

The "ABCs" of Acts – Bellevue Church of Christ
Auditorium Class – Summer / Fall 2014

I: _____

Acts Chapter 9 (1-43)

Acts 7:58; 8:1-3 - In contrast to Philip (Acts 8:40)

**I. Vendetta
Against the Saints
of God (1-2):**

Acts 22:5;
26:10-11

**II. Vision of the
Son of God (3-9):**

Voice spoke in
the Hebrew tongue
Acts 26:14

To persecute
Christians was to
persecute Christ

They heard, but
did not understand
- Acts 22:9

**III. Visitation by
the Servant of God
(10-17):**

a. Revelation
(10-12):

b. Reluctance
(13-14):

c. Reassurance
(15-17):

Acts 26
Gal 2:7-8
Eph 3:6-12

II Cor 6:4-10;
11:23-29

**IV. Victory by the
Sovereignty of God
(18-19):**

1 **But Saul**, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ◀ Caiaphas or Annas

2 and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22)

3 Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.

4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "**I am Jesus**, whom you are persecuting."

6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

7 The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

8 Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

9 And for **three days** he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

10 Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord."

11 And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,

12 and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your **saints** at Jerusalem.

14 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name."

15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the **Gentiles** and **kings** and the **children of Israel.**"

16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

17 So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "**Brother Saul**, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18 And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

19 and taking food, he was strengthened. For some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

150 miles north-east of Jerusalem

Acts 22:6
"about noon"

Acts 26:13
"At midday" - the light was brighter than the sun

Paul gives a complete account of the words of Jesus in his defense before Agrippa
Acts 26:14-18

Well spoken of by all the Jews in Damascus -Acts 22:12

First time "saints" is used to describe Christians in the NT

-How many days did Saul wait after he lost his sight?

-Did he have a dramatic experience? (v. 3)

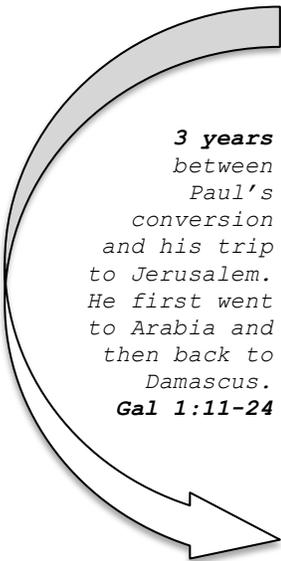
-Did he fast during those three days? (v. 9)

-Did he pray during those three days? (v. 11)

-Did he believe in Jesus? (v. 5)

-When were his sins washed away? (v. 18; 22:16)

Acts 7:60 - We can see the answer to Stephen's prayer in the conversion of Saul? (v. 15)



3 years
between
Paul's
conversion
and his trip
to Jerusalem.
He first went
to Arabia and
then back to
Damascus.
Gal 1:11-24

Acts 22:17-21
Paul "fell into
a trance..."

²⁰ And immediately he proclaimed Jesus *in the synagogues*, saying, "He is the Son of God."

²¹ And all who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?"

²² But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

²³ When *many days had passed*, the Jews plotted to kill him,

²⁴ but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,

²⁵ but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

²⁶ And when he had come **to Jerusalem**, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to *the apostles* and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

²⁸ So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord.

²⁹ And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him.

³⁰ And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to **Caesarea** and sent him off to **Tarsus**.

It became Paul's custom to visit the Synagogue when going to a new city

*Salamis (13:5)
*Antioch (13:14)
*Thessalonica (17:1)
*Berea (17:10)
*Athens (17:16-17)
*Ephesus (19:1,8)

The Apostles
-Paul only visited
with Peter and James
(Gal 1:11-24)

Caesarea - Seaport on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Capital of Roman government in Palestine for over six hundred years.

Tarsus - Gal 1:21-22

²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (and hometown of Paul v. 11)

The church continues to grow in spite of persecution

³¹ So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.

³² Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at **Lydda**.

³³ There he found a man named **Aeneas**, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed.

³⁴ And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose.

³⁵ And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord.

Hebrew Name

³⁶ Now there was in **Joppa** a disciple named **Tabitha**, which, translated, means **Dorcas**. She was full of good works and acts of charity.

Greek Name

³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.

³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay."

³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.

⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.

⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.

⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

⁴³ And he stayed in **Joppa for many days** with one Simon, a tanner.

Lydda - 25 Miles Northwest of Jerusalem

Joppa - Major coastal town, 12 miles from Lydda.

God places Peter in Joppa to receive the call from Cornelius (Acts 10:5)

Heb 2:4 - God used signs and wonders to validate the Gospel message

Paul on the Steps of the Barracks after His Arrest in Jerusalem

Acts 22:1-16 (ESV)

¹"Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."

²And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they became even more quiet. And he said:

³"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day. ⁴I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, ⁵as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶"As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. ⁷And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' ⁸And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.' ⁹Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. ¹⁰And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.' ¹¹And since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came into Damascus.

¹²"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, ¹³came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. ¹⁴And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; ¹⁵for you will be a witness for him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'

Paul's Defense before King Agrippa

Acts 26:1-18 (ESV)

¹So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

²"I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. ⁵They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. ⁶And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! ⁸Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

¹²"In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷delivering you

¹⁸to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Introduction of Saul

Acts 7:57-60 (ESV)

⁵⁷ But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. ⁵⁸ Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 8:1-3 (ESV)

¹ And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ² Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. ³ But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

Contrast of Philip

Acts 8:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

“The Way”

Acts 19:9 (ESV)

⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

Acts 19:23 (ESV)

²³ About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way.

Acts 24:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets,

Acts 24:22 (ESV)

²² But Felix, having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case."

Apostle to the Gentiles

Galatians 2:7-10 (ESV)

⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Ephesians 3:1-13 (ESV)

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— ² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, ³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. ⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Suffering of Paul

2 Corinthians 6:1-10 (ESV)

¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor,

through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

2 Corinthians 11:23-29 (ESV)

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

Critical Questions in this Conversion:

1. How many days did Saul wait after he lost his sight?

Acts 9:8–9 (ESV)

⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for **three days** he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

2. Did he have a dramatic experience? (v. 3)

Illustration: Carmen telling his story on TBN

Acts 9:3–4 (ESV)

³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

3. Did he fast during those three days? (v. 9)

Illustration: Asceticism in Eastern Religions / See Wikipedia Article Below

Acts 9:8–9 (ESV)

⁸ Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. ⁹ And for **three days** he was without sight, and **neither ate nor drank**.

4. Did he pray during those three days? (v. 11)

Illustration: Sinner’s Prayer / Tony Alamo pamphlet

Acts 9:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying,

5. Did he believe in Jesus? (v. 5)

Illustration: Taking verses out of context

John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Acts 16:30–31 (ESV)

³⁰ Then he brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹ And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”

Acts 9:5 (ESV)

⁵ And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...”

6. When were his sins washed away? (v. 18; 22:16)

Acts 9:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized;

Acts 22:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

Acts 2:21 (ESV)

²¹ And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

Romans 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Paul's Visit to Synagogues

Acts 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John to assist them.

Acts 13:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 17:1 (ESV)

¹ Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 17:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue.

Acts 17:16-17 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there.

Acts 19:1-10 (ESV)

¹ And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all. ⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Timeline After Paul's Conversion

Galatians 1:11–24 (ESV)

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

Cities After Leaving Jerusalem

Caesarea (ses-uh-ree'uh), a seaport on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean between the ancient cities of Dor and Jaffa, originally a small fortified Phoenician anchorage named Strabo's Tower. In the year 63 B.C., Pompey added the area, together with other towns on the seashore, to the Roman province of Syria. Mark Antony gave it to Cleopatra VII, but when Octavian (Augustus) won the battle of Actium, he gave the small town to Herod the Great (30 B.C.). Herod built a magnificent new city and port on the site and named it Caesarea Maritima in honor of Octavian, now Caesar Augustus. The harbor complex was given the name Limen Sebastos by Herod (Sebastos being the Greek form of Augustus).

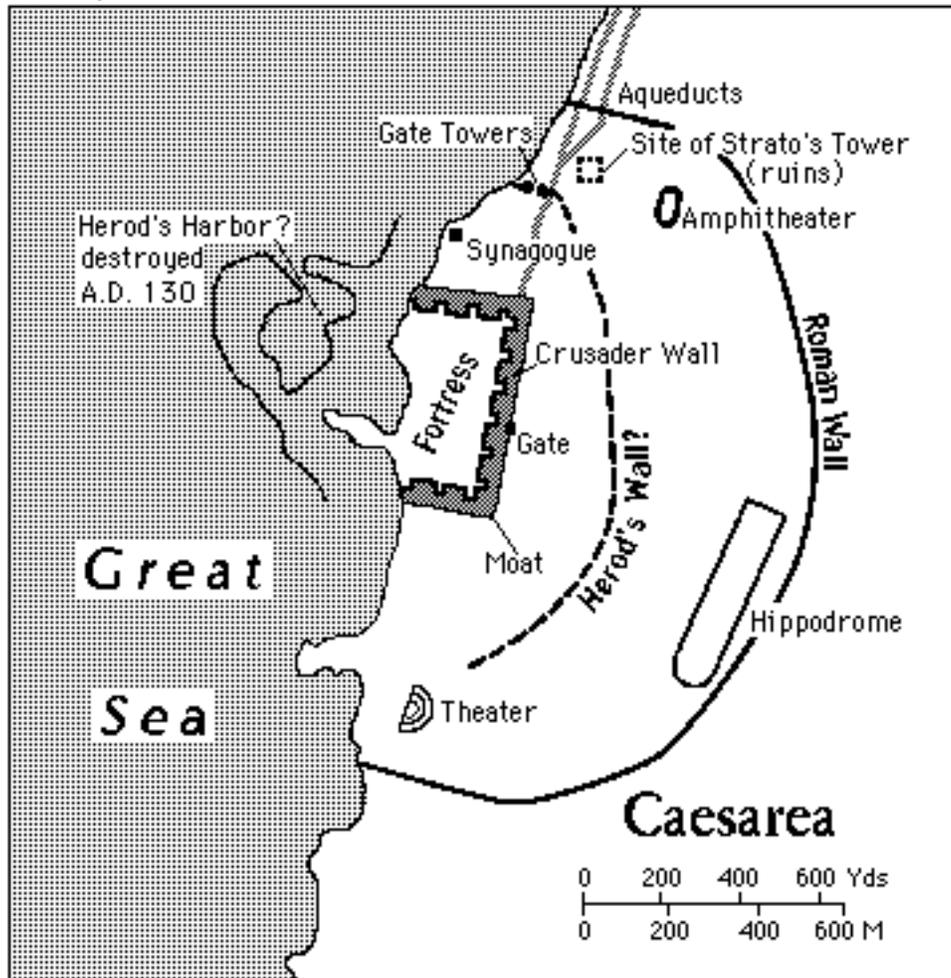
Caesarea was the capital of Roman government in Palestine for over six hundred years, serving as the seat of the Roman governors of the province of Judea and headquarters for the Roman legions stationed in the province. The great Jewish war against Rome began here with an uprising by the Jews in A.D. 66, and 'Judaea Capta' coins were minted here to commemorate their defeat. Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), proclaimed emperor by his legions while at Caesarea, raised the city to the rank of a Roman colony.

According to Acts, Christianity was preached in Caesarea by Philip (8:40) and Peter (10:1-11:18; cf. 15:7-9), the latter being responsible for the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius. Limen Sebastos was the port of arrival and departure for several of Paul's journeys according to Acts (Acts 9:30; 18:22; 21:8; 27:1-2). Paul was brought to Caesarea in custody from Jerusalem (Acts 23:23-35) to stand trial before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa II (Acts 24-26).

Excavations at Caesarea Maritima have revealed streets, palaces, public buildings, a temple, a hippodrome, a theater, and a spacious sewer system from the Roman and Byzantine periods. Marine archaeologists exploring the port have discovered the immense size of the harbor and some of the Roman mole forming the ancient breakwater.

Following the Islamic invasion of the seventh century, Caesarea declined rapidly, but Louis IX of France built a short-lived Crusader fortress at the site of the ancient harbor. **See also** Cornelius; Herod; Paul; Peter; Philip. M.K.M.

Based on available evidence, this plan of Caesarea highlights the city of Herod the Great and also includes buildings of other periods.
(HBD p. 148)



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Based on available evidence, this plan of Caesarea highlights the city of Herod the Great and also includes buildings of other periods.¹

¹ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Tarsus (tahr’suhs), a large, prosperous commercial city located on the Cydnus River, about ten miles from the Mediterranean Sea at the foothills of the Taurus Mountains on the southeastern coast of Asia Minor. Situated 79 feet above sea level in the fertile eastern plain of the region of Cilicia, Tarsus became the capital of the region under the Romans.

According to the Greek geographer Strabo (ca. 63 B.C.-A.D. 23), the Cydnus River had its source from the melting snows of the mountains above the city. The river flowed through the ancient capital into a lake some five miles to the south which served as a naval station and harbor for Tarsus. It was because of the river that inland Tarsus had the opportunity to develop into a thriving maritime center.

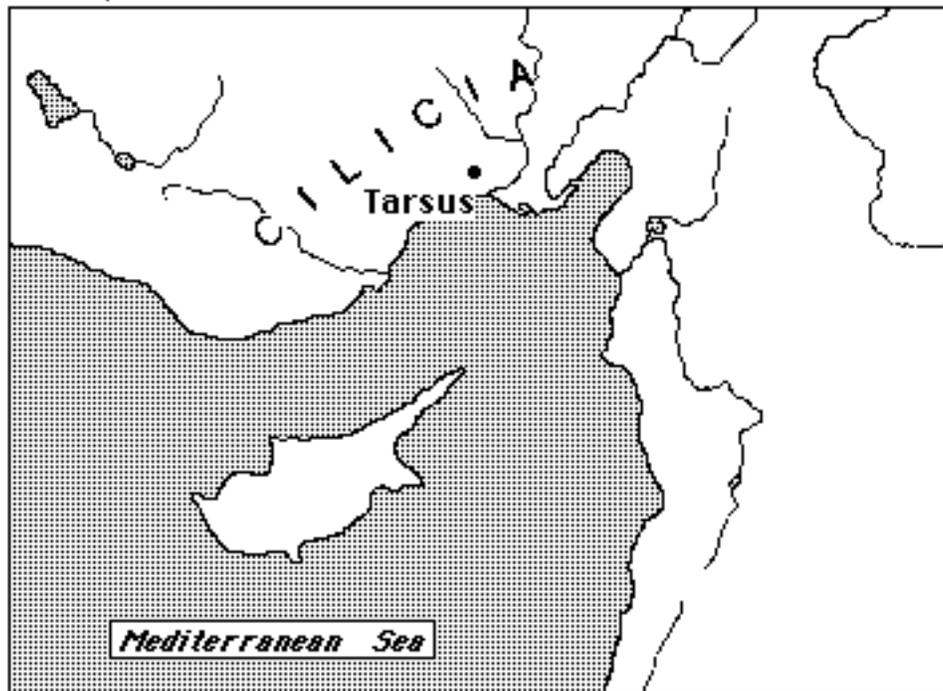
This feature, combined with the fact that the main trade routes passed north through Tarsus to central Asia Minor via the Cilician Gates in the Taurus Mountain pass, or east via the Syrian Gates of the Amanus Mountains to Syria, gave Tarsus a cosmopolitan nature. Paul’s boast, recorded in Acts, that Tarsus was ‘no mean city’ (Acts 21:39) was certainly warranted. It was the meeting place of West and East, of the Greek culture with its oriental counterpart.

The date of the foundation of the city is uncertain, but archaeological evidence shows habitation dated back to the Neolithic Period (ca. 5000 B.C.), and several Bronze Age (ca. 3000-1200 B.C.) cities were built successively on the site. In the middle of the tenth century B.C., the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III conquered Tarsus. When the city rebelled during the reign of Sennacherib a century later, it was destroyed. Rebuilt, Tarsus was under Persian control until it was taken in 333 B.C. by Alexander the Great, who resided there for a short period. The city passed into the hands of the Seleucid dynasty (312-65 B.C.), whose efforts to hellenize the inhabitants provoked an insurrection against Antiochus IV Epiphanes (2 Macc. 4:30). With the advent of the Romans, the region of Cilicia was organized into a Roman province with Tarsus as its capital.

Cicero, the Roman orator and statesman, was governor of Tarsus in 50 B.C. Mark Antony gave Tarsus the status of a free city, and it was here that he met Cleopatra in 41 B.C. It was under the rule of Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14) that the city came to its golden age and was renowned as a center of intellectual life, surpassing even Alexandria and Athens. Tarsus had long been a center of Stoic philosophy, and several of its citizens were famous Stoic philosophers: Zeno, Antipater, Athenodorus, and Nestor. One of the basic tenets of Stoicism states that virtue is the only good as well as the means of fortification against all the pressures of life. This concept seems to be reflected in some of Paul’s writings (e.g. Phil. 4:11-12).

The author of Acts understood Paul to be a citizen and native of Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3) and thus a Jew of the Dispersion (i.e., who lived outside Palestine). As a Jew of Tarsus, Paul would have been reared in a non-Jewish environment and would have spoken the common language of the Roman Empire, Greek. His knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures would have been from the Septuagint, the Greek translation from the original Hebrew. His Jewish name appears as ‘Saul’ (only in Acts), along with the Roman ‘Paul.’ **See also** Cilicia; Paul; Stoics. M.K.M.

(HBD p. 1018)



Location of Tarsus²

Joppa

Acts 10:1–8 (ESV)

¹ At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort, ² a devout man who feared God with all his household, gave alms generously to the people, and prayed continually to God. ³ About the ninth hour of the day he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God come in and say to him, "Cornelius." ⁴ And he stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" And he said to him, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. ⁵ And now send men to Joppa and bring one Simon who is called Peter. ⁶ He is lodging with one Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." ⁷ When the angel who spoke to him had departed, he called two of his servants and a devout soldier from among those who attended him, ⁸ and having related everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Signs & Wonders

Hebrews 2:4 (ESV)

⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

² Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In *Harper's Bible dictionary*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Asceticism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Asceticism (from the **Greek**: ἄσκησις, *askēsis*, "**exercise**" or "**training**") describes a lifestyle characterized by **abstinence** from various sorts of worldly pleasures often with the aim of pursuing religious and **spiritual** goals. Some forms of **Christianity** (see especially **Monastic life**) and the **Indian religions** (including **yoga**) teach salvation and liberation and involve a process of mind-body transformation effected by exercising restraint with respect to actions of body, speech, and mind. The founders and earliest practitioners of these religions (e.g. **Buddhism**, **Jainism**, the Christian **desert fathers**) lived extremely austere lifestyles, refraining from sensual pleasures and the accumulation of material wealth. This is to be understood not as an eschewal of the enjoyment of life, but a recognition that spiritual and religious goals are impeded by such indulgence. Those who practice ascetic lifestyles do not consider their practices virtuous in themselves, but pursue such a lifestyle to encourage, or 'prepare the ground' for, mind-body transformation. In the popular imagination, asceticism may be considered obsessive or even masochistic in nature. However, the *askēsis* enjoined by religion functions to bring about greater freedom in various areas of one's life (such as freedom from compulsions and temptations) and greater peacefulness of mind (with a concomitant increase in clarity and power of thought).^[*citation needed*]

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Etymology

The adjective "ascetic" derives from the ancient Greek term *askēsis* (practice, training or exercise). Originally associated with any form of disciplined practice, the term *ascetic* has come to mean anyone who practices a renunciation of worldly pursuits to achieve higher intellectual and spiritual goals for himself.

Askesis is a Greek Christian term, the practice of spiritual exercises, rooted in the philosophical tradition of antiquity. Originally introduced as the spiritual struggle of the **Greek Orthodox Church** as the style of life

where **meat, alcohol, sex** and ostentatious **clothing** are avoided, the term is now used in several

other relations.

Sociological and psychological views

Early 20th century German sociologist **Max Weber** made a distinction between *innerweltliche* and *ausserweltliche* asceticism, which means (roughly) "inside the world"

and "outside the world", respectively. Talcott Parson translated these as "worldly" and "otherworldly" -- however, some translators use "inner-worldly", and this is more in line with inner world explorations of mysticism, a common purpose of asceticism.. "Inner or Other-worldly" asceticism is practiced by people who withdraw from the world to live an ascetic life (this includes monks who live communally in monasteries, as well as hermits who live alone). "Worldly" asceticism refers to people who live ascetic lives but do not withdraw from the world. Weber claimed this distinction originated in the Protestant Reformation, but later became secularized, so the concept can be applied to both religious and secular ascetics. (See Talcott Parsons' translation of The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, translator's note on Weber's footnote 9 in chapter 2.)

Twentieth century American psychological theorist David McClelland suggested worldly asceticism is specifically targeted against worldly pleasures that "distract" people from their calling and may accept worldly pleasures that are not distracting. As an example, he pointed out Quakers have historically objected to bright-colored clothing, but wealthy Quakers often made their drab clothing out of expensive materials. The color was considered distracting, but the materials were not. Amish groups use similar criteria to make decisions about which modern technologies to use and which to avoid.^[1]

Religious motivation

Self-discipline and abstinence in some form and degree are parts of religious practice within many religious and spiritual traditions. A more dedicated ascetical lifestyle is associated particularly with monks, yogis or priests, but any individual may choose to lead an ascetic life. Shakyamuni Gautama (who left a more severe ascetism to seek a reasoned "middle way" of balanced life), Mahavir Swami, Anthony the Great (St. Anthony of the Desert), Francis of Assisi, Jesus, and Mahatma Gandhi can all be considered ascetics. Many of these men left their families, possessions, and homes to live a mendicant life, and in the eyes of their followers demonstrated great spiritual attainment or enlightenment.

Hinduism

See also: Tapas (Sanskrit)

Sadhus are known for the extreme forms of self-denial they occasionally practice. These include extreme acts of devotion to a deity or principle, such as vowing never to use one leg or the other or to hold an arm in the air for a period of months or years. The particular types of asceticism involved vary from sect to sect and from holy man to holy man.^[2]

The Rig Veda describes Kesins ("long-haired" ascetics) and Munis ("silent ones").^{[3][4]} The Kesins are described as friends of Vayu, Rudra, the Gandharvas and the Apsaras.^[5] There is also another story in the Rig Veda that Dhruva the son of Uttanapada (the son of Manu) performs penance, making him "one with Brahma".^[6]

In the Rig Veda, the Maruts (offspring of Rudra) are mentioned as "young seers who have knowledge of the truth" (V.58.8) and they are said to be "like the wild silent sages" (V.II.56.8). Yatin means "renunciate" and is a name given to mendicants in the Rig Veda.^[7]

Sanyasa is one of the four stages of life in Hinduism.

Within the Bhagavad Gita, sanyasa is described by Krishna as follows:

"The giving up of activities that are based on material desire is what great learned men call the renounced order of life [sanyasa]. And giving up the results of all activities is what the wise call renunciation [tyaga]." (18.2)^[8]

The term "tapas" is used in the Rig Veda to connote the burning of desires.^[9]

Keeping silence, even in times of verbal abuse, was practiced by Hindu ascetics.^[10]

Yajnavalkya also describes Brahmans as "Bhiksacaryas".^[5]

Different types of ascetics are Sanyasis (renunciants who wander forest usually with other renunciants), vairagis, jangamas (who have matted hair and put chains on their feet), sarevras (who shave their heads), and yogis (who practice yoga).

Jainism

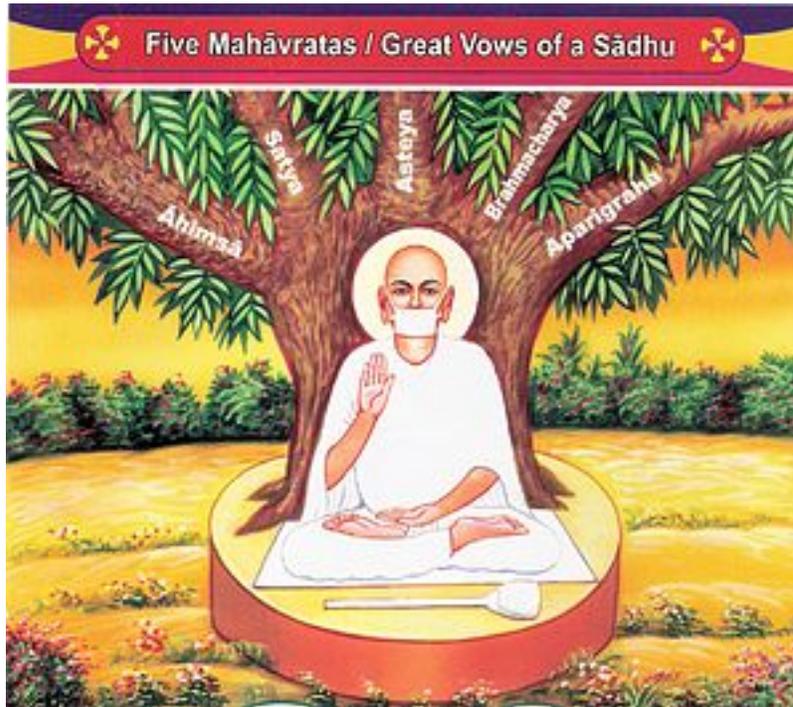


Acharya Vidyasagar, Digambara Jain monk

Asceticism in one of its most intense forms can be found in one of the oldest religions, known as Jainism. Jainism encourages fasting, yoga practices, meditation in difficult postures, and other austerities.^[11] According to Jains, one's highest goal should be moksha (i.e., liberation from samsara, the cycle of birth and rebirth). For this, a soul has to be without attachment or self-indulgence. This can be achieved only by the monks and nuns who take five great vows: Ahimsa (Non-violence), Satya (Truth), Asteya (Non-stealing), Brahmacharya (Chastity) and Aparigraha (Non-attachment). Most of the austerities and ascetic practices can be traced back to Vardhaman Mahavira, the twenty-fourth "fordmaker" or Tirthankara.

The Acaranga Sutra, or Book of Good Conduct, is a sacred book in Jainism that discusses the ascetic code of conduct. Other texts that provide insight into conduct of ascetics include Yogashastra by Acharya Hemachandra and Niyamasara by Acharya Kundakunda. Other illustrious Jain works on ascetic conduct are Oghanijjutti, Pindanijjutti, Cheda Sutta, and Nisiha Suttafee.

Ascetic vows



Five Mahavratas of Jain ascetics

As per the Jain vows, the monks and nuns renounce all relations and possessions. Jain ascetics practice complete nonviolence. Ahimsa is the first and foremost vow of a Jain ascetic. They do not hurt any living being, be it an insect or a human. They carry a special broom to sweep any insects that may cross their path. Some Jain monks wear a cloth over the mouth to prevent accidental harm to airborne germs and insects. They also do not use electricity as it involves violence. Furthermore, they do not use any devices or machines.

As they are possession-less and without any attachment, they travel from city to city, often crossing forests and deserts and always barefoot. Jain ascetics do not stay in a single place for more than two months to prevent attachment to any place. However, during four months of monsoon (rainy season) known as *chaturmaas*, they continue to stay at a single place to avoid killing life forms that thrive during the rains. Jain monks and nuns practice complete celibacy. They do not touch or share a sitting platform with a person of the opposite sex.

Dietary practices

Jain ascetics follow a strict vegetarian diet without root vegetables. Shvetambara monks do not cook food but solicit alms from householders. Digambara monks have only a single meal a day. Neither group will beg for food, but a Jain ascetic may accept a meal from a householder, provided that the latter is pure of mind and body and offers the food of his own volition and in the prescribed manner. During such an encounter, the monk remains standing and eats only a measured amount. Fasting (i.e., abstinence from food and sometimes water) is a routine feature of Jain asceticism. Fasts last for a day or longer, up to a month. Some monks avoid (or limit) medicine and/or hospitalization out of disregard for the physical body.

Austerities and other daily practices



White-clothed Acharya Kalaka

Other austerities include meditation in seated or standing posture near river banks in the cold wind or meditation atop hills and mountains, especially at noon when the sun is at its fiercest. Such austerities are undertaken according to the physical and mental limits of the individual ascetic. Jain ascetics are (almost) completely without possessions. Some Jains (Shvetambara monks and nuns) own only unstitched white robes (an upper and lower garment) and a bowl used for eating and collecting alms. Male Digambara monks do not wear any clothes and carry nothing with them except a soft broom made of shed peacock feathers (*pinchi*) and eat from their hands. They sleep on the floor without blankets and sit on special wooden platforms.

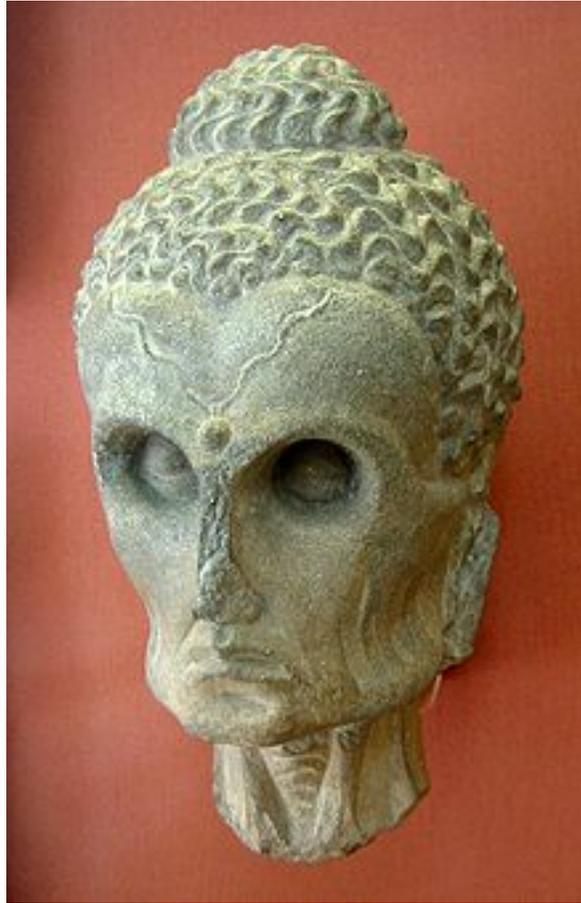
Every day is spent either in study of scriptures or meditation or teaching to lay people. They stand aloof from worldly matters. When death is imminent or when a monk feels that he is unable to adhere to his vows due to advanced age or terminal disease, many Jain ascetics take a final vow of *Santhara* or *Sallekhana*, a peaceful and detached death where medicines, food and water are abandoned.

Quotes on ascetic practices from the Akaranga Sutra as [Hermann Jacobi](#) translated it^[12][1]:

A monk or a nun wandering from village to village should look forward for four cubits and seeing animals they should move on by walking on his toes or heels or the sides of his feet. If there be some bypath, they should choose it and not go straight on; then they may circumspectly wander from village to village. ~Third Lecture(6)

'I shall become a Sramana who owns no house, no property, no sons, no cattle, who eats what others give him; I shall commit no sinful action; Master, I renounce to accept anything that has not been given.' Having taken such vows, (a mendicant) should not, on entering a village or scot-free town, etc., take himself or induce others to take or allow others to take, what has not been given. ~Seventh Lecture (1)

Buddhism



The Buddha as an ascetic. [Gandhara](#), 2-3rd century CE. [British Museum](#).

Theravada

The historical [Siddhartha Gautama](#) adopted an extreme ascetic life after leaving his father's palace, where he once lived in extreme luxury. But later the Shakyamuni rejected extreme asceticism because it is an impediment to ultimate freedom ([nirvana](#)) from suffering ([samsara](#)), choosing instead a path that met the needs of the body without crossing over into luxury and indulgence. After abandoning extreme asceticism he was able to achieve [enlightenment](#). This position became known as the [Madhyamaka](#) or Middle Way and became one of the central organizing principles of [Theravadin](#) philosophy.

The degree of moderation suggested by this middle path varies depending on the interpretation of [Theravadinism](#) at hand. Some traditions emphasize ascetic life more than others.

The basic lifestyle of an ordained Theravadin practitioner ([bhikkhu](#), monk; or [bhikkhuni](#), nun) as described in the [Vinaya Pitaka](#) was intended to be neither excessively austere nor hedonistic. Monks and nuns were intended to have enough of life's basic requisites (particularly food, water, clothing and shelter) to live safely and healthily, without being troubled by illness or weakness. While the life described in the Vinaya may appear difficult, it would be perhaps better described as [Spartan](#) rather than truly ascetic. Deprivation for its own sake is not valued. Indeed, it may be seen as a sign of attachment to one's own renunciation. The aim of the monastic lifestyle was to

prevent concern for the material circumstances of life from intruding on the monk or nun's ability to engage in religious practice. To this end, having inadequate possessions was regarded as being no more desirable than having too many. Initially, the Tathagata rejected a number of more specific ascetic practices that some monks requested to follow. These practices — such as sleeping in the open, dwelling in a cemetery or cremation ground, wearing only cast-off rags, etc. — were initially seen as too extreme, being liable to either upset the social values of the surrounding community or as likely to create schisms among the Sangha by encouraging monks to compete in austerity. Despite their early prohibition, recorded in the Pali Canon, these practices (known as the Dhutanga practices or in Thai as *thudong*) eventually became acceptable to the monastic community. They were recorded by Buddhaghosa in his Visuddhimagga and later became significant in the practices of the Thai Forest Tradition.

Mahayana

The Mahayana traditions of Buddhism received a slightly different code of discipline than that used by the various Theravada sects. This fact, combined with significant regional and cultural variations, has resulted in differing attitudes towards asceticism in different areas of the Mahayana world. Particularly notable is the role that vegetarianism plays in East Asian Buddhism, particularly in China and Japan. While Theravada monks are compelled to eat whatever is provided for them by their lay supporters, including meat, Mahayana monks in East of Asia are most often vegetarian. This is attributable to a number of factors, including Mahayana-specific teachings regarding vegetarianism, East Asian cultural tendencies that predate the introduction of Buddhism (some of which may have their roots in Confucianism) and the different manner in which monks support themselves in East Asia. While Southeast Asian and Sri Lankan monks generally continue to make daily begging rounds to receive their daily meal, monks in East Asia more commonly receive bulk foodstuffs from lay supporters (or the funds to purchase them) and are fed from a kitchen located on the site of the temple or monastery and staffed either by working monks or by lay supporters. Similarly, divergent scriptural and cultural trends have brought a stronger emphasis on asceticism to some Mahayana practices. The Lotus Sutra, for instance, contains a story of a bodhisattva who burns himself as an offering to the assembly of all Buddhas in the world. This has become a patterning story for self-sacrifice in the Mahayana world, probably providing the inspiration for the self-immolation of the Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc during the 1960s, as well as several other incidents.

Judaism

Main article: Asceticism in Judaism

The history of Jewish asceticism goes back thousands of years to the references of the Nazirite (Numbers 6) and the Wilderness Tradition that evolved out of the forty years in the desert. The prophets and their disciples were ascetic to the extreme including many examples of fasting and hermitic living conditions. After the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile and the Mosaic institution was done away with a different form of asceticism arose when Antiochus IV Epiphanes threatened the Jewish religion in 167 BC. With the rise of the Hasmoneans and finally Jonathan's claim to the High Priesthood in 152 BC, the Essene sect separated under the Teacher of Righteousness and they took the banner of asceticism for the next two hundred years

culminating in the Dead Sea Sect. The Hassidean sect, founded by the Ba'al Shem Tov in the 18th century, attracted observant Jews to its fold and they lived as holy warriors in the wilderness during the war against the Seleucid Empire.^[citation needed]

Asceticism is rejected by modern day Judaism; it is considered contrary to God's wishes for the world. God intended the world to be enjoyed, and people be in good spirits when praying.^[13] However, Judaism does not encourage people to seek pleasure for its own sake but rather to do so in a spiritual way. An example would be thanking God for creating something enjoyable, like a wonderful view or tasty food. As another example, while remembering that a person may be fulfilling the commandments of marriage and pru-urvuv (procreation), sex should also be enjoyed. It's a commandment of Halakha for a man to have sex with his wife even if she cannot conceive (possibly after menopause or due to infertility) to bring her pleasure and promulgate their intimacy. Also, food can be enjoyed by remembering that it is necessary to eat, but by thanking God for making it an enjoyable process and by not overeating or eating wastefully.

Modern normative Judaism is in opposition to the lifestyle of asceticism and sometimes cast the Nazirite vow in a critical light. There did exist some ascetic Jewish sects in ancient times, most notably the Essenes and Ebionites. Further, some early Kabbalists may have led a lifestyle that could be regarded as ascetic.^[citation needed] And the more extreme forms of self-mortification practiced by early mystical sects of Judaism were shunned by the Hassidic movement. Because these practices of self-mortification would lead to downheartedness, the Ba'al Shem Tov said this is not the right state for someone to be worshipping Hashem (God).

Christianity

See also: Ascetical theology and Degrees of Orthodox monasticism

Asceticism is closely related to the Christian concept of chastity and might be said to be the technical implementation of the abstract vows of renunciation. Different religious groups within Christianity have differing views on the subject of asceticism; the Catholic Church, as well as the Eastern Orthodox churches, Oriental Orthodox churches and some Anglican churches, all see value in asceticism, while most of the Protestant denominations view asceticism generally in a negative light. One Christian context of asceticism is the liturgical season of Lent, the period between Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, leading up to Easter. During this season Catholics are commanded to practice prayer, fasting, especially on Fridays and special holy days and charitable giving. Many other Christians also practice these traditional Lenten disciplines.

In the Christian Gospels, both the practice of asceticism and also the enjoyment of the good things of the world are depicted, which seem to each have their proper time and place. John the Baptist, forerunner to Jesus, is depicted as a desert ascetic according to the image of an Old Testament Prophet "Clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey" (Mk 1:6). Jesus also is depicted as spending 40 days fasting in the desert and experiencing temptations prior to the beginning of his ministry (Lk 4 1-13). Later, Jesus is frequently depicted sharing and enjoying food and drink with his followers and others, including publicly known sinners, to the scandal of some people. Jesus' followers ask him about this: "They said to him, 'John's disciples often fast and pray and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.' Jesus answered, 'Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast'" (Lk 5:33-35). This has most often been interpreted to mean that after

Jesus' death his followers will practice fasting, at least sometimes. Or merely to foretell his death and the three days and nights when they perhaps went without food to show their grief.

Saint Paul speaks of his own asceticism in his New Testament epistles and also offers some nuance about true and false asceticism. For instance he writes of disciplining his body like an athlete, in order to subordinate it to reason in the service of the Gospel: "Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things. They do this to win a crown of leaves that wither, but we a crown that is imperishable" 1 Cor 9:25.

Christian authors of late antiquity such as Origen, Jerome,^[14] St. Ignatius,^[15] John Chrysostom, and Augustine interpreted meanings of Biblical texts within a highly asceticized religious environment. Scriptural examples of asceticism could be found in the lives of John the Baptist, Jesus, the twelve apostles and Saint Paul. The Dead Sea Scrolls revealed ascetic practices of the ancient Jewish sect of Essenes who took vows of abstinence to prepare for a holy war. Thus, the asceticism of practitioners like Jerome was hardly original (although some of his critics thought it was) and a desert ascetic like Antony the Great (251-356) was in the tradition of ascetics in noted communities and sects of the previous centuries. Clearly, emphasis on an ascetic religious life was evident in both early Christian writings (see the Philokalia) and practices (see hesychasm). Other Christian practitioners of asceticism include individuals such as Simeon Stylites, Saint David of Wales and Francis of Assisi. (See *The Catholic Encyclopedia* for a fuller discussion.)

The deserts of the middle-east were at one time said to have been inhabited by thousands of hermits^[16] amongst whom St. Anthony the Great (aka St. Anthony of the Desert), St. Mary of Egypt, and a particularly unusual example is St. Simeon Stylites.

Sexual abstinence was only one aspect of ascetic renunciation. The ancient monks and nuns had other, equally weighty concerns: pride, humility, compassion, discernment, patience, judging others, prayer, hospitality and almsgiving. For some early Christians, gluttony represented a more primordial problem than lust and as such the reduced intake of food is also a facet of asceticism. As an illustration, the systematic collection of the Apophthegmata Patrum, or Sayings of the desert fathers and mothers has more than twenty chapters divided by theme; only one chapter is devoted to porneia ("sexual lust"). (See Elizabeth A. Clark. *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.) Nowadays, the monastic state of Mount Athos, having a history of over a millennium, is a center of Christian spirituality and asceticism in Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Catholic and Orthodox Christians have strongly tended to view Christian fasting, chastity and other ascetic practice as oriented toward desire and love for Christ (the "bridegroom" of the Church, still really present, these traditions believe, in the Eucharist) over and above all other things, even though the entire creation is affirmed as good. In Catholic theology this is expressed as an inseparable relationship between ascetical and mystical theology, as if the human and divine dimensions of living the Christian spiritual life of incarnate divine love, for instance as described by St. John of the Cross.

Asceticism within Catholic tradition includes spiritual disciplines practiced to work out the believer's salvation by expressing one's repentance for sin and cultivating the virtues, with the ultimate aim of purifying the heart and mind, by God's grace, for encounter with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, (see Kenosis). The fruit of the ascetical life is the flourishing of the soul in the love of God and neighbor in preparation for the vision of God in eternity.

Those monks and nuns today, such as those in the Roman Catholic religious orders of the Carthusians and Cistercians, who are known for especially strict acts of asceticism, echo the even more rigorous ascetic practices were common in the early Church.

Protestant Christians vary widely in their attitudes toward and practices of asceticism.

The Protestant reformers often strongly criticized monasticism and Catholic ascetical practices, contrasting these human works through which people participate in working out their salvation, with "faith alone" in Jesus as savior. Some Protestants are vehement about this to the point of rejecting the whole idea of asceticism, citing St. Paul's teaching in his epistle to the Romans that justification is by faith in Jesus rather than by works such as adherence to Jewish law or similarly in 1 Timothy 4:2-3 speaks against those who would turn Christians away from true faith by imposing unnecessary religious rules: "liars with branded consciences.... forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God required to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." However, many Protestants embrace "spiritual disciplines" such as fasting and disciplined dedication to prayer as a positive and Biblically based means of growth in the Christian life. The Lutheran Church encourages fasting during Lent, similar to the Roman Catholic teaching. Individuals in mainline Pentecostal denominations undertake both short and extended fasts as they believe the Holy Spirit leads them. For Charismatic Christians fasting is undertaken at the leading of God. Fasting is done in order to seek a closer intimacy with God, as well as an act of petition. Holiness movements, such as those started by John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield in the early days of Methodism, often practice such regular fasts as part of their regimen.

Islam

Main article: Dervish

Main article: Faqir

See also: Sufism

The Islamic word for asceticism is **zuhd**. Mohammed is quoted to have said, "What have I to do with worldly things? My connection with the world is like that of a traveler resting for a while underneath the shade of a tree and then moving on." He advised the general people to live simple lives and himself practiced great austerities. Even when he had become the virtual king of Arabia, he lived an austere life bordering on privation. His wife Ayesha said that there was hardly a day in his life when he had two square meals. The prophet advised against wearing rich silken cloths. He himself is said to have only worn some izaars together with a sheet that covered his upper body. A narration reports that he would sleep on the ground, on a mat made of coarse straw, and the markings of the straw would be impressed on his skin when he got up. When he was gifted a new izaar, he preferred to wear the old ones he had. He is also known to not eat meat every day, but only on special occasions.

Zoroastrianism

In Zoroastrianism, active participation in life through good thoughts, good words and good deeds is necessary to ensure happiness and to keep the chaos at bay. This *active* participation is a central element in Zoroaster's concept of free will and Zoroastrianism rejects all forms of asceticism and monasticism.

Secular motivation

Examples of secular asceticism:

- A starving artist is someone who minimizes their living expenses in order to spend more time and effort on their art.
- Many professional athletes abstain from sex, rich foods, and other pleasures before major competitions in order to mentally prepare themselves for the upcoming contest.
- Straight edge people abstain from alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and casual sex as part of a sub-culture lifestyle choice.
- A secular person may practice an ascetic lifestyle for a day, month, or an extended period of time as a test of will, or practicing the ability to "say no" to bodily desires.
- Secular meditation practices require ascetic lifestyles.
- Living ascetically for a period of time may also be in honor of a tradition (e.g. remembering ancestors and their struggles) or a purpose, such as protesting over-indulgent living, et cetera.

Religious versus secular motivation

The observation of an ascetic lifestyle can be found in both religious and secular settings. For example, practices based on a religious motivation might include fasting, abstention from sex, and other forms of self-denial intended to increase religious awareness or attain a closer relationship with a purported "divine". Non-religious (or not specifically religious) practices might be seen in such an example as Spartans undertaking regimens of severe physical discipline to prepare for battle.

Philosophical view

In the third essay ("What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?") from his book *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Friedrich Nietzsche discusses what he terms the "ascetic ideal" and its role in the formulation of morality along with the history of the will. In the essay, Nietzsche describes how such a paradoxical action as asceticism might serve the interests of life: through asceticism one can attain mastery over oneself. In this way one can express both ressentiment and the will to power. Nietzsche describes the morality of the ascetic priest as characterized by Christianity as one where, finding oneself in pain, one places the blame for the pain on oneself and thereby attempts and attains mastery over the world,^[17] a technique which Nietzsche locates at the very origin of secular science as well as of religion.

See also

- Aesthetism (opposite)
- Anatta
- Abstinence
- Arthur Schopenhauer
- Altruism
- Cenobite
- Cynicism
- Ctistae
- Decadence (usually opposite)
- Desert Mothers
- Egotism (opposite)
- Epicureanism
- Fakir
- Fasting

- [Flagellant](#)
- [Gustave Flaubert](#)
- [Hedonism](#) (opposite)
- [Hermit](#)
- [Hermitage](#)
- [Lent](#)
- [Minimalism](#)
- [Monasticism](#)
- [Nazirite](#)
- [Ramadan](#)
- [Rechabites](#)
- [Sensory deprivation](#)
- [Simple living](#)
- [Stoicism](#)

References

1. [^] [McClelland](#), *The Achieving Society*, 1961
2. [^] **Rules and Regulations of Brahmanical Asceticism** - Yatidharmasamuccaya of Yadava Prakasa/ Translated by Patrick Olivelle (Sri Satguru Publications/ Delhi) is a must-read book in this context.
3. [^] P. 77 *An Introduction to Hinduism* By Gavin D. Flood
4. [^] P. 137 *The Rig Veda* By Wendy Doniger, Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty
5. [^] [a b](#) P. 377 *Classical Hinduism* By Mariasusai Dhavamony
6. [^] P. 460 *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* By John McClintock, James Strong
7. [^] Saraswati, N. & Saraswati, S., P. 20 *Sannyasa Tantra*
8. [^] [Bhagavad Gita 18.2](#)
9. [^] P. 34 *India and the Greek world: a study in the transmission of culture* By Jean W. Sedlar
10. [^] P. 134 *The rule of Saint Benedict and the ascetic traditions from Asia to the West* By Mayeul de Dreuille
11. [^] Frank William Iklé et al. "A History of Asia", page ?. Allyn and Bacon, 1964
12. [^] Hermann Jacobi, "Sacred Books of the East", vol. 22: Gaina Sutras Part I. 1884
13. [^] http://www.aish.com/literacy/judaism123/Five_Levels_of_Pleasure.asp
14. [^] <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01767c.htm> New Advent - Catholic Encyclopedia: Asceticism, quoting St. Jerome
15. [^] <http://www.ellopos.net/notebook/ignatius.asp?pg=5> From Chapter 1 of a letter from Ignatius to Polycarp
16. [^] for a study of the continuation of this early tradition in the Middle Ages, see Marina Miladinov, *Margins of Solitude: Eremitism in Central Europe between East and West* (Zagreb: Leykam International, 2008)
17. [^] The final sentence of the book puts it like this: "For man would rather will even nothingness than 'not will.'" (Kaufmann's trans.)

Further reading

- Valantasis, Richard. *The Making of the Self: Ancient and Modern Asceticism*. James Clarke & Co (2008) ISBN 978-0-227-17281-0.
- [The Virtue of Asceticism - Nick Austin SJ](#)

External links

- [Asketikos](#)- articles, research, and discourse on asceticism.
- [St. Simeon Stylites by George Lamb](#)
- [Concordia Cyclopaedia: Asceticism](#)
- [Christian Cyclopaedia: Asceticism](#)
- [Zuhd \(Asceticism\)](#)
- [Practising az-Zuhd in the Dunya](#)

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