

Paul, the Apostle

A play in three acts to celebrate the Year of Saint Paul, 2008–2009

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Act III: Paul's Missionary Journeys

Setting 1) greenery suggesting the outdoors;
2) scrolls suggesting the synagogue;
3) darkness with a light on Paul

Cast

Narrator	3 citizens
Saul/Paul	Barnabas
Companions of Saul	Men in the synagogue
Synagogue official	3 listeners
Group A—3 speakers	Group B—3 speakers
Prison guard	



Narrator: It wasn't easy for the followers of Jesus to accept Saul's change of heart. Just a short time ago, he was hunting them down and dragging them off to prison. Now he too claimed to be a believer. The early Christians were confused.

The Jewish religious leaders were confused too . . . and angry. Saul had turned against them. Saul, their friend, had become Saul, their enemy.

Saul didn't care what others thought. He went all over Damascus, teaching about Jesus to anyone who would listen.

(Three people walk along chatting inaudibly and then stop to share the latest news in Damascus.)

Citizen 1: Have you heard the latest about Saul? The leaders of the temple are out to get him.

Citizen 2: Have I heard? Everyone's heard. He's made a lot of important people very angry.



- Citizen 3:** That's because Saul has turned against them.
- Citizen 2:** I think they're worried that too many Jews are coming to believe that Jesus is the Messiah.
- Citizen 3:** *(in a quieter voice)* I've heard that they want to kill Saul before he causes any more trouble.
- Citizen 1:** You're probably right.
- Citizen 3:** Word's out that his friends want to get him out of Damascus before he's arrested.
- Citizen 2:** That won't be easy. There are guards everywhere, even at the city gates.

(The three continue talking inaudibly as they walk offstage.)

- Narrator:** But in the dark of the night, Jesus' followers in Damascus lowered Paul over the city wall in a huge basket supported by a heavy rope. The temple leaders couldn't believe that Saul had escaped, but they were glad to be rid of him.

Saul went on to Jerusalem. Then he and his companion Barnabas set out on foot and by boat from town to town. Everywhere they spread the good news of Jesus. Their travels were difficult and long. Blisters, illness, heat, wild animals, and robbers were constant threats. Sometimes Saul and Barnabas had to stop and work to pay for their food and lodging. That's when Saul's skill at tent making came in handy.

Arriving in Antioch, Saul, Barnabas, and some of their companions gathered in the synagogue. It was the Sabbath, and they had come to worship with the others.

(Saul and Barnabas and companions enter and seat themselves in the synagogue among the other men.)



Synagogue official: My brothers, here in our synagogue we have heard the reading of the law and the prophets. Now, if one of you has a word to share with us, please speak.

Saul: *(rising to address those gathered)* Brothers of the family of Abraham and all you who fear God, listen. The word of salvation has been sent from God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

(A gasp goes through the crowd.)

Listener 1: What? Did you say Jesus?

Saul: Jesus went about doing good works. He healed the sick, reached out to the sinner, and taught any who would listen.

Listener 2: *(loudly)* Where did you learn these things you talk about?

Listener 1: This is nonsense!

Saul: But the religious leaders and the people did not believe Jesus. They did not accept him as the one promised by God. Instead, even though no guilt could be found in him, Jesus was put to death. But God raised him up after three days. God kept his promise. He sent Jesus to save us.

Listener 3: *(with disdain)* What you say is foolish! No one believes you.

Saul: Hear me! Jesus is the promised Messiah.

Listener 1: Let's go; I don't listen to lies.

(Those gathered [except Saul's companions] shake their heads and raise their fists against Saul. One by one they get up and leave.)

Barnabas: *(rising)* Don't go. What Saul says is true. Forgiveness and salvation are yours through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Saul: *(imploring)* Don't turn away. Stay and listen. Be saved.



Barnabas: All these things Saul tells you for your own good.

(Paul, Barnabas, and the companions leave, speaking quietly and looking discouraged.)

Narrator: Rejected by the Jewish people, Saul brought his message to the Gentiles. With them, he used the Greek form of his name—Paul. News about Paul and his passion for sharing the message of Jesus traveled far.

(People come onstage in threes from various areas, share their news in conversation with one another, and then exit at the opposite end of the stage. One comes alone and speaks directly to the audience.)

Group A *(coming onstage in threes, deep in conversation)*

Speaker 1: Paul and Barnabas were just in the town of Lystra.

Speaker 2: They were preaching, urging people to believe in Jesus.

Speaker 3: One believer had never been able to walk. Paul prayed to God, and the man stood straight up on his feet.

Speaker 2: That's when everyone called Paul and Barnabas gods.

Speaker 3: Oh, was Paul ever angry!

Speaker 1: He kept insisting that he cured the man in Jesus' name, not by his own power.

(All exit at opposite end of stage.)

Group B *(entering stage from different area, talking and walking)*

Speaker 1: Have I got news! Paul is dead.

Speaker 2: No, he isn't. That's just a rumor that's been going around.

Speaker 1: Really? Are you sure?



Speaker 3: I'm sure. What really happened is that some people were upset with Paul's message. They began screaming and yelling at him.

Speaker 2: Then they hurled stones at him, more and more stones. They dragged him outside of the city, threw him in a heap, and left him for dead.

Speaker 3: When Barnabas and his friends came to bury him, they noticed some movement. Paul was hurt but he wasn't dead.

Speaker 1: Remember when Stephen was stoned? I wonder if Paul thought about Stephen when the same thing was happening to him.

Speaker 3: Who knows . . . who knows?

(All exit at opposite end of stage.)

Prison guard: *(walking to center stage and speaking to audience, reading from a paper)* Pardon me. I hate to interrupt, but I need to tell you what happened to me. I wrote it all down so I wouldn't forget anything. Listen.

I was a jailer at the prison in Philippi when Paul was brought in. He'd been stripped and beaten for disturbing the peace. I was told to guard him carefully. So that he couldn't escape, I put Paul in an innermost cell and chained his feet to a stake. There was no way he could get out of there. Then in the middle of the night, there was an earthquake. Honest—all of a sudden—an earthquake. Paul's chains fell from his feet. The prison doors flew open. Paul was freed. Thinking that all my prisoners had escaped, I was ready to kill myself rather than be punished by the authorities. But then I heard Paul say, "Don't harm yourself; we're all here." Paul and his friends could have run, but they didn't. I knew then, without a doubt, that Paul was a man of God. Because of all that happened, I became a believer and was baptized.



Narrator: After his conversion, nothing stopped Paul from preaching about Jesus. Year after year, day after day, he moved from city to town and taught. Over 6,000 miles he traveled—on foot, by boat, on donkey. He endured hunger, cold, shipwrecks, robbery, beatings, and stoning. Still he continued teaching about salvation through Jesus. He helped set up churches in the towns he visited. Near the end of his travels, Paul headed back to Jerusalem, a most dangerous place for him. There he was beaten again, imprisoned, and sent to Rome to be tried.

For several years in Rome, Paul was under house arrest. Still he moved about preaching, always with a Roman guard at his side. Then, one last time, Paul's enemies had him thrown into prison. While there, he wrote letters to the churches he had established. He explained to them about the love of God and belief in Jesus. Just before he was killed, Paul wrote to Timothy, his young disciple.

(Paul is sitting on the floor with paper and quill pen, writing. A recording of Paul's voice comes from offstage, verbalizing his thoughts as he writes. A light shines on Paul. The rest of the stage is dark.)

Paul (recording): My dear Timothy,
Come and visit me here in prison if you can. Try to get here before winter, because I'm afraid my time is up. I'm so tired, and I feel that death is near. But don't worry about me. I'm ready. I fought the good fight. I finished the race. The crown of glory which the Lord has promised will be awarded to me. It will be given to you too and to all who believe in Jesus, our Lord.

Give my greetings to everyone. And even though I want to see you, if you can't get here, don't worry. The Lord will care for me. He'll rescue me from all evil and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To God be glory forever and ever.

End of Act III