

The Life and Letters of

P A U L

In Chronological Order

Compiled for a Bible Study by Jules Grisham  
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## OUTLINE OF THE APOSTLE'S LIFE

### Possible early dates and key events in Paul's life

*[Saul was born a Jew and a Roman citizen (per Acts 22:25-28), the son of a Pharisee (per Acts 23:6) in Tarsus (per Acts 22:3), around the year A.D. 5 (this date based on the references to his being a "young man" in Acts 7:58, and an "old man" in Philemon 9). He also declares in Acts 22:3 that he was studied with Gamaliel in Jerusalem and was thoroughly trained as a Pharisee; thus we can surmise that his family might have moved to Jerusalem sometime between A.D. 5-15, and that he studied with Gamaliel between, say, A.D. 15-20. On several occasions he refers to himself as a Pharisee, and as a particularly zealous one at that (e.g., Acts 23:6, Philippians 3:4-6); it is possible that, having been trained in the milder school of Gamaliel (in the tradition of Hillel), he rejected that in favor of a much stricter school (in the tradition of Shammai). Saul's first appearance in Scripture is Acts 7:58 and 8:1, where we are informed of his approving presence at the mob execution of Stephen, A.D. 31.*

*[A.D. 31 is on the early end of the possible spectrum of dates for Paul's conversion; it would mean that all the events recorded in Acts up to that point had occurred in a span of only eighteen months – a time frame by no means implausible but admittedly fast.*

*[The two key time frames are Paul's references in Galatians to his "first visit" to Jerusalem "three years" after his conversion (1:18) and "then," a second visit "fourteen years later" (2:1), which Luke has coinciding, more or less, with the death of King Herod Agrippa II in 44.*

*[There are three possibilities: (1) conversion in 31, first visit in 33 (counted inclusively, as in all the following), then (reading "then" most appropriately, grammatically-speaking) the second visit 14 years after the first, in 46; (2) conversion in 31, first visit in 33, then (reading "then" as still counting from conversion) second visit fourteen years after the conversion, in 44; (3) conversion in 32-33, first visit in 34-35, second visit (fourteen years after conversion) in 45-46. Anything beyond this begins to warp the overall fabric of the data in Galatians and Acts.*

*[The advantage of (2) is that it has the second visit coinciding perfectly with the year 44, but (a) exact correspondence of the dates is not technically necessary, and (b) the extra-biblical records confirm a famine in Judea between 45-47, which argues for a post-44 date. The advantage of (3) is simply that all the dates work together, Paul is given a late conversion date (allowing plenty of time for all the events of the first chapters of Acts). The disadvantage of both (2) and (3), however, is fundamental: they both rely on an interpretation of what Paul means by "fourteen years later" which is against the most obvious reading of the text. For this reason, I prefer (1), as fitting all the data most easily and most straightforwardly. Thus...]*

### A.D. 31: First Persecution of the Church and the Conversion of Saul

<i>The Choosing of the Seven</i>	<b>Acts 6:1-17</b>
<i>Stephen Seized</i>	<b>Acts 6:8-15</b>
<i>Stephen's Speech to the Sanhedrin</i>	<b>Acts 7:1-8:1</b>
<i>The Church Persecuted and Scattered</i>	<b>Acts 8:2-3</b>
<i>Philip in Samaria</i>	<b>Acts 8:4-8</b>
<i>Simon the Sorcerer</i>	<b>Acts 8:9-25</b>
<i>Philip and the Ethiopian</i>	<b>Acts 8:26-40</b>
<i>Saul's Conversion</i>	<b>Acts 9:1-19a</b>

**A.D. 31-33: Three Years in Arabia and Damascus**

*Paul in the Desert, then Back in Damascus*

**Galatians 1:15-17**

*[Many commentators place Paul's time in Arabia not here but just before Acts 9:23, where Luke writes "After many days..." This is a reasonable and entirely possible placement, and it does in fact fit better with Luke's precise wording. However, Paul's emphasis on the immediacy of his going ("I went immediately") into the desert following upon his conversion, baptism, and recovery has, I believe, important resonances with Jesus' wilderness experience immediately following his own baptism. Moreover, Paul's preaching in the synagogues of Damascus would more logically have followed upon his return to Damascus after the time in the desert; it makes sense that the consternation his teaching aroused would lead to his having to leave the city in a basket under cover of night. It should be pointed out, though, that the difficulty with this chronology is Luke's statement in verse 20 that Paul began preaching in the synagogues "at once." However we determine this issue, the "three years" to which Paul refer in Galatians 1:18, between his conversion and first visit to the apostles in Jerusalem, include his time both in Damascus and in the Arabian desert (outside of Damascus).]*

**Acts 9:19b-24**

**2 Corinthians 11:32-33**

**Acts 9:25**

**A.D. 33: "First Jerusalem Visit"**

*[I.e., three years after the conversion, counted inclusively]*

*Paul Meets the Apostles in Jerusalem*

**Galatians 1:18a**

**Acts 9:26-28a**

**Galatians 1:18b-20**

**Acts 9:28b-30**

*[Comment on this first visit: in Galatians Paul emphasizes how he had little contact with the believers, while in Acts Luke emphasizes his free movement about Jerusalem and bold proclamation of the gospel. The resolution to this seeming dissonance would seem to be that whereas he stayed (or for the most part was kept) away from contact with Christians, who still quite reasonably feared him, he boldly went into the synagogues and proclaimed the truth concerning the Risen Lord Jesus. No doubt, it was on account of the heat raised by this activity that the brothers saw fit to ship him quietly off to Tarsus.]*

**A.D. 33-45: Paul's Years in Tarsus**

*Paul's Twelve Years in Tarsus*

**Galatians 1:21-24**

**Acts 9:31**

**2 Corinthians 12:2-10**

*[Assuming Paul was writing 2 Corinthians in 56, the "fourteen years ago" of this verse brings us to 42 or 43, which places the timing of the vision (a) toward the end of Paul's years in Tarsus, and (b) connects his vision chronologically with the vision given to Peter in Acts 10 and the expansion of the kingdom proclamation to include the Gentiles.]*

*Aeneas and Dorcas*

*Cornelius Calls for Peter*

**Acts 9:32-43**

**Acts 10:1-8**

<i>Peter's Vision</i>	<b>Acts 10:9-23a</b>
<i>Peter at Cornelius' House</i>	<b>Acts 10:23b -48</b>
<i>Peter Explains His Actions</i>	<b>Acts 11:1-18</b>
<i>The Church in Antioch</i>	<b>Acts 11:19-21</b>

**A.D. 45-46: Saul and Barnabas in Antioch**

<i>The Church in Antioch (cont'd)</i>	<b>Acts 11:22-30</b>
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**A.D. 46: Paul's "Second Visit" to Jerusalem**

*[See our discussion on the dating of this visit near the beginning of the outline. If we accept that this second visit occurred in 46, then we need to explain why Luke frames this visit around the event of Herod's death in 44. (In other words, Luke ends one section by speaking of the sending off of the famine relief mission from Antioch to Jerusalem, then cuts away to discuss Herod's death, then has the team returning from Jerusalem; the most obvious reading would be that the second visit was cotemporaneous with Herod's death.] But as we've already mentioned, the extra-biblical sources refer to a famine from 45-47, and this later date seems to fit the entirety of data better. If, therefore, we accept 46 as the date of the second visit, we understand Luke to be cutting away from the one narrative thread (describing the sending of the team) to bring us up to date in another thread (concerning what had happened in Judea "about this time" (12:1)). Though the 44 date fits more perfectly with the Lukan chronological structure, I prefer the later date of 46 because it fits better with the totality of data.]*

<i>The "Famine Relief" Visit</i>	<b>Galatians 2:1-10</b>
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*[With regard to this passage in Galatians, many people see this visit to Jerusalem that Paul describes in Galatians as his version of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, on account of the similarity of subject matter being discussed. But there are many problems with this, including, first, that Paul's whole point in Galatians is to show how little contact he'd yet had with the Jerusalem church, such that for him to omit mention of one of his visits would border on dishonesty; second, it would also seem strange for him not to make any mention of the decision reached and formal letter to the churches composed at the conference, unless we determine that he simply ignored and rejected it ;third, the meeting described in Galatians is private, while that shown in Acts 15 is public. Rather, both Acts and Galatians show the second visit to Jerusalem as being in response to a revelation; Paul and Barnabas led a delegation which included Titus and others; while the official reason for the visit was famine relief, there were private meetings on the very crucial matters of the new outreach to the Gentiles taking place in Antioch and about to happen on the first missionary tour. This second meeting wouldn't definitively settle things; that awaited the third meeting, which happened just AFTER Paul wrote Galatians.]*

**A.D. 44: Death of Herod Agrippa I**

<i>Peter's Miraculous Escape from Prison</i>	<b>Acts 12:1-19a</b>
<i>Herod's Death</i>	<b>Acts 12:19b-24</b>

**A.D. 46: Return from Jerusalem**

<i>Return to Antioch</i>	<b>Acts 12:25</b>
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**A.D. 46-48: First Missionary Journey**

<i>Paul and Barnabas Sent Off</i>	<b>Acts 13:1-3</b>
<i>On Cyprus</i>	<b>Acts 13:4-12</b>
<i>In Pisidian Antioch</i>	<b>Acts 13:13-52</b>

<i>In Iconium</i>	<b>Acts 14:1-7</b>
<i>In Lystra and Derbe</i>	<b>Acts 14:8-21a</b>
<i>The Return to Antioch in Syria</i>	<b>Acts 14:21b-28</b>
<b><u>A.D. 48: Conflict with the Circumcision Party</u></b>	
<i>The Circumcision Party Comes to Antioch</i>	<b>Acts 15:1-2a</b> <b>Galatians 2:11-14</b>
<i>[The circumcision party then presses on into Asia Minor, bringing a measure of confusion to the congregations that Paul had planted there. In response to this provocation and threat, Paul writes his letter to the Galatian churches.]</i>	
<b><u>A.D. 48-49: Writing of GALATIANS</u></b>	<b>Galatians 1:1-6:18</b>
<b><u>A.D. 49: Expulsion of the Jews from Rome</u></b>	
<i>Priscilla and Aquila to Corinth</i>	<b>Acts 18:2a</b>
<b><u>A.D. 49-50: Council at Jerusalem</u></b>	
<i>The Council at Jerusalem</i>	<b>Acts 15:2b-21</b>
<i>The Council's Letter to Gentile Believers</i>	<b>Acts 15:22-35</b>
<b><u>A.D. 50-52: Second Missionary Journey</u></b>	
<i>Disagreement Between Paul and Barnabas</i>	<b>Acts 15:36-41</b>
<i>Timothy Joins Paul and Silas</i>	<b>Acts 16:1-5</b>
<i>Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia</i>	<b>Acts 16:6-10</b>
<i>Lydia's Conversion in Philippi</i>	<b>Acts 16:11-15</b>
<i>Paul and Silas in Prison</i>	<b>Acts 16:16-40</b>
<i>In Thessalonica</i>	<b>Acts 17:1-9</b>
<i>In Berea</i>	<b>Acts 17:10-15</b>
<i>In Athens</i>	<b>Acts 17:16-34</b>
<b><u>A.D. 51-52: 18-Month Stay in Corinth</u></b>	
<i>In Corinth</i>	<b>Acts 18:1-11</b>
<i>[During this 18-month stay in Corinth he wrote the two letters to the Thessalonian church 1 Thessalonians was probably written soon after Timothy and Silas rejoined him in Corinth from Macedonia (18:5); 2 Thessalonians was likely written some six months after that.]</i>	
<b><u>A.D. 51: Writing of 1 THESSALONIANS</u></b>	<b>1 Thessalonians 1:1-5:28</b>
<b><u>A.D. 51-52: Writing of 2 THESSALONIANS</u></b>	<b>2 Thessalonians 1:1-3:18</b>
<b><u>A.D. 52: Appearance before Gallio</u></b>	
<i>In Corinth (cont'd)</i>	<b>Acts 18:12-17</b>
<i>Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos</i>	<b>Acts 18:18-21</b>
<b><u>A.D. 52: Return to Jerusalem and Antioch</u></b>	
<i>Another Visit to Jerusalem, then Antioch</i>	<b>Acts 18:22</b>
<b><u>A.D. 53-57: Third Missionary Journey</u></b>	
<i>Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos (cont'd)</i>	<b>Acts 18:23-28</b>

**A.D. 54-56: 2-Year Stay in Ephesus**

*Paul in Ephesus*

**Acts 19:1-22**

**A.D. 55: Writing of 1 CORINTHIANS**

**1 Corinthians 1:1-16:24**

*[Written in Ephesus during the spring, prior to Pentecost (per 16:8), 1 Corinthians is Paul's written response to information he'd received from "some from Chloe's household" (1:11), reports of a situation involving gross sexual immorality (5:1-13), and various questions about practical matters of Christian faith, worship, and living. It seems that Timothy was sent to deliver the letter. In chapter 16 he also mentions the planned collection for the gift offering to Jerusalem.]*

**A.D. 56: The Corinthian Crisis**

*[It seems that Paul had what he referred to as a "painful visit" to Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:1) soon after the sending of his first letter to the church of that city; perhaps this trip was prompted by Timothy's report of his reception in Corinth when delivering the first letter. During this visit it would appear that various people in the Corinthian congregation openly disrespected Paul and called his apostolic authority into question; the pivotal issues may have concerned the teachings of certain "super-apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5) who were deriding his capabilities and questioning his apostolic authority, demanding proof that God was in fact speaking through him (2 Corinthians 13:3), as well as dissension in the wake of his command to excommunicate the sinner (1 Corinthians 5:13).]*

*Paul's Response to the "Painful Visit"*

**2 Corinthians 2:1**

**A.D. 56: Writing of the "Second Letter"**

**2 Corinthians 10:1-13:14 ?**

*[Soon after that visit Paul wrote an angry letter to them (to which he refers in 2 Corinthians 2:2, 4, and 9), forcefully reminding them of his authority and warning them of his impending visit (2 Corinthians 12:14, 13:1), which would be his third visit to that city. The letter was, it seems, sent with Titus.*

*[Many scholars posit that this second letter to the Corinthians may actually still be extant in 2 Corinthians 10-13, the idea being that when Paul wrote his more irenic third letter, which we have in 2 Corinthians 1-9, the "fierce" letter might have been appended to the peaceable one, much in the way that earlier e-mails are appended to replies; and that what has come to us as Paul's second letter to the Corinthians should in fact be understood as his second and (appended) third letters to that church.*

*[For the purposes of this outline, I shall include the proposed "fierce" letter first, if only because Paul himself refers to an earlier letter. If as is quite possible these chapters were not that letter but were simply always the conclusion of Paul's single letter which we have received as 2 Corinthians, then the "fierce" letter is no longer extant.*

*[After Paul sent the "fierce" letter with Titus, but before Titus had returned with an update on the Corinthians' reaction, the following incident forced Paul to withdraw from Ephesus and to set off toward Macedonia.]*

**A.D. 56: 2-Year Stay in Ephesus (con'd)**

*The Riot in Ephesus*

**Acts 19:23-41**

**A.D. 56: The Corinthian Crisis (cont'd)**  
*Through Macedonia and Greece*

**Acts 20:1**

*[Paul had still not heard back from Titus (per 2 Corinthians 2:12-13), so whereas he had planned to go to Corinth first, then to Macedonia, then back to Corinth again, he opted not to visit, lest that should cause more grief (2 Corinthians 1:15b-16; 2:1).*

**2 Corinthians 1:15b-16**  
**2 Corinthians 2:1-4**

*[When he had come as far as Troas and had still heard nothing from Titus, Paul reports that he had no peace of mind.]*

**2 Corinthians 2:12-13**  
**2 Corinthians 7:5-16**

**A.D. 56: Writing of 2 CORINTHIANS**

**2 Corinthians 1:1-9: 15 (-13:14 ?)**

*[Titus did finally return with welcome news of a faithful response from the Corinthian congregation. Now Paul, from Philippi or some other city in Macedonia, composed 2 Corinthians, a letter expressing his considerable relief. Another major intention of this letter was to make sure they were prepared for the collection he was gathering for the Jerusalem church, a task with which he was occupied along the way through Macedonia, per 2 Corinthians 8. Presumably he sent the letter along with Titus and another brother (Erastus, per Acts 19:22?), ahead of his own arrival toward the end of the year.]*

**A.D. 57: 3-Month Stay in Corinth**

*Through Macedonia and Greece (cont'd)*

**Acts 20:2-3a**

*[During this period Paul composes his letter to the Roman church, having already decided (Acts 19:21) that he would visit there on his way to Spain, following his taking the monies from the collection tour to Jerusalem. The letter to the Romans is written in Corinth (or Cenchrea; see Romans 16:1-2), and sent with Phoebe, and possibly Priscilla, Aquila, and others).*

**Romans 15:26-28**

**A.D. 57: Writing of ROMANS**

**Romans 1:1-16:27**

**A.D. 57: Return toward Jerusalem with the Collection Money**

*Through Macedonia and Greece (cont'd)*

**Acts 20:3b-6**

*Eutychus Raised from the Dead at Troas*

**Acts 20:7-12**

*Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders*

**Acts 20:13-38**

*On to Jerusalem*

**Acts 21:1-16**

**A.D. 57-59: Arrest in Jerusalem, and Incarceration in Caesarea**

*Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem*

**Acts 21:17-26**

*Paul Arrested*

**Acts 21:27-36**

*Paul Speaks to the Crowd*

**Acts 21:37-22:21**

*Paul the Roman Citizen*

**Acts 22:22-29**

<i>Before the Sanhedrin</i>	<b>Acts 22:30-23:11</b>
<i>The Plot to Kill Paul</i>	<b>Acts 23:12-22</b>
<i>Paul Transferred to Caesarea</i>	<b>Acts 23:23-35</b>
<i>The Trial Before Felix</i>	<b>Acts 24:1-27</b>
<i>The Trial Before Festus</i>	<b>Acts 25:1-12</b>
<i>Festus Consults King Agrippa</i>	<b>Acts 25:13-22</b>
<i>Paul Before Agrippa</i>	<b>Acts 25:23-26:32</b>

**A.D. 59: Journey to Rome Begins in the Fall**

<i>Paul Sails for Rome</i>	<b>Acts 27:1-12</b>
<i>The Storm</i>	<b>Acts 27:13-26</b>
<i>The Shipwreck</i>	<b>Acts 27:27-44</b>
<i>Ashore on Malta</i>	<b>Acts 28:1-10</b>
<i>Drawing Nearer to Rome</i>	<b>Acts 28:11-14</b>

**A.D. 60-62: Arrival in Rome (Spring), Arrest and Imprisonment**

<i>Arrival at Rome</i>	<b>Acts 28:15-16</b>
<i>Paul Preaches at Rome under Guard</i>	<b>Acts 28:17-31</b>

**A.D. 60-62: Writing of the “Prison Epistles”:**

*[During his two-year period of house arrest in Rome, Paul composed the prison epistles, Ephesians (a short letter containing gigantic theological themes, transitioning from Romans and its focus on salvation by grace to the fully blown theology of the fullness and grandeur of Christ, which is a theme developed more and more in the letters that follow); Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.]*

<b><u>A.D. 60: Writing of EPHESIANS</u></b>	<b>Ephesians 1:1-6:24</b>
<b><u>A.D. 60: Writing of PHILIPPIANS</u></b>	<b>Philippians 1:1-4:23</b>
<b><u>A.D. 61: Writing of COLOSSIANS</u></b>	<b>Colossians 1:1-4:18</b>
<b><u>A.D. 61: Writing of PHILEMON</u></b>	<b>Philemon 1:1-25</b>
<b><u>A.D. 61-62: Writing of HEBREWS ?</u></b>	<b>Hebrews 1:1-13:25</b>

*[Note that if we conclude that Paul composed the epistle to the Hebrews, we may surmise that he would have done so during this period. In favor of Pauline authorship are at least the following four considerations: first, this letter brings to systematic completion the understanding of the grandeur of Christ (which was more and more the theme of Paul’s writings during this period of imprisonment); second, this letter follows thematically from Colossians in its emphasis on the supremacy of Christ vis a vis the angels; third, he writes in 13:19 that he hopes soon to be “restored” to them; fourth, he mentions in 13:19 how Timothy has recently been “released”; and fifth, he sends greetings in 13:24 from those “in Italy.” Arguments against Pauline authorship note the difference in style and vocabulary; clearly, the letter is written by someone with stunning gifts of eloquence and a profound systematic understanding of Scripture. Some have suggested Apollos as the author, others Barnabas. In the final analysis, this particular letter has no opening salutations and only a very short ending, so the author remains formally anonymous.]*

**A.D. 62-66: Further Missionary Travels**

*[Paul's release from house arrest would have happened in A.D. 62. Most scholars, denying Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles, believe that he was probably executed at this time, or very soon after (e.g., 64-65), during Nero's persecution in Rome. If on the other hand we accept Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, then we conclude that following his release from imprisonment in Rome he continued his missionary travels, possibly westward (to Spain, the western "end" of the world, as he'd explicitly intended, per Romans 15:25) but also definitely eastward, per his own testimony in 1 Timothy 1:3, where we are given a picture of Paul in Macedonia writing to and planning to visit Timothy in Ephesus, and Titus 1:5a, where Paul speaks of how he had left Titus in Crete and was probably now in Macedonia, soon to be wintering in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12).]*

*Crete and Macedonia*

**1 Timothy 1:3a  
Titus 1:5  
Titus 2:12**

**A.D. 65 and 67: Writing of the "Pastoral Epistles":**

*[Note that many scholars reject Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles on the basis of style, vocabulary, and theological emphases. But in fact one can point to innumerable recognizably Pauline stylistic elements, turns of phrase, and characteristic concerns. It has been suggested that the difference in style could be because these letters, unlike his others, have come to us mediated through the hand of a secretary. 1 Timothy and Titus were likely written from Philippi.]*

**A.D. 65: Writing of 1 TIMOTHY**

**1 Timothy 1:1-6:21**

**A.D. 65: Writing of TITUS**

**Titus 1:1-3:15**

**A.D. 66-68: Re-arrest, Final Imprisonment**

*[It seems that Paul was swept up in Nero's anti-Christian persecution following the fire of Rome in 64, being arrested (66 or 67) and then kept chained in the Mamertine Prison in Rome until 68, the same year as the revolt in the Roman Empire which saw the end of the Julian line of emperors.]*

*Paul in Mamertine Prison*

**2 Timothy 1:15-17  
2 Timothy 4:6-16**

**A.D. 67: Writing of 2 TIMOTHY**

**2 Timothy 1:1-4:22**

**A.D. 68: Paul Executed in Rome**

**(1 Clement 5:5-6)**

*[Paul was executed in Rome, about A.D. 68, by beheading, per 1 Clement 5:5-6.]*