

Walking Through the Word

Jesus, Paul and the Church (Week 25)

Story: **Paul's Letters of Love and Leadership** [E: Paul Arrives in Rome; Onesimus, the Runaway Slave; Paul Finishes His Race and The New Testament Letters (560-564); New Testament: Pauline Epistles (618-619); see also The Phillipian Jailer (only end of 535)]

Location: **Acts 28, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon**

Bios & definitions

epistle: a long, formal letter, intended to provide instruction; from the Greek *epistolé* meaning a message or letter, typically more formal like a "treatise" than an informal piece of correspondence

author: the apostle Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, authored each of the letters/epistles listed here; there is some scholarly dispute about the time of some writings, and there is also the suggestion that some of the writings do not mimic Paul's style as well as others (e.g. 2 Thessalonians), but it is generally agreed that Paul authored all of these letters to the churches in the areas noted by the names of the works

NOTE: a short timeline of Paul and his journies/written works:

Paul was a Jew, culturally and religiously, by birth and by choice. ... When he comes onto the biblical scene at the confrontation with Stephen (Acts 7:58), we see Paul as a young Pharisee, zealous for the faith and giving his approval to Stephen's death. Later, we learn that Paul had been trained by Gamaliel, the most respected rabbi of the day (Acts 22:3). Paul was so Jewish, in fact, that he became obsessed with eliminating the young Christian sect that he viewed as heretical (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). Paul was Jewish, but he was also a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28). The mighty Roman Empire extended well beyond Italy, through Macedonia and Asia, all the way to the limits of Judea. Although all who lived in the conquered territory were under Roman domination, not everyone was a Roman citizen. That was a special privilege. A person could become a Roman citizen by birth (born to parents who were citizens) or by purchase. And with Roman citizenship came certain rights and guarantees (for example, the right to a fair trial and the right of passage). So Paul had dual citizenship—in Israel and in Rome—and both were important to him. But Paul was a citizen of yet another nation, the Kingdom of God. ...

After his conversion to Christ (Acts 9:1-19), Paul spent three years in Damascus with Ananias and the other disciples in that city (Gal 1:18). There his ministry began (Acts 9:20-23). Paul then returned to Jerusalem, sponsored by Barnabas, who encouraged him and presented him to the apostles. But after attempts on Paul's life by his former associates, zealous Jews, he was sent by the apostles to Tarsus. (It would be fourteen years before he would return to Jerusalem—see Gal 2:1.)

Paul remained in the northern region for about eight years, becoming established in the faith and teaching in the churches, especially in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). The church at Antioch then commissioned Paul and Barnabas, sending them on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3), to Cyprus, Pamphylia, and Galatia (Acts 13:4-14:28). This trip occurred in A.D. 46-48. At each town, first Paul would attempt to reach the Jews with the gospel; then he would reach beyond the synagogue to the Gentiles, who responded in great numbers. The response of the Gentiles further enraged the Jews and even caused the apostles and other believers to question Paul's ministry. The issue of taking the gospel to non-Jews was somewhat resolved at the Council of Jerusalem in AD 50 (Acts 15).

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Paul took two other missionary trips, establishing churches in Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and other cities along the Mediterranean coast and inland. These trips occurred in A.D. 50–52 and A.D. 53–57. While on his third missionary journey, Paul became determined to return to Jerusalem to deliver the money he had collected for believers there, even though he knew that enemies were waiting for him (Acts 20:22-24).

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem was peaceful at first (Acts 21:17-19), but when he was recognized at the Temple, a violent mob seized him and tried to kill him (Acts 21:27-32). This led to his conversation with the commander and the beginning of his series of trials that eventually brought Paul to Rome in A.D. 59 (Acts 28:11-16).

Although under Roman guard in a house, Paul was able to continue his ministry while in Rome, teaching all who came to visit and listen. In addition, he was able to write the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. This arrangement lasted two years (Acts 28:17-31).

According to tradition, Paul was released after those two years. Some reasons for this tradition are as follows: (1) Luke does not give an account of Paul's trial before Caesar, and Luke was a detailed historian; (2) the prosecution had two years to bring the case to trial, and time may have run out; (3) in Paul's letter to the Philippians, written during his imprisonment in Rome, he implied that he would soon be released and would do further traveling; (4) Paul mentioned several places where he intended to take the gospel, but he never had visited those places in his first three journeys; and (5) early Christian literature talks plainly about other travels by Paul.

After his release, Paul probably left on another missionary journey, through Ephesus where he left Timothy (1 Timothy 1:3), then to Colosse (Philemon 22), and on to Macedonia. He may also have realized his goal of going to Spain (Romans 15:24, 28). Eventually he probably journeyed east and visited Crete (Titus 1:5), where he left Titus to organize and lead the church. During this time of freedom, Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus.

Eventually, Paul was arrested a second time and returned to Rome. This prison experience differed greatly from his first—this time Paul was isolated and lonely, awaiting execution (2 Tim 4:9-18). However, he was able to write 2 Timothy. Paul was martyred in the spring of A.D. 68.¹

Romans: this letter, more like a formal essay, is considered Paul's most thoughtful work, as it is a systematic explanation of salvation and God's grace, God's overarching redemptive plan; it was written to primarily a Gentile audience (the church at Rome), though Jews made up a small portion of the congregation; likely written in AD 56-57 from Corinth or close by, while Paul was anticipating (or on) his third missionary journey

KEY IDEAS: all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom 3:23); sin is death, but God's gift is eternal life through Christ (6:23); righteousness comes from God (chpt 3); there is no condemnation for those in Christ (chpt 8)

1 Corinthians : this letter is one of two Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, in many ways the chief city of Greece in Paul's day (heavy commerce, priority on religious temples, highly immoral but "cultured") ; it was written to deal with inappropriate behavior among believers in the city; he authored this work around AD 54-55, while concluding his ministry in Ephesus

KEY IDEAS: teaching against division among and immorality by the Christians (chpts 1-6); instruction about the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) and orderly worship (chpt 14); most famous for "Love Chapter" (13:1-13)

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2 Corinthians – the second of Paul’s letters to Corinth, addressing concerns about Paul’s authority and the false teachers who were undermining the work he had done among the church; likely written later the same year as the first letter (AD 55), following a painful (2nd) visit to the church (1 Cor 2:1) when his advice was not heeded, and postponing another visit (3rd) until after writing the second letter (Acts 20:2,3)

NOTE: Paul ... wrote several letters to the believers in Corinth, two of which are included in the Bible. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is lost ([1 Corinthians 5:9-11](#)), his second letter to them is our book of 1 Corinthians, his third letter is lost ([2:6-9](#); [7:12](#)), and his fourth letter is our book of 2 Corinthians. Second Corinthians was written less than a year after 1 Corinthians.²

Galatians – this letter of Paul to the church at Galatia was written to help Jewish and Gentile believers embrace that a man is justified by faith in Christ, no more and no less; a strong argument was made by some Jewish Christians insisting on Gentile believers practicing certain customs to be accepted (e.g. circumcision); Paul writes to emphasize our adoption into the family of God regardless of ethnicity, gender or social status; dating for this letter rests on the question of to what area of Galatia this was written, south (AD 48-49) or north (AD 53-57)

KEY IDEAS: we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28); we have “sonship” or adoption through Christ (chpt 4); walking by and living in the Spirit (chpts 5-6)

Ephesians – unlike many of Paul’s letters, which were often written to address wrong behaviors or false truth circulating among believers, Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus to emphasize God’s desire for the church and how it might function best and what it means to live out our faith in daily life; authored around AD 60-61; the city was on par with Rome, Antioch and Corinth for its fame, most notably for its temple of Diana; this may have been authored with the “Prison Letters” (most notably with Colossians)

KEY IDEAS: God reconciled man to Himself through Christ and His grace (chpt 2); there is unity among true believers of God and they should walk in the light and imitate God by following Christ’s example (chpts 4-5)

Philippians – one of several letters from Paul written during his house arrest, known as a “Prison Letter”; this is very much a “thank you” letter from Paul to the church in Philippi for its missionary support and to give them a report on his circumstance; he used the opportunity to encourage the believers in this Roman colony to stand firm during persecution and rejoice in difficulty; probably written AD 60-61

KEY IDEAS: one of the most familiar and important passages about Christ and His self-denial (Phil 2:5-11) and “joy,” which is mentioned in some form, more than 15 times (most famously in 4:1-8)

Colossians – another of Paul’s “Prison Letters” written about the same time as Ephesians and Philemon; authored to combat the heresy circulating in the church; though Paul does not directly address the issue, some conclusions may be drawn (e.g. ceremonialism, reduction of Christ as most important, angel worship, and secret knowledge); written from house arrest in Rome in AD 60-61

KEY IDEAS: supremacy of Jesus Christ (1:15-23); warning against false teaching (chpt 2) and instruction for living a holy life and keeping a Godly household (chpt 3)

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1 Thessalonians – usually regarded as Paul’s earliest letter to a church (see entry on **Galatians** for possible difference), this correspondence came to Thessalonica to encourage new believers in their faith, as Paul was not present with this church very long in his missionary journeys (Acts 17:5-10) and wanted to give more support to a church he left in its infancy; a very dominant theme of the Second Coming of Christ is present in both this first and Paul’s second letter to the church; written circa AD 51-52

2 Thessalonians – written very shortly after his first letter to Thessalonica, Paul sends another letter emphasizing the same thoughts, as it appeared the church had not changed much; he wrote to encourage new converts, to challenge believers to be diligent to labor faithfully, and to speak about the Lord’s return; likely authored about 6 months after 1 Thess in AD 52

KEY IDEAS: almost 40 percent of this letter deals with the last days of Christ (known as eschatology), as 18 of 47 verses contain a reference to the subject

1 Timothy – one of three letters from Paul known as the “Pastorals” – letters emphasizing pastoral care for congregations; this letter, along with 2 Timothy, were written from Paul to Timothy, a young minister whom Paul mentored and took under his wing as a son in the faith; written to exhort Timothy as the key leader at Ephesus (following his fourth missionary journey, see 1 Tim 1:3) when Paul realized he might not return to the city after leaving for Macedonia; this first challenge to Timothy was authored circa AD 63-65, some eight years after the recorded events of Acts 28

KEY IDEAS: instruction for appointing leadership in the church (chpt 3); how to deal with false teachers (chpt 4); how to minister to different church folk (chpts 5-6); a pastoral charge (6:11-16)

2 Timothy – Paul’s second pastoral letter to Timothy, this one written from the Mamertime dungeon during his imprisonment under Emperor Nero in AD 65-67 toward the end of his life; his letter indicates a fondness for Timothy (and loneliness during imprisonment), a desire to see Timothy and the Ephesian church persevere during Nero’s persecution (2 Tim 2:1-13, 3:1-17), and a charge to stand firm in the face of difficult times (4:1-6)

Titus – a Pastoral letter from Paul to a Gentile believer to whom was given the responsibility to oversee the church in Crete; Titus was a help to Paul in his ministry and worked with him in Ephesus; Paul writes to Titus to give him instruction on organizing the new believers there, and how they are to live; there is an emphasis on “good deeds” given the heresies present on the island, which had fallen into moral decay and short briefs on key Christian ideas (2:11-14, 3:4-7); this is written at the same time as 1 Timothy circa AD 63-65

Philemon – this is another of Paul’s “Prison Letters,” this one written to a believer in Colossae who was a slave owner; Philemon’s slave Onesimus had stolen from his master and run away, but encountered Paul, who vouched for Onesimus and the change in him because of Christ (Philemon 10); Paul writes to ask Philemon to receive his slave back as a fellow Christian and not a slave punishable with death; letter written at the same time as Colossians in AD 60; both were likely delivered by Onesimus, one to his master, the other to the church

¹ Source: [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#)

² Source: [Life Application Study Bible](#)