



The History of the Bible  
Session 08: Topic 2.1.3  
The Writing Ministry of the Apostle Paul

Study by  
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Detailed Study

2.1.3 Paul's Letters  
2.1.3.1 Overview

The writings of the apostle Paul are typically divided into four groups:

- 1) early writings, while on the second missionary journey (48-51 AD);
- 2) middle period of writing, while on the third missionary journey (52-57 AD);
- 3) captivity or prison letters, while under arrest either in Caesarea or Rome (57-61 AD);
- 4) pastoral letters written to Timothy and Titus written after release from initial Roman imprisonment and shortly before his martyrdom at the hands of emperor Nero (62-64 AD).

Although the precise dating of these letters varies from scholar to scholar, the approximate time period of each is reasonably certain.

2.1.3.2 Issues

The dating of some of the letters remains debated. In the material below, I will attempt to highlight some of the more central debates among scholars today, as well as indicated my position on these matters.

2.1.3.2.1 Galatians

First, Galatians will be dated in one of three periods:

- 1) just after the first missionary journey (46-47 AD) and before the Jerusalem Council (48 AD);
- 2) in the early stages of the second missionary journey (48-51 AD);
- 3) in the middle of the third missionary journey (52-57 AD).

The variables leading to these differences largely revolve around

- a) the meaning of "so quickly" (ταχέως) in Gal. 1:6 and
- b) whether the trip to Jerusalem described in Gal. 2:1-10 matches Acts 11:27-30 or Acts 15:1-29.

"So quickly" can be taken as so soon after your conversion, favoring view 1). Or, it can be taken as so soon after my visit, favoring either view 2) or 3). If Gal. 2:1-10 matches Acts 11:27-30, then view 1) is correct, but if 2:1-10 matches Acts 15:1-29, then either view 2) or 3) is possible. Advocates of view 3) additionally link Galatians and Romans together because of common phraseology such as "justification by faith apart from works of law" in Gal. 2:16 and Rom. 3:28, as well as a similar use of the example of Abraham (Gal. 4 with Rom. 4). Other, less significant issues also play into the mixture as well. Personally, I have been convinced for several decades that view 2) has the most going for it and the least amount of problems.

2.1.3.2.2 Authenticity

Second, the issue of authenticity of some of these letters has played a major role in dating since the middle 1800s. Those letters where this issue typically surfaces are 2 Thessalonians, the prison letters of Ephesians, and Colossians, and the pastoral letters of 1-2 Timothy and Titus. Widely differing conclusions are going to be reached by different scholars. The dominant tendency generally is to reject the authenticity of the pastoral letters. Less wide spread is the rejection of the others. When any of these letters is rejected as authentically coming from Paul, the dating normally is projected to a period late in the first Christian century

or more typically to the early decades of the second century. The use of material from most of these letters in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers in the first half of the second century puts a clear terminus point on how late they can be understood to have arisen. Most of the arguments favoring rejection of Pauline composition that I have examined in great detail over the past 40 years carry little persuasiveness and represent flawed scholarly methodology with too much modern cultural bias driving the conclusions. This does not suggest that the traditional view points, largely derived from the Church Fathers, do not possess problems, for they do, and in some instances rather large problems. But for me the greater problems lay with the proposed alternatives.

In light of the historical reality behind these issues, conclusions in many instances must remain tentative, if the Bible student maintains intellectual honesty and is basing viewpoints on concrete data, rather than on ideological or emotionally driven biases. But intellectual honesty also necessitates drawing honest conclusions and then moving to biblical interpretation based on those conclusions. Dogmatic attitudes therefore are excluded from serious Bible study. Polemically based castigations of “liberalism” or “fundamentalism” against differing viewpoints adopted through honest inquiry are completely out of place and unchristian. But every viewpoint is subject to careful scrutiny and intense critique in order to expose its strengths and weaknesses. Only in such endeavor can we come closer to the truth in these matters.

### 2.1.3.2.3 Hebrews

Third, the issue of the authorship of Hebrews. Debate over who is responsible for the Letter to the Hebrews has existed for a long, long time, as the quote from Leopold Fonck, “The Epistle to the Hebrews”, Catholic Encyclopedia (1910) below notes:

a) In the East the writing was unanimously regarded as a letter of St. Paul. Eusebius gives the earliest testimonies of the Church of Alexandria in reporting the words of a “blessed presbyter” (Pantaenus?), as well as those of Clement and Origen (Hist. Eccl., VI, xiv, n. 2-4; xxv, n. 11-14). Clement explains the contrast in language and style by saying that the Epistle was written originally in Hebrew and was then translated by Luke into Greek. Origen, on the other hand, distinguishes between the thoughts of the letter and the grammatical form; the former, according to the testimony of “the ancients” (oi archaioi andres), is from St. Paul; the latter is the work of an unknown writer, Clement of Rome according to some, Luke, or another pupil of the Apostle, according to others. In like manner the letter was regarded as Pauline by the various Churches of the East: Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Cappadocia, Mesopotamia, etc. (cf. the different testimonies in B. F. Westcott, “The Epistle to the Hebrews”, London, 1906, pp. lxii-lxxii). It was not until after the appearance of Arius that the Pauline origin of the Epistle to the Hebrews was disputed by some Orientals and Greeks.

(b) In Western Europe the First Epistle of St. Clement to the Corinthians shows acquaintance with the text of the writing (chs. ix, xii, xvii, xxxvi, xlv), apparently also the “Pastor” of Hermas (Vis. II, iii, n.2; Sim. I, i sq.). Hippolytus and Irenaeus also knew the letter but they do not seem to have regarded it as a work of the Apostle (Eusebius, “Hist. Eccl.”, xxvi; Photius, Cod. 121, 232; St. Jerome, “De viris ill.”, lix). Eusebius also mentions the Roman presbyter Caius as an advocate of the opinion that the Epistle to the Hebrews was not the writing of the Apostle, and he adds that some other Romans, up to his own day, were also of the same opinion (Hist. Eccl., VI, xx, n.3). In fact the letter is not found in the Muratorian Canon; St. Cyprian also mentions only seven letters of St. Paul to the Churches (De exhort. mart., xi), and Tertullian calls Barnabas the author (De pudic., xx). Up to the fourth century the Pauline origin of the letter was regarded as doubtful by other Churches of Western Europe. As the reason for this Philastrius gives the misuse made of the letter by the Novatians (Haer., 89), and the doubts of the presbyter Caius seem likewise to have arisen from the attitude assumed towards the letter by the Montanists (Photius, Cod. 48; F. Kaulen, “Einleitung in die Hl. Schrift Alten und Neuen Testaments”, 5th ed., Freiburg, 1905, III, 211).

After the fourth century these doubts as to the Apostolic origin of the Epistle to the Hebrews gradually became less marked in Western Europe. While the Council of Carthage of the year 397, in the wording of its decree, still made a distinction between Pauli Apostoli epistolae tredecim (thirteen epistles of Paul the Apostle) and eiusdem ad Hebraeos una (one of his to the Hebrews) (H. Denzinger, “Enchiridion”, 10th ed., Freiburg, 1908, n. 92, old n. 49), the Roman Synod of 382 under Pope Damasus enumerates without distinction epistolae Pauli numero quatuordecim (epistles of Paul fourteen in number), including in this number the Epistle to the Hebrews (Denzinger, 10th ed., n. 84). In this form also the conviction of the Church later found permanent expression. Cardinal Cajetan (1529) and Erasmus were the first to revive the old doubts, while at the same time Luther and the other Reformers denied the Pauline origin of the letter.

This uncertainty is reflected in the sequential listing of Hebrews in the canon of the NT. The Pauline section begins with Romans and ends with Philemon. The order of listing is based simply on the length of

each document. Romans is the longest and Philemon is the shortest. The exceptions to this are the documents written to the same group or individual such as 1-2 Corinthians, 1-2 Thessalonians, and 1-2 Timothy. In these cases the length of the first document determines the position of both documents regardless of the length of the second document.

The general letters begins with James and ends with Jude and follows the same guidelines for sequential listing. Hebrews then is dropped down between the Pauline and the General Letter sections placing it near the Pauline section, but not inside it. Were it inside the Pauline section reflecting clear Pauline authorship, it would come after 2 Corinthians sequentially.

### 2.1.3.3 Paul's Life and Ministry

Before a clear understanding of Paul's writing ministry can emerge, some background understanding of this life and gospel ministry must be studied. This is particularly important for Paul, since all his letters were 'occasional' letters. This means that every writing of Paul in the New Testament was prompted by a particular set of historical circumstances at a specific geographical region in the eastern Mediterranean world of the mid-first century. His letters were a substitute presence, and were written simply because circumstances at that moment made it impossible for the apostle to travel to the location needing attention. Thus Paul's letters are 'historically conditioned' to a very high level.

Such has profound impact on the process of understanding the contents of each letter. Where Paul was when the letter was written becomes important. What was going on around him at the time of writing shaped some of his thinking. Identifying the situation of those to whom the letter was written takes on great importance. Frequently Paul will only allude to a problem in addressing it. Knowing as much about the situation as possible helps us understand how Paul proposes to solve it. And why he takes the particular angle of solution. Of course, when the letter was sent to its recipients is important since problems in the churches were always shifting and emerging with new twists and angles. Who helped Paul do the writing is increasingly understood in contemporary scholarship as very important to the interpretive process as well.

Below is a Timeline of Paul's writing ministry, that I developed years ago for use in the classroom.

## Timeline of Paul's Ministry

Missionary Activity	Writing Ministry
<p><b>I. Paul's early ministry</b></p> <p>A. Conversion and early activities (AD 33-46)</p> <p>B. First missionary journey (AD 46-47), Acts 13:1-14:28</p> <p>C. Jerusalem council (AD 48), Acts 15:1-35, Gal 2:1-10</p>	<p><b>Galatians, AD 47 (South Galatian Theory)</b> (From Antioch)</p>
<p><b>II. Paul's middle period of ministry</b></p> <p>A. The second missionary journey (ca. AD 48-51), Acts 15:36-18:22</p>	<p><b>I. Paul's Early Writing Ministry</b></p> <p>Galatians, AD 49* (South Galatian Theory) (From Macedonia)</p> <p>1 Thessalonians AD 50 (From Athens)</p> <p>2 Thessalonians AD 51 (From Corinth)</p>
<p>B. The third missionary journey (ca AD 52-57), Acts 18:23-21:16</p>	<p><b>II. Paul's Middle Period Writing Ministry</b></p> <p>1 Corinthians, AD 54-55 (From Ephesus) (Possibly the Prison Letters from Ephesus)</p> <p>2 Corinthians, AD 56 (From Macedonia)</p> <p>Romans, AD 57 (From Corinth)</p> <p><b>Galatians, AD 57 (North Galatian Theory)</b> (From Corinth)</p>

**III. Paul's final period of ministry**

- A. Arrest in Jerusalem (AD 57),  
Acts 21:17-23:22
- B. Imprisonment in Caesarea (AD 57-60),  
Acts 23:23-26:32
  
- C. The Voyage to Rome (AD 60),  
Acts 27:1-28:13
  
- D. House Arrest in Rome (AD 61-62),  
Acts 28:14-31; Eph. 3:1, 4:1, 6:18-22;  
Phil. 1:12-26; 2:19-30; 4:1-3, 10-19; Col 4:7-18;  
Philm 22-24.

Prison Letters,  
Colossians, AD 57-60  
(From Caesarea)  
Ephesians  
(From Caesarea)  
Philemon  
(From Caesarea)  
(Possibly Philippians also)

Philippians, AD 61-62  
(From Rome)  
(Possibly the above prison letters also)

- E. Release from Imprisonment and Resumption of  
Ministry (AD 63-64),  
1 Tim. 1:3-4; Titus 1:5, 3:12-13.

Pastoral Letters,  
1 Timothy, AD 63-64  
(From Macedonia)  
Titus, AD 63-64  
(From Nicopolis)

- F. Subsequent Arrest and Execution in Rome  
(AD 64),  
2 Tim. 1:8, 15-18; 4:7-21.

2 Timothy, AD 64  
(From Rome)

Notes:

This chronological schema depends upon a combination of traditional understanding and modern scholarly insights. It represents but one projection of possible temporal connections between Paul's work as a missionary and his ministry in letter writing.

What is not included here is the much more complex relationship with the Christian community at Corinth. For a reconstruction of that, see my "Paul's Relation to the Church at Corinth" at <http://cranfordville.com/paul-cor.htm>.

Also complex is the internal connection of the four Prison Letters. Clearly Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon have a close connection. But the connection of Philippians to these three letters is less clear. I see the first three as arising from Paul's lengthy imprisonment at Caesarea after his arrest in Jerusalem, while Philippians comes later during his house arrest as he awaits his first trial before the Roman emperor Nero in the early 60s. The possibility of an Ephesian origin for either three or all four of these letters certainly exists, but the evidence for it is scanty and thus such an early date for the origin of these letters during the third missionary journey is very subjective. For more details, see my "Relationships among the Prison Letters" at <http://cranfordville.com/paul-pris.htm>.

Lastly but far from least is the issue of the Pastoral Letters. Since the F.C. Baur Tübingen School of the 1800s in Germany, much of modern scholarship has been convinced that these letters, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, are pseudo-pauline letters, and should be dated anywhere from the late first century to well into the second century AD. As I have studied the issue over the past forty years while living both in the US and in Germany, I have become less and less convinced by the arguments put forth in defense of this position. At the same time, increasingly convincing arguments have been set forth both in critique of the Baur position, as well as in defense of the Pauline connection to these letters. Thus I tend toward the traditional view that Paul did dictate these letters to a writing secretary toward the end of his life and that they were authorized by the apostle himself before his death, contra the view of P.N. Harrison who sees pauline fragments in a deutero-pauline view. But the evidence is clearly not a black/white matter. In the traditional view, one must assume some significant developments in the apostle's thinking about some issues of the Christian belief system. Yet, in his 60s, I would expect Paul's thinking to be somewhat different than it was in his early 30s, when he first began ministry as an apostle. I certainly hope my thinking has changed and developed over the past forty plus years of Christian ministry. When I preached my first sermon in March of 1958, I understood very little about Christianity. Hopefully I understand much more now, in May of 2005.

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### 2.1.3.4 The Ministry of Writing

Writing a document of any kind in the first century world was quite an undertaking. Writing materials were primitive and the process of writing was painstakingly tedious and long. Different kinds of writings had differing patterns of composition that were to be followed, just as is true in our contemporary world. But these patterns were not the same as is true in today's world. All of Paul's writings in the New Testament are in the form of a letter. But letter writing in the ancient world was very different than in our day.

**Letter Structure.** Paul's letters follow the ancient pattern in their core elements, although the apostle exhibits substantial creativity in expanding and modifying these core elements. The diagram to the right illustrates the component elements in a typical ancient letter. The example is taken from Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Four core segments were commonly found in the typically one to two page long letters in the first Christian century.

The *Praescriptio* was the introductory segment written in formulae, rather than sentence, structure. In the Greek pattern came first the identification of the sender or senders of the letter (the *Superscriptio*). Next were the recipients of the letter identified (the *Adscriptio*). Thirdly, came the bridging word of greetings from the sender to the recipients (the *Salutatio*). The usual greeting was but a single word: χαίρειν. But Paul usually extends this to 'grace and peace...' (χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη...). Most ancient letters, including both formal and intimate types, at that time contained little amplification of each of these three elements. Paul's letters, on the other hand, usually contain extensive expansion elements of these core segments.

The *Proem* section served also as a bridging device and sometimes merely extended the *Salutatio* section. The distinctive aspect of the *Proem* was its prayer structure. The *Proem* typically invoked the blessing of the deity / deities worshipped by the sender and / or recipient. In Paul's letters the *Proem* always begins with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the letter recipients. Often, the thanksgiving merges into a petitionary prayer in behalf of the readers for God to bless them in certain ways. Sometimes the *Proem* in Paul's letters are short, but sometimes they are quite long. Only the letter to Titus omits the *Proem*.

Paul does something in these first two segments that was occasionally done by ancient letter writers. In the expansion of the core elements in either the *Praescriptio* and the *Proem*, or in just one of these, Paul will signal the major themes to be addressed in the Body proper of the letter. Thus by the end of the *Proem* the reader has some idea of what Paul is going to talk about in the Body section of the letter.

The *Body* of the letter does not follow any prescribed structure. The arrangement of the contents depended on the creativity of the writer and on the general purpose for the writing of the letter. Quite a number of guidelines in these matters existed in the ancient world and were generally adhered to by letter writers, especially in the writing of formal letters over against personal letters. Paul exhibits considerable creativity in this section of his letters, although definable literary forms that he used can be traced out.

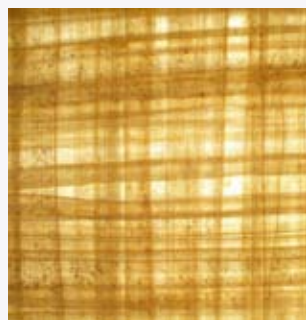
The *Conclusio* is the final section of ancient letters. This section provided the writer the opportunity to 'wrap up' his thoughts, and from the hundreds of surviving ancient letters available to us today, we can detect several distinct sub-units of material were possible to insert at this point. Paul's letters will usually have some combination of four sub-units: Greetings, Sender Verification, Doxologies, and Benediction. Occasionally additional material is also inserted.

**Letter Writing Process.** The actual writing of ancient letters, outside of very brief personal letters, was done by a writing secretary employed by the sender of the letter for this laborious task. These individuals were known as scribes, in Greek γραμματεὺς and in Latin *amanuensis*. They had training in writing, taking dictation etc. and were more polished in writing out documents. Paul alludes to this practice in 2 Thess. 3:17 by indicating that he had only written the *Conclusio* part of the letter according to his usual custom with his

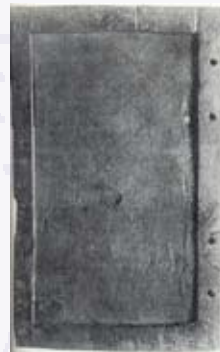


Ancient Letter on papyrus

letters: “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the mark in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.” Unfortunately we don’t know the names of the individuals who did the actual writing of Paul’s letters, outside of Tertius who identifies himself as the writer of the letter to the Romans in Rom. 16:22: “I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord.” Elsewhere in the New Testament, Silas identifies himself by his Latin name, Silvanus, as the writer of 1 Peter in 1 Pet. 5: “Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother,



I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God.” The typical process of that time most likely was followed by Paul with the composition of his letters. This normally involved the sender of the letter sketching out verbally what he wanted to say, and the writing secretary would then write out a draft form on a board with warm wax as the writing surface. Once the letter had been proofed, revised, and brought to finalized form, the letter would be written on a more permanent surface, usually papyrus. Then the sender would put his ‘stamp of verification’ on the letter -- usually the writing of the *Conclusio* in his own hand



writing that was familiar to the letter recipients (cf. 2 Thess. 3:17 and Gal. 6:11-18<sup>1</sup> for examples).

In this way the apostle Paul was responsible for eleven of the twenty-seven documents in our New Testament.

The question naturally arises over whether this is all that the apostle Paul wrote. And the answer to that question can be answered from data inside the New Testament as “No, Paul wrote more than what we have in the New Testament.” From the writings of Paul to the Corinthian church we know with certainty that he wrote at least four letters to the church at Corinth, but we only have two of them in our New Testament. And depending on how Col. 4:16 is understood,<sup>2</sup> there quite possibly was a letter to the church at Laodicea that Paul also wrote. How many others may have existed at one time and have been lost we do not know.



But of those in the New Testament the following summary is important, that is based upon the above listed timeline.

<sup>1</sup>Gal. 6:11 (NRSV): “See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!...”

<sup>2</sup>”And when this letter [i.e., Colossians] has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and *see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.*” (Col. 4:16, NRSV)

#### 2.1.3.4.1 The Early Writings

**Galatians.** After Paul and Silas had passed through the Galatian province on the second missionary journey in the late 40s of the first century, they moved on to Macedonia to establish churches at Philippi, Thessalonica, etc. While there word came that the Galatian churches were coming under the growing influence of Judaizing teaching that claimed that one could not become a Christian without first converting to Judaism, since “salvation was of the Jews only.” The letter is written as a stinging rebuke of these false teachers and as a passionate appeal to the believers in Galatia to remain steadfastly committed to the apostolic gospel of ‘justification by faith apart from works of Law.’

**1 Thessalonians.** After Paul had left Thessalonica in Macedonia around 50 AD on this same missionary journey, he landed in Athens to preach the gospel to this city. Timothy and Silas soon joined him there with a report on the situation of the church in Thessalonica. Paul’s first letter to the church was written from Athens and carried to Thessalonica by Timothy (cf. 1 Thess. 3:1) to encourage the church and to correct some understandings about the gospel, in particular about the second coming of Christ.

**2 Thessalonians.** A few months later after Paul had moved on to Corinth from Athens Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth with another update on the situation at Thessalonica. More serious problems, especially about Christ’s return, were surfacing at Thessalonica and this letter was written to address these issues along with encouraging the church to remain faithful to Christ.

From Corinth in 51 AD Paul heads back to Jerusalem and then to Antioch to report to this congregation what God has done in raising up new churches.

#### 2.1.3.4.2 The Middle Writings

**1 Corinthians.** On the third missionary journey (AD 52-57), Paul and Silas along with others traveling with them move due west from Galatia to Ephesus on the western coast of the Roman province of Asia. Here Paul will spend almost three years in a lengthy mission in and around Ephesus. At some point evidently early on at Ephesus, Paul penned a letter to the Corinthians that he mentions in 1 Cor. 5:9. This letter is now lost, in spite of some scholarly opinion contending that part of it is contained in 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1. The circumstances prompting the writing of this letter are not clear, but at least in part had to do with immoral behavior by some of the Corinthians while professing to be Christian.

At some point during this lengthy Ephesian ministry Paul received two reports about more serious problems in the church continuing to develop in Corinth. Members of the household of Chloe were in Ephesus on business and brought a report of several significant problems which Paul addressed in chapters one through six of 1 Corinthians. Also during the same general period of time a group of Corinthian believers traveled to Ephesus to raise specific questions to Paul on several topics and he addresses those issues in chapters seven through sixteen of 1 Corinthians.

Sometime afterwards Paul evidently decided to make a quick visit to Corinth in order to correct some of the problems still unresolved in the church (cf. 2 Cor. 2:1; 12:14; 13:1,2 for sources). The trip proved to be very painful for the apostle and didn’t achieve the success he had hoped for.

**2 Corinthians.** During the final months at Ephesus toward the middle 50s, Paul encountered vicious opposition to the preaching of the gospel in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:1-20:1). He had sent Titus ahead to Corinth to see whether Titus could help solve the problems at Corinth and to resolve some of the animosity against Paul that had developed there. Paul left Ephesus and headed northwest into Macedonia where he and Silas spent some time. In part he was waiting to hear from Titus who was to meet him in Macedonia with a report on the situation at Corinth. This would determine whether he went on to Corinth or headed on to Jerusalem from Macedonia. A major activity of Paul during the third missionary journey had been the collection of a sizeable ‘relief offering’ from the Gentile churches of Asia, Macedonia and Achaia to take to the believers in Judea who were suffering from both persecution and a severe drought in that part of the world. Titus showed up with basically good news about Corinth. In response Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to encourage the Corinthians, and to vigorously defend his right as an apostle. Titus carried this letter back to Corinth ahead of Paul and the delegation of other believers who were traveling with Paul at this point representing their churches with the relief offering.

**Romans.** Upon arriving at Corinth, Paul spent three months in ministry there (cf. Acts 20:3) before heading to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Pentecost in the temple (cf. Acts 20:16). During that time in Corinth, he began anticipating future ministry in Rome (cf. Acts 19:21). As a part of that growing conviction he dictated the letter to the Romans to his writing secretary, Tertitus (cf. Rom. 16:22). This letter, the most carefully crafted of any of Paul’s writings, was to serve as an introduction of the apostle to a congregation whom he did not know from personal experience, although he knew many of its leaders from encounters elsewhere in the empire. In this letter Paul comes the closest to setting forth a “biblical theology” as can be

found anywhere in the New Testament. In the lengthy body of the letter he places his gospel message on the table in carefully laid out fashion. His dream was that Rome could serve as a launch pad for extended ministry in the western Mediterranean just as Antioch had been for the northeastern Mediterranean world (cf. Rom. 15:14-33). A growing sense of imminent danger developed in Paul as he headed for Jerusalem, but he remained confident of God's watch care over him and of the necessity of traveling to Jerusalem.

#### 2.1.3.4.3 The Captivity Writings

Once Paul arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost in late spring of AD 57, things did not go the way he had planned. Instead of being able to worship God in the temple and then move on to Antioch in the north, he found himself embroiled in a substantial controversy with the Jewish religious leadership who were determined to get rid of him at all costs. The threat on his life became so severe that the Roman military commander whisked him away at midnight from Jerusalem to the central military garrison at Caesarea Philippi on the Mediterranean coast. There he would remain for over two years occasionally having to defend himself against trumped up charges brought against him by the Jewish authorities (cf. Acts 23:16-26:32). In desperation he drew upon one of the privileges of his Roman citizenship and appealed to the emperor to hear his case. The Roman governor Festus had no choice but to grant his demand.

**Ephesians.** During this lengthy two year imprisonment Paul kept busy in part with the writing of a series of letters to churches in western Asia. Ephesians was composed not only for the church at Ephesus, but as a 'cover letter' to serve as an introduction to the other letters of Colossians and Philemon (and maybe the one to the Laodiceans also). Thus Ephesians treats eloquent themes of the exalted nature of the church as the Body of Christ with all that implies for righteous living.

**Colossians.** Both Colossians and Philemon are sent to the inland town of Colossae some hundred or so kilometers east of Ephesus. The letter to the Colossians treats also some eloquent themes of a rather philosophical nature about the person and being of Christ. False teachers with a peculiar blending of Jewish mysticism and Greek philosophical tendencies toward Gnosticism were having a ruinous impact on believers there. Paul sought to counter this false teaching with gospel truth couched in philosophical tones.

**Philemon.** Philemon was a Christian leader at Colossae who had had a runaway slave named Onesimus. This slave had met Paul along the way and in the process had become a Christian. Now Paul was sending him back home to Colossae and to Philemon who was a dear friend of the apostle. Paul wrote to his friend to take Onesimus back not just as a slave but as a Christian brother. Later church tradition suggests that Onesimus eventually became a Christian leader himself.

**Philippians.** At the end of Paul's lengthy imprisonment in Caesarea Philippi in AD 60, he was placed on board a ship and under Roman soldier guard was transported to Rome in order to stand trial there before Emperor Nero. After arriving in Rome Paul was placed under house arrest while awaiting his trial before the emperor. During this time -- perhaps two or more years -- Paul received a visit from Epaphroditus, a Philippian believer who brought a love offering from the Philippian church to Paul in order help him during his imprisonment there. In response, Paul dictated one of the most joyous letters of his entire ministry to the church as a thank you letter for their generous support of him and his ministry, especially during his days of confinement by the Roman authorities.

#### 2.1.3.4.4 The Pastoral Letters

The book of Acts ends in chapter twenty eight with Paul under house arrest in Rome. Reconstructing the story of the final years of Paul's life then becomes more challenging because of the scarcity of data. But a commonly followed understanding based on Pauline authorship of the pastorals can be sketched out as follows.

**1 Timothy.** Sometime in late 61 or early 62 AD Paul successfully defended himself before Nero and was released from Roman custody. Now freed to again preach the gospel, the apostle resumed his missionary activity. Earlier he had expressed a desire to travel to Spain (cf. Rom. 15:24) to evangelize. Whether or not he was able to do so during this time is unclear, but rather doubtful. He did evidently travel to Ephesus and to Crete as a part of his activities after release from imprisonment in Rome.

From an undisclosed location Paul wrote 1 Timothy to his young assistant who now was at Ephesus attempting to help the churches address a variety of issues before them. Paul indicates that he planned to come soon to Ephesus after writing the letter (cf. 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 4:13). We assume that he did.

**Titus.** Perhaps on the way he passed through the island of Crete and found numerous problems there among the churches. Thus he left another young assistant Titus on Crete in order to attempt to solve these problems (Titus 1:5ff). After arriving at Nicopolis on the western coast of Greece in late fall, the letter to Titus was written (cf. Titus 3:12-13). Like 1 Timothy, this letter contains instructions to the two young preachers on



how to lead the churches toward resolution of many of their problems.

**2 Timothy.** At some point in late 63 or early 64 AD Paul found himself again a prisoner of the Romans and once more back in Rome facing another trial before Emperor Nero. By this time, Nero is increasingly in conflict with the Roman Senate with the tensions soon to produce the infamous burning of Rome in the mid 60s. He is in no sympathetic mood to treat fairly those brought before him under charges of some sort.

Thus shortly before Paul was sentenced to be executed by Nero, he wrote his final letter, again to his young friend Timothy who was still chipping away at the problems in Ephesus after quite some time there.

According to strong church tradition the apostle Paul suffered martyrdom at the hands of Emperor Nero sometime in the mid 60s of the first Christian century. The exact time frame is not certain and could have been at any point from about 64 to 68 AD. More likely, it was toward the earlier point of this time frame. At the same time, so says church tradition, the apostle Peter also suffered martyrdom at the hands of Nero.

Thus came to an end the life of the greatest Christian, outside of Jesus, to ever live and serve God. The impact of this converted Jew from Tarsus remains profound on the Christian movement nearly two thousand years after his death. Through his ministry, Christian moved from being another Jewish sect to becoming a world wide religion embracing all peoples of all nations. God mightily used this man that He changed on the Damascus road in the early 30s.

## How do I learn more?

### Online

Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament*, "The Epistles of Paul," chap. 13:  
<http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=1116&C=1233>

