

## Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus

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### The Traditional (but *Inaccurate*) Division of Paul’s Travels:

People usually talk about “Paul’s Three Missionary Journeys” followed by “Paul’s Voyage to Rome”:

- 1) **Acts 13–14** - A journey through Cyprus, Pamphylia, and Pisidia (today’s South-Central Turkey).
- 2) **Acts 15:39–18:22** - A journey through Macedonia and Achaia (modern Greece) and Asia Minor (Western Turkey).
- 3) **Acts 18:23–21:16** - Another Journey through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia, ending in Jerusalem.
- R) **Acts 22–28** - After being arrested in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea, Paul is taken by ship to Rome.

### Problems with this schema:

- *Paul is not in charge* during the *first* journey; rather, **Barnabas** is the leader of the mission and Paul is his assistant (see Acts 9:27; 11:25-30; 13:1-3; **14:12**).
- After Paul and Barnabas separate, *Paul never travels or works alone*, but always has a growing number of **assistants** (esp. Timothy; see **Acts 15:39-40; 16:1-3**; and the beginnings of most of Paul’s letters).
- The so-called second & third “journeys” are *not circle-trips leaving and returning to Antioch* (see Acts 18:18-23).
  - Rather, Paul makes a *definite break* with Barnabas and the Church at Antioch (see **Gal 2:11-14**; Acts 15:39-40).
  - He spends several years preaching & founding churches in Macedonia & Achaia, esp. in the city of **Corinth**.
  - After leaving Corinth, he makes his main base of missionary operations in **Ephesus**, the capital of Asia Minor.
- If Paul ever returned to **Antioch**, it was probably only for a *brief visit* (see Acts 18:22-23); but he is no longer a member of the community there, nor commissioned by them to go out and preach.

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### A More Accurate and Comprehensive Overview: Five Main Phases of Paul’s Life

The following chronology is based on a combination of evidence from Paul’s own letters and from the Acts of the Apostles, since neither gives us a complete picture and there are some points of tension between them.

#### 0) *Pre-Christian Phase* (ca. AD 10–35)

- A. Paul was a Jew who was born in **Tarsus**, the capital of CILICIA (Acts 9:11, 30; 11:25; 21:39), but possibly also lived and received part of his education in *Jerusalem*, “at the feet of Gamaliel” (Acts 22:3).
- B. He was a *Hebrew*, born of Hebrew parents (Phil 3:5; 2 Cor 11:22); probably also a *Roman citizen* (Acts 22:25-29; 23:27).
- C. He was *bi-lingual* (Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek) and *bi-cultural* (Jewish and Hellenistic/Greek), making him an ideal “transition figure” for the spread of early Christianity from Palestine to the rest of the Roman empire.
- D. He was originally named “Saul” (Acts 7:58–13:9; 22:7; 26:14), but later (as a Christian) changed his name to “Paul” (see Acts 13:9ff and in all the Epistles).
- E. Raised as a *Pharisee*, he was very *zealous* for the Torah & Jewish Traditions (Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6-9; 26:5).
- F. He begins *persecuting* the followers of Jesus, because he considers belief in Jesus as Messiah to be incompatible with Judaism (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:5-6; 1 Cor 15:9; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 26:4-12).

#### 1) *First Phase of Paul’s New Christian Life: In the EAST* (ca. AD 35–49)

- A. Jesus “reveals” himself to Paul (traditionally called Paul’s “conversion”) while Paul is traveling on the road to **Damascus** in southern SYRIA (Gal 1:11-12, 15-16; 1 Cor 15:8-10; Acts 9:3-30; 22:6-21; 26:12-18).
- B. Paul begins preaching in Arabia, Damascus, Syria, and Cilicia, despite some opposition (Gal 1:17-24; 2 Cor 11:23-33).
- C. Barnabas takes interest in Paul, helps & protects him, introduces him to other Christians (Acts 9:26-30; 11:25-30; 12:25).
- D. Commissioned by the church of **Antioch**, in Northern SYRIA, Barnabas and Paul go on their first missionary journey to Cyprus, Pamphylia, and Phrygia (Acts 13–14); Barnabas is clearly the leader, with Paul as his assistant (see esp. Acts **14:12**, when Barnabas is called “Zeus,” the king of Greek gods, while Paul is called “Hermes,” the Greek messenger god).
- E. Barnabas and Paul participate in the “**Council of Jerusalem**” (ca. AD 49; Gal 2:1-10; Acts 15)  
(Note: Many scholars think this council was slightly later, ca. AD 51.)

## 2) *Early Independent Missionary Phase: In MACEDONIA & ACHAIA (ca. AD 50–52)*

- A. Paul breaks with Barnabas due to the “**Incident at Antioch**” (contrast Gal 2:11-14 with Acts 15:36-41).
- B. Paul travels with Silas & Timothy through ASIA and crosses over to **MACEDONIA**, where they establish small Christian churches, esp. in **Philippi & Thessalonica**, possibly also in Beroea (Acts 16:1–17:15).
- C. After getting kicked out of one Macedonian city after another, the three missionaries go down to **ACHAIA**; Paul alone briefly visits *Athens*, but his preaching is not very successful there (Acts 17:16-34).
- D. They move on to **Corinth**, the capital of ACHAIA, where they stay for over 18 months (Acts 18:11, 18); they meet Prisca & Aquila in Corinth soon after **Emperor Claudius** had expelled Jews from Rome in AD 49 (Acts 18:2).
- E. Paul is brought to trial before the **Proconsul Gallio** (Acts 18:12-17), who was in *Achaia only in AD 51–52*; this fact is the only fixed date in the chronology of Paul’s life, from which all other dates are calculated backward or forward.
- F. From Corinth, Paul & his companions *write 1 Thess, and probably also 2 Thess* (see 1 Thess 3:1-6).

## 3) *Mature Missionary Leadership Phase: In ASIA Minor (ca. AD 53–57)*

- A. Paul travels through Asia, then to Syria (including brief visits to Jerusalem and Antioch), and back again to **Ephesus**, the capital of ASIA (Acts 18:18–19:41).
- B. He remains in **Ephesus** for *at least 27 months*, probably longer, preaching and strengthening the churches (Acts 19:8, 10, 22); Ephesus becomes his “missionary headquarters” with more and more associates over time.
- C. Paul travels personally and sends & receives messengers and letters back and forth from Ephesus to Macedonia, Corinth, various parts of Asia Minor, and possibly other regions (1 Cor 16:5-12; 2 Cor 8-9; Phil 2:19-30; 4:10-20).
- D. He and his associates found other Christian communities in and around Asia Minor; e.g., *Epaphras* establishes a church in Colossae (Col 1:7).
- E. Paul encounters opposition from Jews and Gentiles, and is blamed for a riot caused by some silversmiths in Ephesus, since he preached against the “idolatry” of worshipping pagan gods (see Acts 19:26); he probably spends some time in prison in Ephesus.
- F. From Ephesus, Paul & his companions *write 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Phil, Phlm, and probably Gal* (see 1 Cor 15:32; 16:8; 16:19).

## 4) *Final Missionary Travel Phase: To the WEST (ca. AD 58–62/64)*

- A. Paul wants to go to Rome & Spain, but first to collect & deliver money for poor Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; Rom 15:22-32; Acts 19:21); he stays in **Corinth** three more months (Acts 20:3), and *writes Rom* from there (Rom 16).
- B. Paul and some associates deliver this collection to **Jerusalem**; soon he is arrested in the Temple (Acts 20–21).
- C. Paul is held under arrest for about two years in **Caesarea**; at his trial he appeals to Caesar and is taken to **Rome**, where he remains under house-arrest for two more years (Acts 22–28); possibly *writes Col from prison in Caesarea*.
- D. We cannot be sure what happened next, since nothing else is written in Acts: either he was tried, found guilty, and executed; or he was tried, found innocent and released, so he might have gone to preach in **Spain**, as he had planned.
- E. Early Christian tradition agrees Paul was executed during the reign of Emperor Nero; but we cannot be sure whether it was at the end of his first Roman imprisonment (AD 62), or after his return from Spain (AD 64), since his death is not recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

## X) *After Paul’s Death: His legacy continues (AD 60’s - 90’s and beyond)*

- A. Paul’s associates continue to preach, gain converts, build up Christian churches, address problems, write letters, etc.
- B. *1 Tim, 2 Tim, Tit, and Eph* are probably *pseudepigraphic* (i.e., letters written in Paul’s name by his followers after his death).
- C. **Ephesus** and Colossae remain strong centers of Pauline-style Christianity, possibly led by Timothy and Onesimus.
- D. Someone begins collecting and editing Paul’s letters (cf. 2 Pet 3:15-16); by the late first century, about 10 letters are circulating together (not yet 1 Tim, 2 Tim, or Tit); Ephesians possibly functions as an introduction or “cover letter.”
- E. Eventually, *thirteen letters* attributed to Paul are recognized as “canonical” (i.e., accepted in the NT; the “Letter to the Hebrews” was sometimes also thought to be written by Paul, but most scholars and church leaders today agree that it is not Pauline).
- F. Other legends about Paul develop, as recorded in *non-canonical* works (e.g., “Acts of Paul”; “Acts of Paul and Thecla”).

## New Testament Letter Structure

### Standard Structure of Ancient Letters:

Written communications today follow some fairly common and standard formats:

- *Personal letters* usually begin something like “Dear Mary” and end with “Love, John.” We write the date near the top right, sometimes write a P.S. after the signature, fold the letter, put it in an envelope, and write the recipient’s address and the return address on the outside.
- *Business memos* or E-mail messages often have a header with four parts (To: / From: / Date: / Re: or From: / Sent: / To: / Subject:).

Most letters written in the *ancient world* also followed a standardized format, but one which is slightly different from today. The *letters in the NT* written by and/or attributed to Paul and the other Apostles usually follow the standard expectations of their day. Although there are some variations in individual letters (esp. in the body and conclusion), the basic structure of ancient letters can be outlined as follows:

<b>I) Letter Beginning</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sender(s): From whom</li> <li>2. Recipient(s): To whom</li> <li>3. Formal Greeting</li> <li>4. Thanksgiving (or Blessing)</li> </ol>	<b>II) Letter Body</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Initial Exhortation</li> <li>2. Thesis Statement</li> <li>3. Theological Discussion</li> <li>4. Ethical Admonition</li> </ol>	<b>III) Letter Conclusion</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Practical Matters</li> <li>2. Individual Greetings</li> <li>3. Personal Postscript</li> <li>4. Doxology or Prayer</li> </ol>
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### Special Features of the Pauline Letters:

- In most of these letters, Paul is *not the only author*, but one or more *co-authors* are mentioned (who is usually listed? which letters mention Paul alone? why?)
- These letters are *not addressed to all the people* in the respective cities, but only to small groups of *Christian* believers (exactly how does Paul refer to them?)
- Paul’s standard “Formal Greeting” *combines* a variation of the usual *Greek* greeting (*chaire* - “Grace”) and the common *Jewish* greeting (*shalom* - “Peace”)
- All the letters written by or attributed to Paul contain the standard three main sections, but not all Pauline letters contain all subsections exactly as listed above:
  - sometimes a subsection is omitted, (e.g., in the opening of Gal; at the end of 1 Thess)
  - sometimes the order of subsections is changed (esp. the endings of many of Paul’s letters)
  - sometimes letters have more than one section of the same type (e.g., two “thanksgivings” in 1 & 2 Thess)
  - theological, ethical, and practical concerns are often intertwined (esp. in long letters), so verse divisions in “Body” sections below are only suggestions.

### Applying Pauline Letter Structure for Religious Education Settings:

<b>I) Session Beginning</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Teachers/Leaders:</i> Recall we are “apostles”/“servants” of Christ</li> <li>2. <i>Participants/Learners:</i> Think of them as “saints” &amp; “holy ones”</li> <li>3. <i>Formal Greeting:</i> “Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (<i>adapt to culture</i>)</li> <li>4. <i>Thanksgiving (or Blessing):</i> Give thanks <u>to</u> God <u>for</u> your students</li> </ol>	<b>II) Session Body</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Initial Exhortation:</i> Remind them of our “Vocation” as Christians</li> <li>2. <i>Thesis / Main Point:</i> State the “Learning Objectives” of the session</li> <li>3. <i>THEOLOGICAL Discussions:</i> Always use Scripture, Tradition, Experience</li> <li>4. <i>ETHICAL Applications:</i> Apply to both Community and Individual life</li> </ol>	<b>III) Session Conclusion</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Practical Matters:</i> Assignments, announcements, etc.</li> <li>2. <i>Individual Greetings:</i> Esp. to their parents &amp; families</li> <li>3. <i>Personal Witness:</i> Share your faith, in your own words</li> <li>4. <i>Closing Prayer:</i> End with prayer, praising/thanking God</li> </ol>
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## Structural Charts of NT Letters: The Seven Undisputed Letters of Paul (incl. 2 Thess, for comparison to 1 Thess):

*Carefully considering exactly which verses of each letter belong to each of these standard sections (or which are missing) can lead to some important observations about the nature and message of that letter. **Abbreviations:** CJ = "Christ Jesus"; JC = "Jesus Christ"; Square Brackets [ ] indicate verses that do not quite fit the typical section descriptions.*

Letter:	1 Thess	[2 Thess]	1 Cor	Phil	Phlm	2 Cor	Gal	Rom
<b>I) Letter Beginning:</b> Sender(s): From whom	1:1a - Paul, <i>Silvanus</i> , & Timothy	1:1a - Paul, <i>Silvanus</i> , & Timothy	1:1 - Paul an apostle, and our brother <i>Sosthenes</i>	1:1a - Paul & Timothy, servants of CJ	1a - Paul <i>prisoner</i> of CJ & Timothy our brother	1:1a - Paul apostle of CJ & Timothy our brother	1:1-2a - Paul an apostle of God & <i>all those with me</i>	1:1-6 - Paul a servant of JC, called to be an apostle...
Recipient(s): To whom	1:1b - to the Church of the Thessalonians in God Father & Lord JC	1:1b - to the Church of the Thessalonians in God Father & Lord JC	1:2 - Church of God in Corinth <i>and all who call on Jesus!</i>	1:1b - to all saints in CJ in Philippi, <i>with bishops &amp; deacons</i>	1b-2 - to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, & house church	1:1b - Church of God in Corinth <i>and all saints in Achaia</i>	1:2b - to Churches of Galatia	1:7a - to all God's beloved in Rome, called to be saints
Formulaic Greeting	1:1c - Grace to you and peace	1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God Father and Lord JC	1:3 - Grace to you and peace from God Father and Lord JC	1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God Father and Lord JC	3 - Grace to you and peace from God Father and Lord JC	1:2 - Grace to you and peace from God Father and Lord JC	1:3-5 - Grace & peace from JC, <i>who gave himself for our sins...</i>	1:7b - Grace to you and peace from God Father and Lord JC
Thanksgiving (or Blessing)	1:2-10 - faith, love, & hope; & 2:13-16 - for accepting God's word	1:3-4 - faith & love growing; & 2:13-15 - God chose you for salvation	1:4-9 - grace, riches, wisdom, spiritual gifts given to strengthen you	1:3-11 - you share in the Gospel, in righteousness and love	4-7 - love, faith, sharing, joy & encouragement	1:3-11 - <i>Blessed</i> be the God of JC, Father of mercy & God who consoles	X [1:6-10 - " <i>I am amazed...</i> "]	1:8-15 - faith & spiritual encouragement
<b>II) Letter Body:</b> Initial Exhortation	2:1-12 - follow Paul's example; 2:17--3:13 - Paul's relation to Xns in Thessalonica	[1:5-12] - God's judgment at the revelation of Jesus	1:10-17 - appeal for unity, not division in the community	1:12-30 - spread of the Gospel;	8-10 - appeal on behalf of Onesimus	1:12--2:13; 7:5-16 - on reconciliation	[1:11--2:14 - Paul's life history]	X
Thesis Statement	?	?	1:18 - message of the cross: foolish or powerful?	[2:1-2 - be united in mind & love]	[11 - word-play: useless/useful]	?	2:15-21 - justification thru the faith of CJ	1:16-17 - gospel is the power of God for salvation thru faith
Theological Discussion	4:13--5:11 - death, resurrection & the parousia	2:1-12 - events before the coming of JC	1:19--4:21 - true wisdom in JC; [5:1--15:58 also very theological]	2:1--3:1 - unity & humility in CJ; [3:2--4:1 - against circumcision]	11-16 - freedom & brotherhood	[2:14--7:4 - Paul's role as apostle]	3:1--5:12 - the Law and Faith; Abraham; Hagar vs. Sarah	1:18--11:36 - law, sin, faith; Adam, Abraham, Jesus; baptism, death, life
Ethical Admonition	4:1-12 - live acc. to God's will	3:6-15 - warning against being idle	5:1--15:58 - about the Corinthians' problems & questions	4:2-9 - Euodia & Syntyche; Rejoice always	17-21 - repaying debts; obedience	[10:1--13:10 - warnings against false apostles]	5:13--6:10 - lots of warnings; bear others' burdens	12:1--15:21 - life in the body of Christ; mutual love
<b>III) Letter Conclusion:</b> Practical Matters	5:12-22, 25, 27 - respect church authorities, pray, etc.	3:1-5 - request for prayers	16:1-14 - the collection, travel plans, warnings	4:10-20 - thanks for gifts sent through Epaphroditus	22 - prepare a guest room	[8:1-24; 9:1-15 - help the poor] 13:1-10 - Paul's third visit	X	15:22-33 - travel plans; 16:17-20 - be careful of evil
Individual Greetings	5:26 - Greet all brothers & sisters	X	16:15-18 - commends Stephanas...; 19-20 - from Asia greetings	4:21-22 - greet saints in CJ; saints greet you, esp. Caesar's house	23 - greetings from lots of folks (cf. Col 4:10)	13:11-12 - greet one another with holy kiss; all the saints greet you	X	16:1-16, 21-23 - <i>lots of greetings to Rome &amp; from Corinth</i>
Personal Postscript	X	3:17-18 - Paul marks every letter this way	16:21-24 - a curse on those who don't love the Lord	X	19 - I, Paul, write this with my own hand, I will repay	X	6:11-17 - warnings re. circumcision & cross	X [16:22 - by scribe Tertius]
Prayer and/or Doxology	[3:11-13] 5:23-24 - May God sanctify you; & 5:28 - Grace of JC with you.	[2:16-17] 3:5, 16, 18 - May the Lord give you love peace & grace	16:23-24 - grace of Lord Jesus & my love be with you in Christ	4:20 - to God be glory; 4:23 - grace of the Lord JC be with your spirit	25 - grace of Lord JC be with your spirit.	13:13 - grace of Lord JC, love of God, & communion of HS be with all	6:18 - grace of Lord JC be with your spirit. Amen.	[11:33-36] [15:13] 16:25-27 - to God be glory