evidence is to the contrary. ***James and James' church alone has the right to such a title.***

Prior to Paul's conversion, this church under James was expansive, and not limited to Jerusalem. When Paul became a Christian, there was already a church far from Jerusalem at Damascus in Syria, where Paul first joined the church. (Acts 22:12.) Paul later joins a Church at Antioch. This church was founded by Peter. When Paul goes to Rome, there are already Christians there even though Paul never before set foot in Rome. (Acts 28:15.) This church too was founded by Peter. These are the prior fruits of James' church² without any assistance from Paul.

Thus, it is pure myth that Paul was *highly* successful in evangelism. It is not based on any provable facts from the Book of Acts. His success was certainly nothing compared to that of James and the church James ran at Jerusalem.

Why The Exaggeration of Paul?

We often hear "Paul was the world's most successful evangelist in the early Church." (*St. Paul's Lutheran Church*.)³ But we saw above that Paul had scant success and Luke records Paul perhaps led 41 people to Christ. James and James' church led "many tens of thousands" to Christ in Jerusalem alone, and had spread the church far and wide long before Paul appeared on the scene.

What do you think explains the exaggeration of Paul's success and the complete forgetting of the success of James and his church (including Peter) *before Paul appeared on the scene*? Do you think it has to do with one's preference for Paul's doctrine over James' teachings? Do you think it also might be intended to downplay Peter as part of Catholic-bashing? (While I do not agree with many teachings and practices of Roman Catholicism, this does not permit me to denigrate the historical role of Peter.)

2. Peter was the apostolic member of James' church who founded the church at both Rome and Antioch. (Eusebius, *The Chronicle* (303 A.D.)

3. "Evangelism," *St. Paul Lutheran Church* reprinted online at <http://www.stpaul-srq.org/Evangelism%20ministry.htm>

Next we will prove that the church universally was led between 125 A.D. and 325 A.D. by persons who shared James' view of Jesus. They rejected all of the uniquely Pauline doctrines that we hear about today. This proves once more who was the leader of the most successful evangelist movement of its time: James and those who shared his doctrines.

Proof
James Not
Paul Was
The Most
Effective
Evangelist

East and West, the church leaders from 125 A.D. to 325 A.D.—known as the *Anti-Nicene period*⁴—all echo the teachings of James and reject those of Paul. This proves that the churches were established by the evangelism that James (along with Peter) ushered in at Jerusalem rather than what Paul later tried to inject.

This disproves the other myth popular today that Paul was the true founder of Christianity. Paulinists delight in this designation which scholars opposed to Christianity try to affix to Christianity. These opposing scholars' purpose is to marginalize Jesus. They know if Christianity *has always been Paulinism*, and not following Jesus, then the question arises: 'How can anyone say Jesus was an *important historical figure*?' Instead, the true founder of the Church after Jesus was his brother—James along with Peter as a key evangelist. They were wedded to Jesus' doctrine tightly. For Pauline Christians to accept the thesis that 'Paul was the true founder of Christianity' thesis is simply intellectually conniving to accept a false myth that bolsters Paulinism at the expense of Christ's true church.

Let's prove this by reviewing the doctrines in that *Anti-Nicene period*. We turn now to the leading church figures of that period: Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Archelaus, and Papias. They all send one clear universal message: they accept all of Jesus' teachings (which coincide with James' doctrines) and reject all of those doctrines that are uniquely Pauline. They reject loud and clear that man has no free-will. They skewer the doctrines of total depravity, eternal security, predestination, and most important of all, salvation by faith without works.

4. The Anti-Nicene period (125 A.D. to 325 A.D.) represents the post-apostolic period when the bishop of Rome, while influential, still was just one of many bishops. Other than James as the superior bishop over those of other churches, once he died there was no recognized shift of the superior bishop to the one at Rome *in that Anti-Nicene period*. See index entry on 'Roman Catholicism: origins.'

Bercot, a Protestant attorney like myself, has done a comprehensive survey of the doctrines of the early Church, in his *Will The Real Heretics Please Stand Up* (1999). It is backed up by an exhaustive 705 page *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (1998). He admits he discovered that the early church, in “contradiction to many of my own theological views,” taught doctrines that *universally* (*i.e.*, with no dissent) rejected doctrines which we all recognize as part of Pauline teaching. Bercot, for example, explains:

**Paul’s
Doctrine of
Total
Depravity** “[T]he early church never taught that humans are incapable of doing or overcoming sin in their lives. They believed that we *do* have the ability to serve and obey God.” (*Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, at page 53, quoting Origen, Clement and Lactantius.) “The early Christians didn’t believe man is totally depraved and incapable of doing any good.” *Id.*, at 64.

**Salvation
by Faith
without
Works** “The early Christians universally believed that works or obedience play an essential role in our salvation.” (*Id.*, at 57, quoting Clement of Rome, Polycarp, the letter of Barnabas, Hermas, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian, and Lanctantius.)

**Eternal
Security** “[E]arly Christians...believed that a ‘saved’ person could still end up being lost.” (*Id.*, at 65, quoting Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian.) I would add quotes from *Scorpion’s Bite* by Tertullian to the list.

**Rejected
The Grace
Alone
Teachers** “As surprising as all of this may be to you, what I’m about to tell you is even more bizarre. There was a religious group labelled as heretics by the early Christians, who strongly disputed the church’s stance on salvation and works. Instead, they [*i.e.*, the heretics] taught man is totally depraved. That we are saved solely by grace. That works play no role in salvation. And that we cannot lose our salvation once we obtain it....” *Id.*, at 66.

Bercot then cites the works by Tertullian and Irenaeus against Marcion and Gnostics heretics. For more on Marcion, see the main volume and Appendix B: *How the Canon Was Formed*.

**Predestinat-
ion and
Free-Will** “The early Christians were strong believers in free-will [citation and discussion omitted.] Originally, it was the pagan world, not the Christian, who believed in predestination. Yet, in one of the strange quirks of history, Martin Luther took the side of the pagan Romans against the early Christians....[I]t was once again some of the

Gnostic teachers who taught that humans are arbitrarily predestined for salvation and punishment....Although not believing in predestination, the early Christians believed in God's sovereignty and in His ability to foresee the future." (*Id.*, at 70, 72, 73, 76, quoting Justin Martyr, Clement, Archelaus, Methodius, and Origen.)

Conclusion

If Paul were truly the successful evangelist we are told that he was, then what explains the early church between 125 A.D. and 325 A.D. rejecting almost every *uniquely Pauline doctrine*? Why were those holding to modern Paulinist ideas on salvation, predestination, and grace regarded as heretics? What makes more sense is the approximately 41 people identified in Acts as having been led to Jesus by Paul is close to the true total number. This is one of the reasons why Paul had so little impact in the early church.

By contrast, Acts records that James and James' church at Jerusalem were responsible for *many tens of thousands of Jews* coming to Christ. James and James' church (including Peter) prior to Paul's entrance is truly the greatest evangelical movement of all time—starting from nothing and growing internationally and at Jerusalem at a phenomenal rate. This explains why James' doctrines *permeated* the early church right up through 325 A.D.

Post-Script:

What Changed Things?

Had it not been for the Emperor of Rome, Constantine, in 325-329 A.D. changing the direction of the church in Roman territories, there would never have been any notion that Paul had any influence. Thus, by the Roman church's actions under Constantine's influence, it gave an illusion that Paul had greater influence to that point than he actually previously ever had.

This is because the Roman Catholic Church post 325 A.D. treated two unique teachings of Paul for the first time as officially valid:

- 1 Original sin which then spawned the Marian heresy that she had to be sinless⁵ to prevent original sin tainting Jesus;⁶ and

5. This is heretical because if sinless from birth, Mary needed no savior. Yet, Mary affirms God is "My Savior." (Luke 1:47.)

2 Keeping the Sabbath was heretically legalistic, relying upon Paul's principle that the Law of Moses' was abrogated.⁷

These same two doctrines were rejected by the remaining Christian bishops who lived outside the Roman empire.⁸ They rejected them then as they still do today. These bishops trace their origin to James' church at Jerusalem by unbroken historical records of succession. They are known to us today as the Eastern Orthodox Church (with 250 million members). They are primarily located in Israel, the Middle East, Ethiopia, Russia, Armenia, and Turkey. They always have kept the Sabbath for the past 2,000 years while worshipping on Sunday. They are extraordinarily non-Pauline in all their teachings. (See Chapter Nineteen.)

The pattern is clear. Paul had virtually no influence in the early church's doctrine. (His only impact was possibly to exaggerate the meaning of James' ruling in Acts 15.) This historically explains the non-Pauline doctrines of the Orthodox church. The only change in that pattern arose by the fortuity of Emperor Constantine's influ-

6. Mary worship had already entered the church earlier. However, Mary-worship was later made respectable as a solution to the problem of original sin uniquely taught by Paul in Romans ch. 5. Roman Catholicism taught Mary's alleged sinless nature explained how Jesus did not suffer original sin in his flesh. Marcion resolved this dilemma differently in 144 A.D. He said Jesus only appeared to have human flesh. This was the heresy of docetism that Apostle John condemns. Both the RC and Marcion heresies derive from Paul's teaching on original sin in Romans ch. 5.

7. At the Council of Laodicea of 363 A.D.—one of the first church councils controlled primarily by the Roman Bishop—it was decided to deem heretical and anathema (cursed) the practice of keeping Sabbath. (Canon 29.) The Council claimed Sabbath-keeping was “judaizing.” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (1990), supra, XIV at 148.) This council ruling was never accepted outside of Roman territories. The Eastern Orthodox have always maintained Christians must keep the Sabbath while worshipping on Sunday. The *Anti-Nicene* church records from 125 A.D. to 325 A.D. likewise show that keeping Sabbath on Saturday & then Sunday worship was the clear practice of universal Christianity pre-363 A.D. See the *Constitution of the Apostles* (ca. 200 A.D.) Book 7, ch. XXIII & XXX, Book 2, ch. LX, and Book 5, ch. XX, reprinted in *Anti-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to a.d. 325* (Ed. The Rev. Alexander Roberts, D.D., and James Donaldson, LL.D.) (Reprint of Edinburgh Edition of T&T Clark)(Grand Rapids: Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans). A reprint of Book 7 is at http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-07/anf07-47.htm#P6620_2278762. A reprint of Book 2 and 5 are at the same webpage, except identified as ANF-02 or ANF-05.

8. Tertullian, a leading church member at Carthage (N. Africa) in *Against Marcion* around 207 A.D., does concur that Paul abrogated ceremonial laws from the Law, such as feast-days and the sabbath. However, he claims otherwise Paul did not abrogate the law. Some interpret James in Acts 15 that way too. However, James in Acts 21 tells Paul this is a misunderstanding of what his decision on circumcision meant.

ence beginning in 325 A.D. He led the Roman Bishop to tamper with the universal doctrine of the church that *had no doctrine of Paul affixed to it*. The *pope* added what appeared then to be just *two minor Pauline doctrines*. They turned out to be the poison pill.

The Irony Of Roman Catholicism

It is somewhat ironic that the Roman Catholic church would later be put on the run by Luther's citation to Paul. The irony is that the Roman Catholic Church then had to run back to James' Epistle and its clear teaching on salvation.

The mistake the Roman Catholic Church made way back in the 300s, which left it trapped in a fatal inconsistency, was that it let in Paul's teaching on original sin and the abrogation of the Law. As a result, then it had no plausible way to claim Paul's salvation doctrines should not also be the measure of doctrine. Paul contradicts James. The Catholic church had retained James on salvation doctrine. Yet, the Roman Catholic church was wedded to the doctrine of original sin (which propped up Marianism) and abrogation of Saturday-Sabbath. It relied upon Paul for those two positions.

The Eastern Orthodox have no such problem. They never agreed on *any unique points of Paul*. They show a low regard for any of his unique teachings. In its own territories, the Orthodox are not subject to any vulnerability of inconsistency over Paul because they never gave him any serious credence.

As a result of the Roman Catholic church's totally different position, it has remained completely vulnerable to attack by Paulinists for its inconsistency. The Paulinist asks Catholicism a clearly difficult question: how can Roman Catholics accept the unique teachings of Paul on original sin (Romans ch. 5) and the abrogation of Sabbath, but not also accept Paul's teachings on salvation by faith without works in Romans 4:4 and Eph. 2:8-9? Hard questions deserve an answer. Roman Catholicism never offers a coherent answer. It just keeps citing James to "balance" Paul.

A Solution for Roman Catholics

The solution for Roman Catholicism is to take a brave step. While it has kept up a stiff upper lip for 400 years, it must one day resolve this inconsistency between James' doctrine and Paul's teachings. The Roman Catholic Church needs to expel the uniquely Pauline doctrine of original sin (and get rid of all the Marian heresies that it spawned) and restore the Mosaic Law to the position it deserves, making the careful distinction between Gentile and Jew that James in Acts 15 and 21 revealed. With a few other repairs, such as

removal of doctrines about purgatory, infant baptism, calling priests *fathers*, and abrogation of anything that offends Jesus' teachings, the church can be restored to its original purity of the teachings under James. After all, they are identical to the teachings of Jesus. As a result, we will get back to Our Lord's true words.

