

A HISTORY OF ISRAEL AND GOD'S CHOSEN PEOPLE FROM PENTECOST TO THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

CHAPTER 1 THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

I. EARLY EXPANSION OF THE CHURCH

A. The Impact of Pentecost [Acts 2]

- The day of Pentecost empowered the early disciples and established the Christian movement
- The Jewish pilgrims touched by Pentecost became the seed planters of early expansion
- Acts mentions pilgrims from all over the Roman world and beyond who took part in the events [Acts 2:5-12]

- Peter refuted those who claimed the believers who received the Holy Spirit were drunk and delivered a powerful sermon on Jesus as Lord and Christ [Acts 2:13-36]
- Peter's message cut to the hearts of those who heard, and on that day those who accepted Peter's message were baptized; about 3,000 [Acts 2:38-41]

- The first church was established that day; *"Every day they continued to meet together in the Temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts praising God"* [Acts 2:46-47]
- *"The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"* [Acts 2:47]

- Converts carried the Gospel back to their homelands, where the Gospel news took root, starting in the synagogues

B. Peter and John

- Peter and John emerged as the leaders of the Jerusalem Church, which met for worship in the Temple precincts and private homes

- With the healing of the crippled man by Peter at the Temple [Acts 3] and Peter's defiant preaching, Temple authorities became alarmed at the movement and expressed concerns to the Sanhedrin

- Hardliners moved to suppress the dangerous heresy; persecutions and jailings only strengthened the faith of believers and eventually worked to spread the Gospel

- As more miracles were performed in Jerusalem, so the persecutions increased
- When an angel of the Lord released the apostles from jail, they went to the Temple courts and continued to preach

- They were brought before the Sanhedrin and commanded not to preach about the dead Jesus, but Peter and the others charged Sanhedrin with killing Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead

- Gamaliel, a Pharisee and wise teacher of the Law, came before the Sanhedrin and advised the Council to let the apostles go; *“Leave these men alone! Let them go. For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God”* [Acts 5:33-39]

- Gamaliel’s words persuaded the Council to have the apostles flogged and ordered not to speak the name of Jesus again [Acts 5:40-42]—after the flogging, the apostles preached even more

C. Persecution of the Church Intensifies

- When Stephen was martyred, a more intense persecution scattered Christians into Judea and Samaria where they shared their testimonies about Jesus [Acts 8:1-2]

- Leading an intensified persecution campaign against the Church was the Pharisee, Saul, who gave approval of Stephen’s death [Acts 8:1]

- King Herod had James the brother of John put to death with the sword [Acts 12:2]

- Even before James was murdered, the Church at Jerusalem began to scatter throughout Judea and Samaria

D. In Spite of Persecution, the Church Grew

- The Christian movement expanded beyond Jerusalem along the western coast of Palestine [Ashdod, Joppa, Caesarea—Acts 9:32-43]

- At Caesarea, the Gospel went to the Gentiles [Acts 10]

- Peter kept a divine appointment with the Roman Cornelius, whose household and friends became the first fruits of an important missionary endeavor—a greater ministry to the Gentile world

- The first missionary went out to Samaria where Philip proclaimed Christ [Acts 8:25]

- Philip was also directed by an angel of the Lord to go south on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza where he would meet an Ethiopian treasurer and proclaim the Good News to him [Acts 8:26-40]

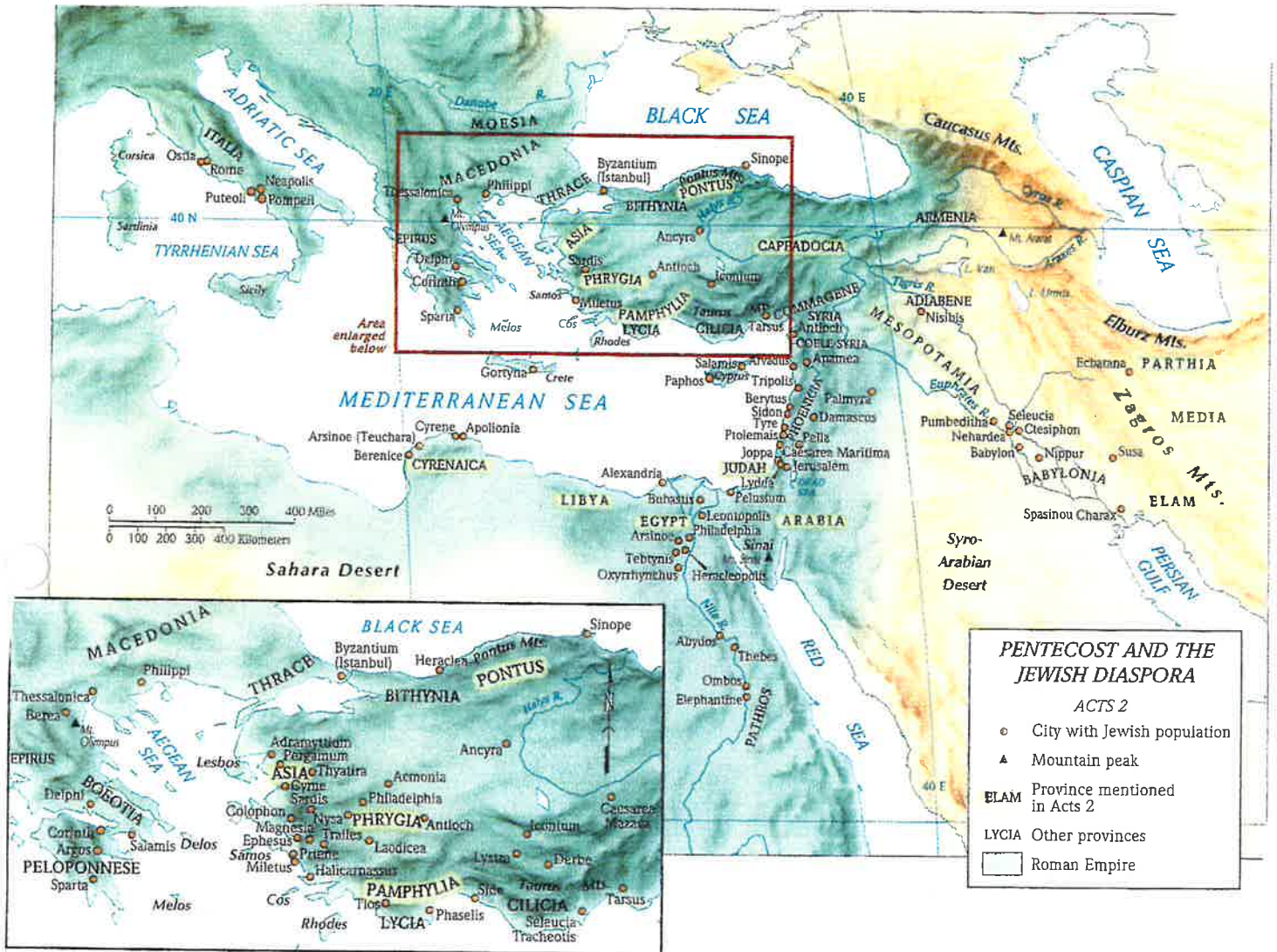
II. THE MINISTRY OF PAUL

A. Persecution of the Followers of the Way

- The “Way” movement did not fade away as the religious leaders had hoped after the apostles were released by the Sanhedrin [Acts 5:40-42]—it only grew, reaching alarming proportions

- Many of the religious leaders felt that if drastic measures were not taken to suppress the movement, it would get hopelessly out of hand—Saul became one of the most vocal proponents of suppressing the movement with violent measures

- Stephen attracted the attention of religious leaders in Jerusalem, especially the Sanhedrin, by his critical attitude toward the Temple and how Jesus profoundly changed the status of the Mosaic Law [Acts 7:48-53]

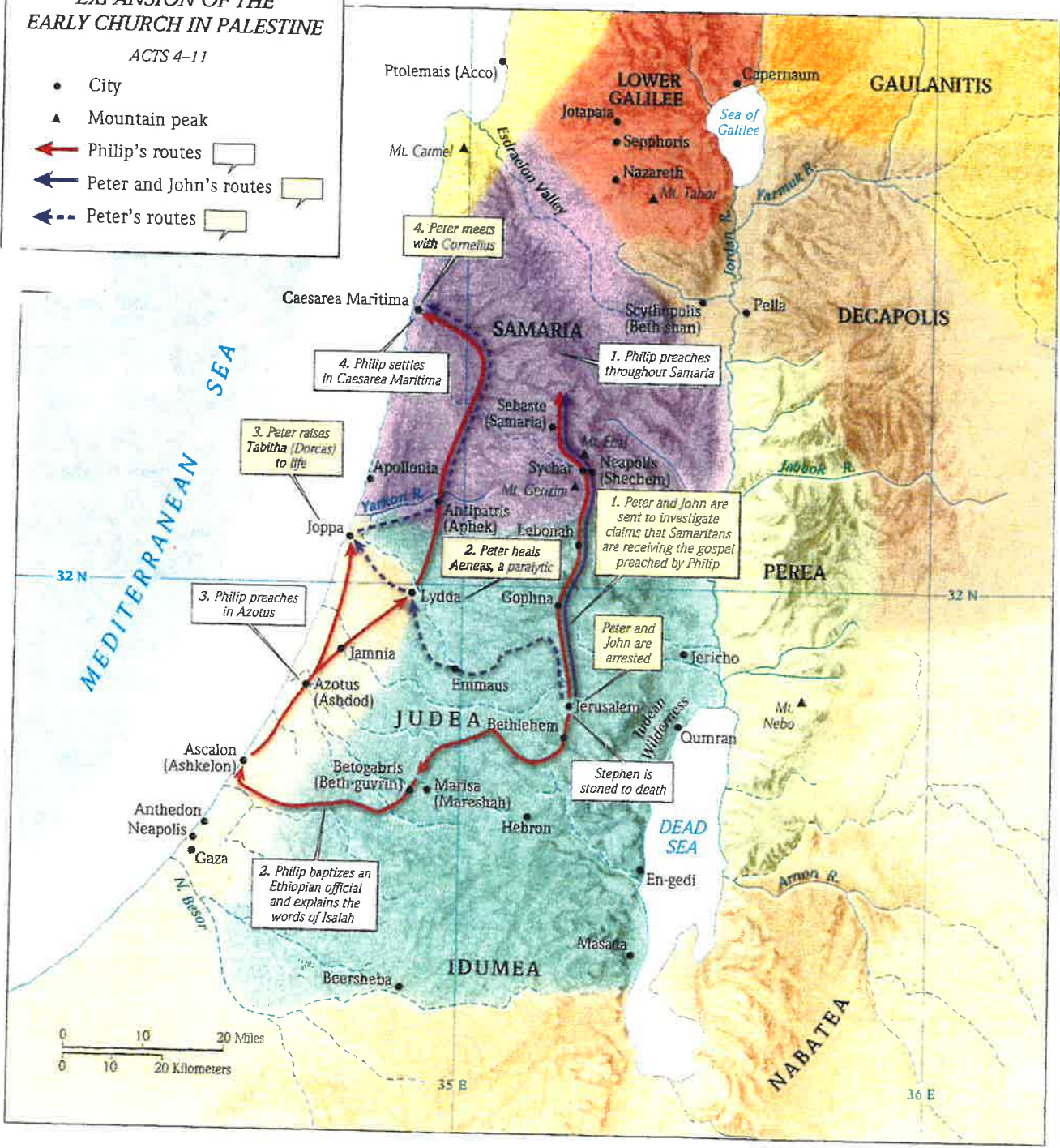


**IMPACT OF PENTECOST IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL
HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS**

EXPANSION OF THE EARLY CHURCH IN PALESTINE

ACTS 4-11

- City
- ▲ Mountain peak
- Philip's routes
- ← Peter and John's routes
- ←- - Peter's routes



THE EARLY CHURCH EXPANDS OUT FROM JERUSALEM
HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS

- According to Roman law, Jewish administration could not enact capital punishment in Judea except in the one case where the sanctity of the Temple was violated in word or action
- Stephen's trial and execution gave the Chief Priest establishment an opportunity to launch an expansive campaign of repression and terror against the young Church

B. Impact of Stephen's Death

- Many members of the Church, especially those associated with Stephen, left Jerusalem and in fact Judea where the power of the Sanhedrin could reach them

- There were two important outcomes of this dispersion—first the Gospel was carried by the Hellenists to territories outside Palestine; second, the Church of Jerusalem became much more uniformly Hebrew in its composition and outlook

- Stephen's death and the persecution of believers seems to be a negative event for the Church, but in reality it was a positive—God used Stephen's death to move the Gospel out into new territory

- The first great missionary outreach by the early Church began and greatly expanded with the conversion of Saul

- Satan's attempt to stamp out the Church's fire by Saul only scattered the embers and started new fires in the outermost parts of the Empire

- This repressive campaign against the Church first brings Saul into close involvement with primitive Christianity as its chief persecutor [1 Cor 15:9]

- He began a zealous campaign to destroy the Church in Jerusalem by going house to house and dragging men and women to prison [Acts 8:2; 9:1]

- Saul delivered untold numbers of men and women who followed the "Way" to prisons or persecuted them to death [Acts 22:4]

C. What Drove Saul's Destructive Campaign to Destroy the Church?

- His rejection of Jesus as a crucified Messiah—this was a contradiction in terms for Saul

- For Saul, Jesus was crucified and came within the meaning of the pronouncement in Deuteronomy 21:23—therefore, Jesus could not be the Messiah

- The Messiah was uniquely endowed with the divine blessing, "*the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him*" [Is 11:2]—the divine curse explicitly rested on one who was crucified

- The very idea of a crucified Messiah was an outrageous blasphemy—a crucified man could not conceivably be the elect One of God

-**Paul later acknowledged that in preaching a crucified Messiah, he was preaching something which was a stumbling block to Jews [1 Cor 1:23; Gal 3:13]

- When Saul first confronted people who publicly affirmed that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah, his course was clear—they were guilty of blasphemy and would be dealt with

-The “Way” was a malignant growth needing to be destroyed; he was an eager soldier for the cause against the “Way”

D. Saul’s Murderous Threats Expanded from Jerusalem

- The violent persecutions against believers drove many out of Judea, but even then they were not safe from Sanhedrin reach

- Saul went to the High Priest in Jerusalem seeking letters [arrest warrants] for the synagogues in Damascus to seek out followers of the “Way” and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem [Acts 9:1-2]

- Damascus appeared to have a community of followers of the “Way” before the persecutions began in Jerusalem and Judea—fugitives from Judea came in hopes of finding refuge

- The Damascus believers were not the subject of the extradition papers Paul carried—he came only to apprehend the refugees from Judea

- If he could accomplish his purpose in Damascus, Saul could repeat the procedure in other foreign countries

- Until the last moment of his pre-Christian life, Saul zealously tried to destroy the “Way” [Galatians 1:13]—Saul fulfilled the Lord’s prediction recorded in John 16:2

- In his own words to the Philippians, Saul showed himself to be “*as to zeal a persecutor of the church*” [Phil 3:6]

- Saul literally tore the Church apart—it would haunt him for the rest of his life so much that he felt unworthy to be called an apostle [Acts 22:3-5, 19-20; 26:9; 1 Cor 15:9; 1 Tim 1:13]

- In spite of such evil wrath by Saul, God used it for His Gospel purposes

***Luke portrayed Saul as a man totally committed to crushing the new Church. In chapter 8 of Acts we read about Saul’s relentless and brutal assault on Christians, while just days away from these terrible atrocities, his life would be changed to a devoted follower of Christ. This is a reminder to us that God works where least expected and a vehement opponent of the Gospel can become the next believer—trust God to change the heart of an opponent of Christ to one of faith and service. Don’t give up on anyone

III. SAUL’S ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS THAT CHANGE COUNTLESS NUMBERS OF LIVES—PAUL, THE APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES

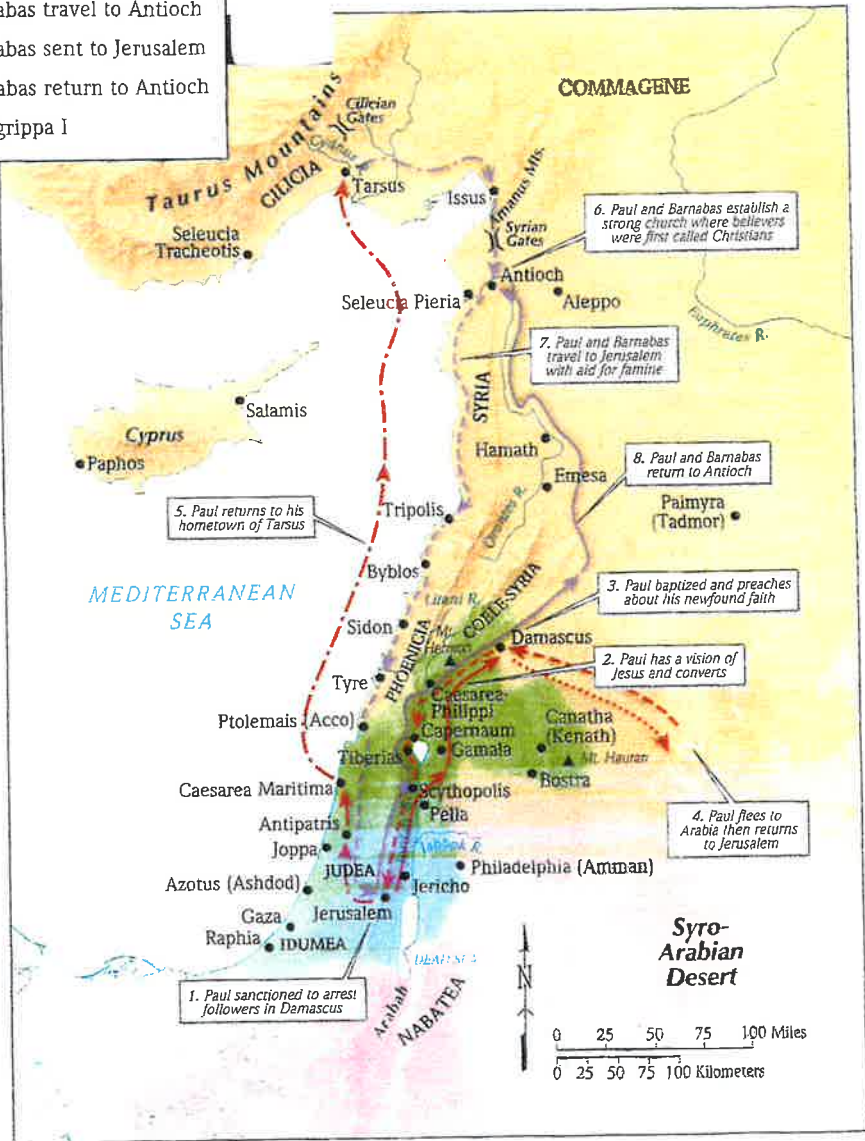
A. Saul on the Road to Damascus

- Saul went to Damascus to seize the Christians who fled there and bring them back to Jerusalem

PAUL'S CONVERSION AND EARLY MINISTRY

ACTS 9:1-30; 11:19-30; 12:24-25
GAL. 1:11-24

- City
- ▲ Mountain peak
- ⌋ Pass
- Paul sent to Damascus
- Paul spends time in Arabia
- Paul returns to Jerusalem
- Paul flees from Hellenists
- Paul and Barnabas travel to Antioch
- Paul and Barnabas sent to Jerusalem
- Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch
- Kingdom of Agrippa I



PAUL'S CONVERSION ON DAMASCUS ROAD AND EARLY MINISTRY
HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS

- Prevent the spread of the “Way” to other cities—these Christian “nests” had to be destroyed
- Keep Christians from causing any trouble with Rome
- Saul may have thought Damascus was the first place to stamp out Christianity, and thus prevent its spread to other areas and cities

B. A Divine Encounter Initiated by the Lord

- Nearing Damascus around noon in full sunlight, Saul and his companions were engulfed in light brighter than the Middle Eastern sun [Acts 22:6; 26:13]
- Saul and his companions fell into the dirt [Acts 26:14]
- His traveling companions and himself heard the voice of the Lord, but they did not understand the words [Acts 22:9]—the Lord’s words were for Saul only
- Saul actually saw Jesus in the brilliant light [Acts 9:17, 27; 22:14; 26:16; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8]—the others only saw the light [Acts 22:9]
 - The last person to see the resurrected and glorified Jesus was Stephen, and now Saul—this is a testimony to the power of God’s grace that the man involved in Stephen’s death was the next man to see Jesus Christ

***God always initiates contact in salvation, although not as dramatic as with Saul [John 6:37, 44; 20:27-29; 17:2, 6, 9,11, 24; 2 Cor 4:6, Phil 1:29; James 1:18] Salvation initiated by God is very powerfully stated to Titus by Paul [Titus 3:3-5]

C. Jesus Convicts Saul [Acts 9:4]

- “*Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting Me?*”—a severe rebuke of Saul so he would realize how wrong he had been—Saul was the one who hated Jesus without cause [John 15:25]
- Jesus’ words also reflect an inseparable link between Himself and the Church body [members]—by persecuting believers, Saul was directly persecuting the Lord
- Saul’s violent persecutions brought him face to face with the enormity of his crimes—they weren’t just against Christians, but against Christ [1 Cor 16:22; John 16:9]

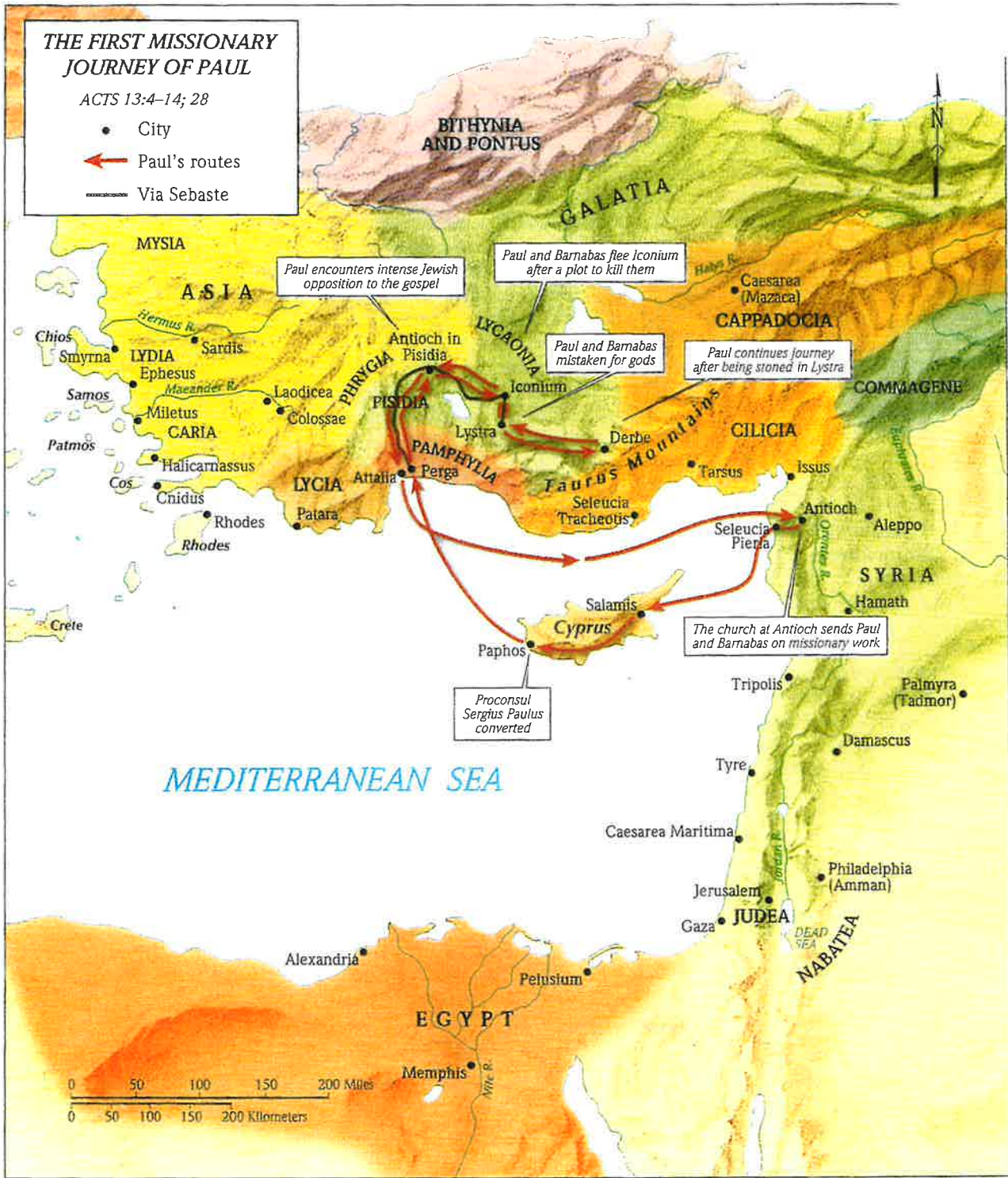
***The crime of all crimes for which men will be eternally damned is to refuse to love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ

- True salvation must include conviction of damning sin—When Jesus confronted Saul, the conviction must have been overwhelming
- Saul knew all about Jesus, the truth of the faith, God’s mercy of grace and redemption—Jesus’ words crushed Saul’s old beliefs into the dust, and he was made to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF PAUL

ACTS 13:4-14; 28

- City
- Paul's routes
- Via Sebaste



**PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY
HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS**



PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY
 HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS
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D. The Miraculous Conversion of Saul [Acts 9:5]

- “*Who art Thou Lord?*”—response a recognition of deity; he knew it was the Lord
- Saul probably knew the answer before he asked it, but also some fear—what if Jesus was the Messiah and Christianity and God’s Gospel was truth, and he had been fighting God
- “*I am Jesus whom you are persecuting?*”—truth was confirmed for Saul, and the Gospel became positive
- Jesus whom he believed dead was obviously alive and who He claimed to be
- The Lord reminded Saul of his pointless and painful efforts against Him [Acts 26:14]
- Saul’s resistance was crushed and his heart broken by repentance was healed by faith—Saul the persecutor of the “Way” was no more but Paul the servant of the Lord Jesus [Phil 3:4-11]
- The miraculous conversion of Saul without human involvement when it occurred is an example of the extent and power of saving, sovereign Grace—Paul testified to that Grace in 1 Timothy 1:13-17

E. “What Shall I do Lord?” [Acts 22:10; 9:6-8]

- Saul humbly submitted himself to the will of the Lord he had hated—he was submissive to the Lordship of Jesus from the moment of conversion to the end of his life
- Jesus told Paul to get up and he would be told what to do—the men with him were speechless, only hearing the voice, but seeing no one
- Because Paul was helplessly blinded when he stood up, his companions led him by the hand into Damascus
- Like molten metal, God refined Saul to the point of total consecration and fashioned the most useful man of God the Church has ever known

IV. PAUL’S MISSIONARY JOURNEY FROM THE DAMASCUS ROAD ALL THE WAY TO ROME

A. Luke’s Account of Paul’s Missionary Journeys—Acts

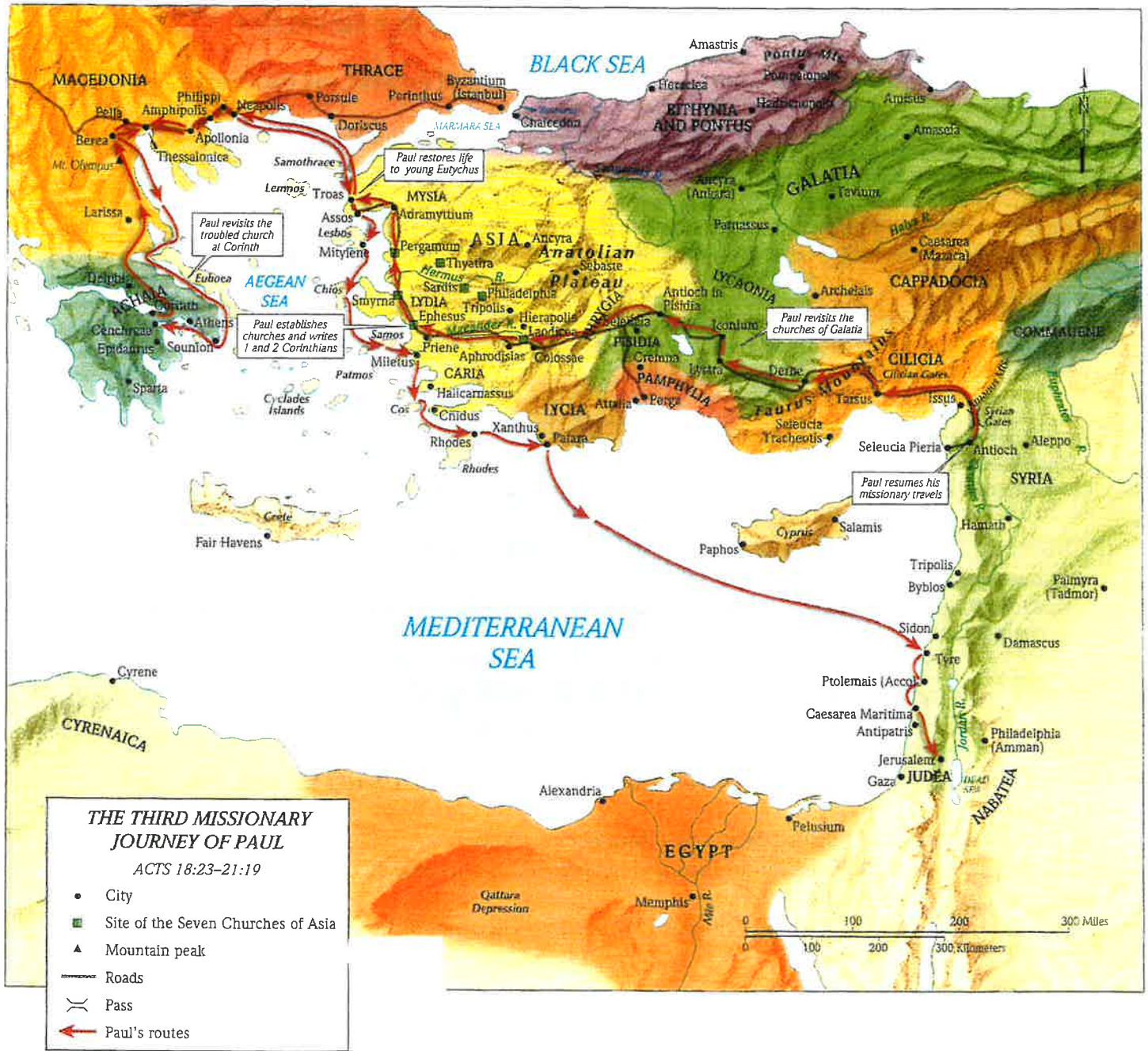
- Luke records Saul’s conversion to Paul and his preaching at Damascus and escape to Jerusalem in Acts Chapter 9, verses 1-29
- From Acts Chapter 13 to the last chapter [28] is Luke’s account of Paul’s three missionary journeys

B. Paul’s First Missionary Journey [Acts 13:1-14:28]

- Proclaiming the Gospel on Cyprus [Acts 13:4-12]
- Ministry in Pamphylia and Galatia [Acts 13:13-43]
- Paul and Barnabas in Iconium [Acts 14:1-7]
- Efforts in Lystra and Derbe [Acts 14:6-20]

C. The Second Missionary Journey [Acts 16:1-18:22]

- Return to the believers in Asia Minor [Acts 16:1-5]



PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY
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- A mission to go over to Macedonia [Acts 16:6-17:15]
- A prison encounter saves a Philippian jailer [Acts 16:16-40]
- Ministry in Thessalonica and Berea [Acts 17:1-15]
- Confronting the unknown god in Athens [Acts 17:16-34]
- To Corinth and the meeting of new brothers [Acts 18:1-17]
- Paul's journey to Ephesus and then on to Jerusalem and Antioch [Acts 18:18-22]

D. Paul's Third Missionary Journey [Acts 18:23-21:20]

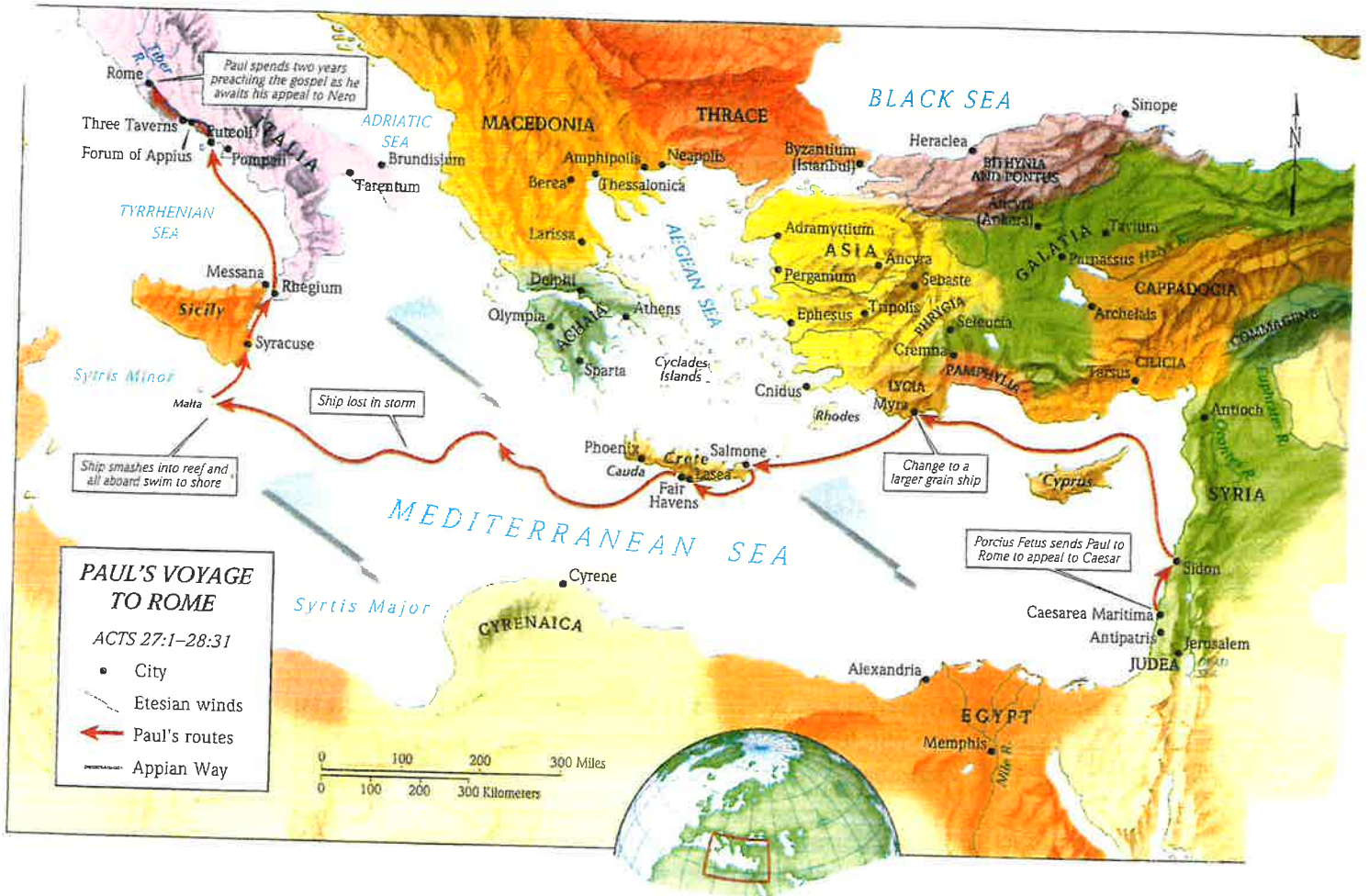
- Paul's ministry to Ephesus [Acts 19:1-20:24]
- Paul returns to Jerusalem to complete his mission [Acts 21:1-20]

E. Paul's Arrest at the Jerusalem Temple to House Arrest in Rome [Acts 21:27-28:1-31]

- The angry mob against Paul and his arrest by Roman troops [Acts 21:27-22:29]
- Paul defended himself before the Sanhedrin and the plot to kill him [Acts 23:1-23:1-35]
- Paul's first trial in Caesarea [Acts 24:1-27]
- Paul on trial before Festus and Agrippa in Caesarea [Acts 25:1-26:1-32]
- Paul's perilous sea voyage [storm and shipwreck] to Rome [Acts 27:1-44]
- From Malta to Paul's house arrest in Rome for two years [Acts 28]

F. The Impact of Paul's Commission From Christ

- From 35-48 A.D., Paul spent his life in missionary work and writing letters; the greater portion of his missionary work was toward Gentiles, but Paul always started in the Jewish synagogues
- Rise of Christianity is one of the most important events in the history of Judaism
- Christianity became the vehicle for Jewish history to be universalized through adoption of the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament
- With the universal spread of Christianity, the Old Testament became a text for most of humanity; the history of Judaism is interwoven with the history of Christianity
- Paul was instrumental in eliminating Jewish habits and restrictions that were a detriment to non Jews accepting the Gospel
- Paul took the Gospel message throughout the Roman Empire which crossed paths with Jews dispersed throughout the Empire
- With Paul's missionary commission, the Acts Church faithfully carried out Christ's Great Commission, "*Be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth*" [Acts 1:8]



PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME
HOLMAN BIBLE ATLAS