

# Chronology on the Life of St. Paul

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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.

### 1. *Pre-Christian Phase (ca. 10–36 AD)*

- 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), but probably also a *Roman citizen* (Acts 22: 25-29; 23: 27).
- c. Thus, 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 its beginnings in 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” (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).

### 2. *First Phase of Paul's New Christian Life: in the EAST (ca. 36–49 AD)*

- 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 - for these texts, [see below](#)).
- b. Paul begins preaching around Arabia, Damascus, Syria, and Cilicia, despite some opposition (Gal 1: 17-24; 2 Cor 11: 23-33).

- c. Barnabas takes an interest in Paul, guides and protects him, and 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**, in which Barnabas is called “Zeus,” the king of the Greek gods, while Paul is called “Hermes,” the Greek messenger god).
- e. Barnabas and Paul participate in the “**Council of Jerusalem**” (*ca. 49 AD*; Gal 2: 1-10; Acts 15 - note that many scholars think this council was slightly later, *ca. 51 AD*).

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

- 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 49 AD (Acts 18: 2).
- e. Paul is brought to trial before the **Proconsul Gallio** (Acts 18: 12-17), who was in *Achaia only in 51–52 AD*; this fact gives us 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).

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

- 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).

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

- a. Paul wants to go West to Rome and 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 another two years (Acts 22–28); possibly *writes Col from prison in Caesarea* (or later from Rome).
- d. We cannot be sure what happened next, since nothing else is written in Acts: either he was tried, found innocent and released, in which case he might have gone to preach in **Spain**, as he had planned; or he was tried, found guilty, and executed.
- 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 (62 AD), or after his return from Spain (64 AD), since his death is not recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

## 6. *After Paul's Death: his legacy continues* (60's - 90's AD and beyond)

- a. Paul's associates continue to preach, gain new converts, build up Christian communities, address problems, write letters, etc.
- b. *1 Tim, 2 Tim, Tit, and Eph* are probably *pseudepigraphic* (i.e., letters written in his name by his followers after his death).
- c. **Ephesus** and Colossae remain strong centers of Pauline-style Christianity, possibly led by Timothy and Onesimus, respectively.
- d. Someone begins collecting (and editing) Paul's letters (cf. 2 Pet 3: 15-16); by the end of the first century, about 10 letters are circulating together (not yet including 1 Tim, 2 Tim, or Tit), with Ephesians possibly functioning as an introduction or "cover letter."
- e. Eventually, *thirteen letters* attributed to Paul are recognized as "canonical" (i.e., accepted as part of the NT; in some phases of Christian history, the "Letter to the Hebrews" was also thought to be written by Paul, although most scholars and church leaders today agree that it is not Pauline).
- f. Other legends about Paul develop and are recorded in *non-canonical* works (e.g., the "Acts of Paul" and the "Acts of Paul and Thecla").