

A Bible Study Regarding—
THE ORDER OF PAUL’S EPISTLES
IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE BOOK OF ACTS

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A CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

The purpose of this study is to show the time period the Book of Acts covers and the relationship of Paul’s Epistles (and ministry) to that time period. It is well known by most Bible teachers that the book of Acts represents the history of a “Transition” in the early church out of Judaism into pure Christianity. The exact particulars of what is involved in that transition are hotly disputed by some sects. However, most would obviously agree to certain fundamental changes that occurred during those years in the experience and fellowship of the early Christian communities.

The expression found in Hebrews 9:10, “*the time of reformation,*” most certainly applies to the book of Acts time period. The inspired writer to the Hebrew believers says that the Law of Moses which was characterized by “*physical ordinances*” was “*imposed until the time of reformation.*” The Greek word *diorthosis* is translated “reformation.” It basically means “to set in order” or “to make proper arrangement.” This “reformation” or “setting things in order” involved the transition out of Judaism into pure Christianity as covered in the Acts history of the early Christian communities, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and through the agency of the Apostles, in particular, the apostle Paul.

Actually what is told us in the passage from the ninth chapter of Hebrews is that the whole physical ceremonial system of Judaism—composed of the outward physical dietary laws, the variety of baptisms, and most certainly mandatory circumcision (see Acts 15:1 & 5)—would be terminated at the end of this time period. We say it would be terminated at the end of this time period because the immediate context—Hebrews 8:13, tells us that the Old Covenant “*becoming obsolete and growing old is now ready to vanish away.*” At the beginning of the book of Acts the church was totally Jewish and worshipping in the Temple—devoutly keeping the Law. At the middle of the book of Acts (Acts 15) it is firmly established that the new converts from among the Gentiles were not to have the Law of Moses imposed upon them. Jewish believers continued to practice the ceremonial Law (Acts 21:20). With the close of the book of Acts the Hebrew believers were also clearly and plainly liberated from the ceremonial Law system. At 70 A.D. the Temple was destroyed and true Christianity moved forward.

We shall see that the book of Acts covers approximately 32 years until about 62 A.D. After another eight years the Temple and the city of Jerusalem were destroyed. Thus, from the death of Christ in 30 A.D. until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. was a 40 year time period. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in the well

attested date of 70 A.D., brings to a close, in finality, this transition time period. By the end of this 40 year time period most everyone agrees there was realized for the church such things as the termination of animal sacrifices, the end of the functioning of the Levitical priesthood, the elimination of Temple worship, etc. Because of the doctrinal content of Paul's letters, it is necessary to place them in a proper chronological order on this scale of time to show the principle of "*Progressive Revelation*" as it unfolds in those instructions to the early church composed of both Jews and Gentiles. The Holy Spirit did not reveal everything to the church all at once. It was progressively and systematically unfolded.

It is the purpose of this part of the study on the "Transition period" to examine the actual chronology of the time period itself. Then we shall superimpose upon that chronology the ministry and epistles of the Apostle Paul. It was primarily through Paul's ministry that the distinctive characteristics of Christianity emerged.

The Starting Date of 30 A.D.

Since our modern calendars are set by the date of the birth of Christ and since Christ lived to 33 years of age (Luke 3:23 and 13:7) it has been traditional to date His crucifixion and the birth of the church on Pentecost of 33 A.D. However in this study you will note that the starting date of the book of Acts is 30 A.D. and naturally you would want to know why this is. In the year 525 A.D. a Roman Catholic monk named Dionysius Exiguus was commissioned by the Pope to establish a calendar for the Western Church. He began dating events from the perspective of the year of Christ's birth instead of from the Roman civil Julian calendar. His system began to be used widely and eventually became the calendar method of Western civilization. It was officially adopted and sponsored by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, and is since called the Gregorian Calendar. All events happening before Christ's birth are dated B.C.—meaning *Before Christ*. All events occurring after Christ's birth were dated A.D.—meaning *Anno Domini* (or the Year of our Lord). (Today, most historians and scholarship adopt the meaning of B.C.E. as *Before the Common Era* and C.E. as *the Common Era*.)

Today it is generally conceded by historians and chronologers that Dionysius was in error in his calculations of the date of Christ's birth in relationship to the Julian calendar by four or five years. Hence, most historians today would say that Christ was actually born in late 5 B.C. and died in early 30 A.D. Josephus, the Jewish historian, documents the death of King Herod (Matt. 2:15) by a lunar eclipse (Antiquities, op. cit. XVII, 6, 4) which has now been identified by computer calculations as taking place in March of 4 B.C. In addition, confirmatory evidence of the date of Christ's death also comes in the form of modern computer calculations as to the Lunar months. Since the Jewish sacred year calendar is primarily a Lunar calendar, with each month set by the arrival of a new moon, the computer was able to do an otherwise almost impossible task of calculating the exact times of the new moons in that time frame. From the Biblical record it is evident that when Christ died the Passover had occurred on a Thursday (Nisan 14) and Friday (Nisan 15) relationship. Indeed, the computers found that the Passover that occurred precisely within that Thursday-Friday relationship was in 30 A.D. and not the traditional 33 A.D. Hence, we start the book of Acts record at 30 A.D.

General Explanation

Calculating the actual years in the book of Acts will almost entirely center around the record of Paul's life and ministry. I will combine statements in Luke's record of the Acts time period with statements in the Epistles of Paul. The council in Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15 will actually be a pivotal point in this chronology. An assessment of the time indicated in the book of Acts, along with statements made by Paul in the book of Galatians and then certain historical and archaeological findings, will all be helpful in solidifying the approximate date of A.D. 50 for the council in Jerusalem of Acts 15. I will depend upon statements in Galatians about Paul's conversion and visits to Jerusalem to cover the earlier years of the book of Acts up until the council of Acts 15. Then, we will follow Paul's travels rather closely to cover the years following the council of Acts 15 up until Paul's imprisonment in Rome where the book of Acts closes in approximately 62 A.D. The total time covered in the book of Acts is approximately 32 years.

Approximately eight years after the close of the book of Acts the Roman armies, under the leadership of the Roman general Titus, totally destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. Thus the total time from 30 A.D. to 70 A.D. is 40 years. We can think of this as similar in nature to the 40 year time period that Israel experienced when they came out of the land of Egypt until they finally arrived in their promised land. Israel went through many adjustments as they came under a new economy. There was progressive revelation through Moses as they learned how to implement the various laws that were unfolded to them. In addition there were miraculous helps given to aid Israel and to preserve her through that wilderness journey. They did not always know where they were going were it not for the miraculous guidance. There were also times of rebellion which brought about severe discipline to be administered. Finally, by the end of that 40 year time period, Israel was mature enough to enter into her promised land. Now they could function in completeness for the rest of their dispensation. And so it was with the early church as well. They received miraculous aid to help guide and direct them through their transition period until they reached maturity and the revelations were complete. It has been said that the book of Acts should be read not so much as a doctrinal book of what we are to follow today, but rather as a historical book telling us what the early Christian community experienced in this time of transition.

Many religious groups totally fail to recognize the importance of Acts as a period of transition out of Judaism into pure Christianity. I will divide Acts into six sections or periods of time.

I. A.D. 30 – 32 (Approx. 3 years), Acts 1 – 8.

During the first three years of the church (some would say six years, depending upon the interpretation of Galatians 2:1) the early Christian community: 1) sprang into existence on the Day of Pentecost and witnessed to many thousands of Jews within a short time (Acts 2 and 3); 2) received severe threatenings from the Jewish hierarchy in response (Acts 4); 3) experienced the beatings of the apostles (Acts 5:40); 4) assigned certain disciples as overseers in service in the daily administration of economic needs (Acts 6); 5) witnessed the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7); and 6) saw the evangelization of the Samaritans (Acts 8).

II. A.D. 33 – 35 (Approx. 3 years), Acts 9:1-30 & Gal. 1:18.

This will cover the time from the conversion of Saul until his escape from Damascus and return to his own home town of Tarsus. After Saul's conversion he spent "certain days" at Damascus (Acts 9:19). According to Paul's statement in Galatians 1:17 & 18 he says he went into Arabia and returned to Damascus. Then after "many days" transpired he had to flee Damascus (Acts 9:23). According to Acts 9:24,25 and II Cor. 11:32,33 Paul was let down over the wall of the city in a basket in order to escape. The entire time that elapsed was three years (Gal. 1:18). At the conclusion of this three years Paul briefly visited Peter and James in Jerusalem and then returned to Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:18-20).

III. A.D. 36 – 49 (Approx. 14 years), Acts 9:13-14 & Gal. 2:1.

This 14 year time period covers the time from Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion until he went up to Jerusalem for the conference as described in Acts 15. During this time period: the first Gentile converts were made (Acts 10-11:18); a congregation formed in the city of Antioch of Syria, which included a large number of Gentiles who were receptive to the Gospel (Acts 11:19-21); Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Saul to Antioch to minister there for about "a year" (Acts 11:22-26); relief was sent to Jerusalem by Barnabas and Saul because of a great famine (Acts 11:27-30); in Jerusalem James was killed and Peter was imprisoned but miraculously escaped (Acts 12); Paul and Barnabas went out on their first journey of evangelism in the general vicinity of Galatia and have many and sundry experiences (Acts 13 & 14); they remain for a "long time" in Iconium (Acts 14:1-3), and finally they returned to Antioch where they remained for a "long time" (Acts 14:28).

IV. A.D. 50 – 52 (Approx. 3 years), from Acts 15 – 18:22.

This began with the council at Jerusalem and took Paul through his second evangelistic journey all the way into Greece and back to Jerusalem and Antioch. After the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29) Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch where they remained for a period of time (approx. ½ yr.) during which the events of Galatians 2:11-14 took place. Paul then returned through the area of his first journey in order to strengthen the churches (Acts 15:36-16:6) and he came to Troas where he received the Macedonian vision (Acts 16:7-10). He then traveled through Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and finally came to Corinth (Acts 16:11-18:1). This likewise consumed approx. ½ year.

In Corinth Paul met Aquila and Priscilla. They had recently fled from Rome because of a decree of Claudius that all Jews were to leave Rome. Historians say that Claudius issued this decree in 49 or 50 A.D. That would mean they probably arrived in Corinth in 50 A.D. and Paul would join them no later than 51 A.D. Because of the great number of believers in Corinth, Paul remained there for "a year and one-half" (Acts 18:11). We are then told that the Jews caused a great deal of trouble against Paul when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia (Acts 18:12). Archaeologists add collaboration to these dates when they found a stone inscription (Delphi) upon which the name Gallio is named

as the “proconsul” in Achaia. Historians established a date for this at 52 A.D. Paul remained yet a “good while” in Corinth (Acts 18:18) before he returned to Jerusalem and then back to Antioch where he began his trip (Acts 18:19-22). This probably consumed the remainder of 52 A.D. and brings us into 53 A.D.

V. A.D. 53 – 56 (Approx. 4 years), Acts 18:23 through 21:16.

Once again this time period began with Paul in Antioch for a “time” (Acts 18:23), and then took us through Ephesus in Asia Minor, Corinth in Greece and finally back to Jerusalem for the final time.

Paul began his third trip by returning through the same areas strengthening the brethren (Acts 18:23). He then came to Ephesus in Asia Minor (Acts 19:1-7) where he met certain disciples of John. He stayed there for “three months” speaking in the synagogue at Ephesus (Acts 19:8). He continued to spend some “two years” in Ephesus disputing in the school of one Tyranus (Acts 19:9,10). Paul remained in Ephesus “for a season” (Acts 19:22). Then a great uproar was created because of many people turning from their idolatry (Acts 19:23-41). The total time Paul spent in Ephesus was “three years” (Acts 20:31). Paul then went into Macedonia and Corinth in Greece where he remained for “three months” (Acts 20:1-3). He then returned with a small group of brethren through Macedonia and paused at Philippi during the days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6). He continued to travel by Troas and Ephesus (Acts 20:6-38). Paul purposed to be in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). This would bring his arrival in Jerusalem within 45 days after leaving Philippi. This would also bring us to the early summer of approx. 57 A.D. (some four years after leaving Antioch).

VI. A.D. 57 – 62 (Approx. 5 years), Acts 21:17 – 28:31.

This time period began with Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem, his imprisonment for two years, his long trip to Rome, remaining imprisoned for another two years.

Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem (Acts 22:24) where he appeared before the Sanhedrin council (Acts 22:30 & 23:1). There was a plot to kill Paul (Acts 23:12) and he was transferred to a prison in Caesarea (Acts 22:23). After a short time the High Priest arrived with an orator to accuse Paul (Acts 24:1).

Under the orders of Felix, Paul remained in prison for “two years” (Acts 24:27). Then at another hearing under Festus, Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11,12). Yet on another occasion Paul spoke before Agrippa and Bernice (Acts 25:13-26:32). Paul was finally sent to Rome (Acts 27:1). Winter was coming on rapidly while they were in Asia Minor (Acts 27:12). They were eventually blown off-course and ended up shipwrecked on the island of Melita (Acts 28:1). After some “three months” (Acts 28:11) they set out for their final destination of Rome in Italy. Once in Rome, Paul was left in bonds in his own hired house for a period of “two years” (Acts 28:30).

This closed the book of Acts time period and brings us to the approximate date of 62 A.D. We have reason to believe that Paul was temporarily released from confinement and left free to travel once again. During this time he wrote I Timothy, Titus and his last epistle, II Timothy, in about 68 A.D.

THE ORDER OF PAUL'S EPISTLES

In studying the Transition of the early church out of Judaism into pure Christianity it is important to note the order in which Paul's Epistles, which contain progressive Divine revelations, were written. One can easily see this order by simply comparing statements in Paul's letters with the recorded history of the early church in the book of Acts. Thus we can arrive at a fairly accurate chronology involving the time and sequence of the distinctive revelations that are contained in Paul's letters. Once the order of Paul's letters is established, we can turn to investigate the content of his letters, to see the meaning of those revelations as they would relate to the walk and conduct of the Jewish and Gentile members of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts history.

The book of Acts is first of all a history of the early church which is given by inspiration through Luke, an early disciple to Christianity and a physician by occupation. Luke's detailed research into the life and teachings of Jesus Christ brought him into first hand contact with the eyewitnesses of Jesus as to His birth, home life and public ministry. The book of Acts is a continuation of that story as it took the shape of the congregations which followed Christ, beginning in Jerusalem right out into the capital of the Gentile world at that time—Rome. The Gospel of Luke bears the name of the inspired human writer and the book of Acts is a continuation or sequel to his earlier historical record (see Luke 1:1-4 and Acts 1:1). Luke was a close associate of the apostle Paul in Paul's travels and ministry beginning in Acts 16 (see the "we" passages in Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-21:18 and 27:1-28:16; Philem. 24; Col. 4:14 and II Tim. 4:11). This history involves a transition of early Christian communities out of Judaism into pure Christianity.

Whenever one speaks of a "***transition***" it should be understood that this means an "overlapping" of two distinct programs. One program is phasing out and another is phasing in! This will take place over a period of time until the new program is firmly established and is a self-sustaining operation.

Most Bible teachers and historians recognize that the early church was essentially Jewish in its beginning years. In fact, for the first several years the church was *only* Jewish, and they were obviously still jealously practicing the Law of Moses. Christianity was looked upon by the secular world as merely a sect of Judaism. However, a change was in progress. In Acts chapter ten we have the record of the first Gentiles joining the association of the Jewish communities through the ministry of the apostle Peter. It should be noted in this record that Peter's ministry to Gentiles came at great reluctance on his part. Peter needed and received specific revelations from God before he would violate the Mosaic Law of separation from Gentiles. However, after the salvation and calling of Paul to evangelize the Gentile peoples, a great host of Gentiles professed faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Their walk and conduct in relationship to the Law of Moses was then called into question at the first church council as recorded in Acts 15. It was decreed, by the Holy Spirit's leading in that council, that Gentiles should not come under the jurisdiction of the ritualistic Mosaic Law system.

That leaves the question of when the saved Jewish members of the early church would be relieved from the requirements of the Mosaic Law system as well. Obviously their position had already been compromised by God's mandating to them their need to associate with the Gentile believers in spite of the Mosaic Law's directive to do

otherwise. This much of the Law had been changed by the Holy Spirit's directive. That placed the "handwriting on the wall," so to speak, that the rest of the Law system was to receive further abrogation. When would this happen? This is the precise question which will be answered in the Divine revelations given to the apostle Paul in his epistles. I say again, once we establish the order in which those epistles were written, we should then turn to the content of those letters to ascertain the revelation as it would apply to the walk of the Jewish Christians in relationship to the Law of Moses.

First, I will give a quick synopsis of the time and order of Paul's epistles with the book of Acts; then I will give a more detailed explanation of each one.

A QUICK SYNOPSIS OF THE ORDER AND TIME OF THE EPISTLES WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

First Group

Written by Paul when he first arrived in Corinth.

I Thessalonians—**I Thess. 3:1,2** with **Acts 18:5**—**A.D. 51**
II Thessalonians—(shortly thereafter)—**A.D. 51-52**

Second Group

I Cor. was written by Paul from Ephesus.

II Cor. was written by Paul from Macedonia on his way to Corinth.

I Corinthians—**I Cor. 16:5,8,9 & 19** with **Acts 19:21,22**—**A.D. 55**
II Corinthians—**II Cor. 7:6-16** with **Acts 20:1**—**A.D. 56-57**

Third Group

Written by Paul just before leaving Corinth.

Romans—**Rom. 15:26,28** with **Acts 19:21 & 20:3,4**—**A.D. 57-58**
Galatians—(same as Romans) **Acts 20:4**—**A.D. 57-58**

Fourth Group

Written by Paul at the end of his two year's imprisonment at Rome.

All five of these books mention the imprisonment at Rome.

Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon were all delivered by the same messenger.
Philippians and Hebrews were also written at the close of this imprisonment.

It is in this group of books that the positive revelation is made that the Law was "nailed to the cross" and was "now ready to vanish away."

Acts 28:30—**A.D. 62-63**

Fifth and final Group

I Tim. and Titus were written by Paul in the interim between his first and second imprisonments.

*II Tim. was written by Paul during his second imprisonment
and shortly before his death.*

I Timothy, (travels, no bonds)—approx. **A.D. 64**;

Titus, (travels, no bonds)—approx. **A.D. 65**;

II Timothy, (past travels mentioned); imprisonment and impending death
—approx. **A.D. 68**.

THE FIRST EPISTLES WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

I & II THESSALONIANS

The letter we call “I Thessalonians,” of course, bears the name of the apostle Paul (I Thess. 1:1 & 2:18). In this first letter Paul describes events in his ministry to the Thessalonians which agree with certain incidents described in the book of Acts record of Paul’s travels and experiences in that ministry. For instance, just before Paul’s arrival in Thessalonica he spoke of his evil treatment at Philippi—I Thess. 2:2 (see Acts 16:22,23). In addition, Paul spoke of his persecution at Thessalonica when he ministered there—I Thess. 3:4 (see Acts 17:5). And then, after Paul had to leave Thessalonica, he spoke of his sending Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen them and to hear of their faith. Paul had apparently been prevented from returning himself. Thus, he remained at “Athens alone” (I Thess. 3:1) eagerly awaiting the return of Timothy and also Silas—I Thess. 2:17,18; 3:1,2,5. This coincides with the account in Acts of Paul’s “wait” at Athens—Acts 17:16. Therefore, we can piece together the sequence of events leading up to Paul’s writing the epistle:

- 1) Paul had to flee from Thessalonica and in turn from Berea (Acts 17:10,14);
- 2) Those who conducted Paul away accompany him as far as Athens where orders are sent back for Timothy and Silas to join Paul (Acts 17:15);
- 3) But then, though it is not recorded in Acts, Paul also sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to seek their welfare (I Thess. 3:1, 2) and he remained at Athens;
- 4) Before the return again of Timothy and Silas, Paul moved over to the city of Corinth where he met Aquilla and Priscilla, and worked with them as tent makers (Acts 18:1-4);
- 5) At this juncture, Timothy and Silas arrived from their service in Macedonia (Acts 18:5);
- 6) And upon hearing the good report Paul wrote this first epistle, **I Thess. 3:6-10**. Thus, the time of the writing coincides with **Acts 18:5**.

In summary, Paul wrote this epistle shortly after his ministry there, “*having been taken away from you for a short time,*” (***I Thess. 2:17***).

As to secular historical information which would shed light on the time of this writing we have two sources. First, we are told that when Paul arrived in Corinth he met and worked with Aquilla and Pricilla who had been evicted from Rome and had recently

set up their business in Corinth. Luke told us that Claudius Caesar issued this decree that all Jews be evicted from Rome—Acts 18:2. This decree is on historical record to have occurred in approx. A.D. 49 (Seutonius Claudius, 25; this is also recorded by the Roman historian Orosius [5th century] VII,6,15 in which he assigned it to the emperor's 9th year, approx. A.D. 49). This would mean that Aquilla and Pricilla would probably have set up their business in Corinth sometime in A.D. 50. Paul is said to have joined them a relatively short time after their arrival (Acts 18:2). This would probably take us into **A.D. 50-51**.

A second historical reference is given to us by Luke when he tells us that Paul remained in Corinth for a year and a half, and that “when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia” the Jews brought him before the judgment seat—Acts 18:11,12. This proconsulship of Gallio is well attested to by an inscription on a monument set up by order of Claudius Caesar. It is clearly dated on the inscription as being set up in A.D. 52. (See *Archaeology and the New Testament*, by Unger, 1980, Zondervan). Thus, if we go back a year from mid A.D. 52 we come again to approx. **A.D. 51** for the writing of I Thessalonians.

II THESSALONIANS

This letter also bears the name of Paul (II Thess. 1:1 & 3:17). It was written not too long after the first epistle was written for the following reasons: 1.) Timothy and Silas are still serving with Paul (I Thess. 1:1 & II Thess. 1:1), whereas Silas is no longer mentioned after Paul leaves Corinth; 2.) The epistle was written to clarify some of the truths about the Second Coming of Christ given in the first letter (II Thess. 2:1-3); 3.) The epistle was also written to show the next step in dealing with disorderly brethren—see and compare I Thess. 2:9; 4:10-12 & 5:14 with II Thess. 3:6-14; 4.) In addition to their faith growing, they were still suffering severe persecution (II Thess. 1:3 & 1:4). Thus, this second epistle was written sometime during Paul's stay at Corinth., probably in **A.D. 51-52**.

OTHER BOOKS WRITTEN

It is interesting that these two epistles of Paul are actually the only two documents from the New Testament that we can firmly date as early as A.D. 50-52. It is interesting that even more liberal scholars have come to accept this early date for Paul's epistles (see the book by historian Michael Grant, “Saint Paul,” 1976, page 16).

No doubt there are other books being written during this time. Luke, himself, says in his gospel, which was completed prior to the closing verses of Acts 28 (sometime during Paul's two year stay in Rome), that many had “taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:1). Amongst those books were possibly the inspired records of Matthew and Mark, which were probably completed before the time of the Gospel of Luke. In addition, some have noted the early characteristics of the book of James. In James 2:2 he talks about someone who may come into your “assembly.” Literally, this is the word “synagogue,” and it is to be understood that many of the believing Jews throughout the dispersion (James 1:1) were still meeting in the synagogues. James had even indicated that the Gentile believers

could still hear the Law being read in the “synagogues,” Acts 15:21. However, the book of James cannot be dated precisely.

Therefore, it remains a certainty that Paul’s letters have become the first proclamations in inspired writing about the glories of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the known world. Paul’s inspired letters will be instantly circulated to, and read by, every inspired believer in obedience to the command in I Thessalonians 5:27. Therefore, Christianity and the truth about Jesus Christ would get their first publication with the special flavor from the writings of the apostle to the Gentiles.

THE SECOND GROUP OF EPISTLES WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

I & II CORINTHIANS

Paul was the author of I Corinthians as indicated—I Cor. 1:1 & 16:21. It is also of interest that Paul chose to write his epistle jointly with a coworker named Sosthenes—I Cor. 1:1. Now, if this is the same Sosthenes who was the chief ruler of the synagogue at Corinth who had been beaten before the judgment seat of Gallio (Acts 18:17), then it would mean that this Sosthenes had become a believer in Christ and was a vital leader now respected among the Christians. This is, in all probability, the case, for we know of no other Sosthenes associated with Paul in ministry. This also would mean that Paul was wisely issuing this epistle with the complement of an important Corinthian leader himself. Surely this would get the attention of the Corinthians.

Paul’s initial stay at Corinth had been for a specified year and a half, and then for an additional time after his being taken before the judgment seat of Gallio (Acts 18:12 & 18). Paul then returned to Syria, but on the way he paused for a short time at the city of Ephesus. His Jewish Christian friends, Aquilla and Priscilla, traveled that far with him and remained in Ephesus. Paul made interesting contacts there, but had to continue his journey to Syria with the promise that he would be back (Acts 18:21).

After reporting to the church in Jerusalem and at Antioch he retraced his steps through the areas of his ministry to strengthen those assemblies (Acts 18:23). This time period no doubt took us into the year A.D.53-54. Then he soon returned to Ephesus (Acts 19:1). Paul had good opportunities in Ephesus and remained there for some two years (Acts 19:10). This brings us to the approx. year of A.D.55-56.

The events that prompted the apostle to write this first epistle to the Corinthians took place at the time while Paul was in Ephesus and can be noted by reading carefully the epistle itself. Paul had received several visitors from Corinth who were respected and responsible brethren among the Corinthians—I Cor. 16:15-18. These brethren brought to Paul several things. There was a contribution from the Corinthians for Paul’s ministry which they delivered—I Cor. 16:17. They (or Sosthenes) also were probably the ones who delivered to Paul a letter from the Corinthian assembly asking a series of questions that Paul would answer in his epistle—I Cor. 7:1, etc. In addition they no doubt added and/or confirmed reports about the situation among the saints in Corinth—I Cor. 5:1; 6:1; 11:2; 11:18 & 15:2. To this would be added the bad news that Paul received from those

of Cloe's association—I Cor. 1:11. All this amounted to serious problems at Corinth which Paul needed to address. In addition, Paul purposed to go to Corinth by way of Macedonia. This fact ties in with evidences from the book of Acts.

In Acts 19:21 & 22 we are told of Paul's purposing to leave Ephesus and to travel into Macedonia and Achaia. We are also told here that he sent Timothy on ahead into these regions. This synchronizes with Paul's statements in I Corinthians that he had sent Timothy on his way to eventually reach them—I Cor. 4:17. Paul assumes that because of Timothy's ministry along the way, this epistle will reach the Corinthians before Timothy's arrival—I Cor. 16:10. The epistle is thus written from Ephesus as stated in I Cor. 16:8,9 & 19 prior to Paul's leaving to come through Macedonia, himself—I Cor. 16:5. (Actually, Paul was delayed in his leaving Ephesus.) Thus we have the writing of I Corinthians at the time of **Acts 19:21,22** about **A.D.55**.

In I Corinthians 16:3 Paul told of his intent to go to Jerusalem from Corinth. This compares perfectly with a similar statement in **Acts 19:21** that it was his intent to go to Jerusalem from Corinth.

II CORINTHIANS

Paul is clearly the author—II Cor. 1:1 & 10:1.

After writing the first epistle to the Corinthians we are told that Paul "remained in Asia for a time" (Acts 19:22). Then a great riot occurred in Ephesus centered around the temple of the goddess Diana and those who made merchandise in the manufacturing of idols (Acts 19:23-41). The total time that Paul spent in Ephesus was nearly "three years" according to his statement in Acts 20:31. If we remember that Paul wrote I Corinthians after being in Ephesus for two years we can understand that he waited for another year before he wrote the second letter. Paul finally left Ephesus and traveled to Troas where he was expecting to meet Titus who was returning from Corinth. However Titus was not there which caused concern for Paul—II Cor. 2:12 & 13.

Paul continued over into Macedonia (II Cor. 2:13; 8:1 & 9:2) where he finally met Titus and received a favorable report of the situation in Corinth, whereupon he wrote the second epistle to the Corinthians—**II Cor. 7:6-16**. Thus the second epistle was written from Macedonia approximately a year after he had written the first epistle. This brings us to approx. **A.D. 56-57** and coincides with **Acts 20:1** where Paul arrives in Macedonia.

THE THIRD SET OF EPISTLES WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

ROMANS AND GALATIANS

After writing II Corinthians, Paul continued his travel through the various assemblies of Macedonia, and then headed south into Achaia, finally arriving at the city of Corinth—Acts 20:2. After spending three months in Corinth, Paul was forced to leave and return through Macedonia—**Acts 20:3**. It is at this juncture that he finished and sent off the book of Romans. This probably brings us into **A.D. 57-58**.

Paul affixed his name to the very first verse once again—Rom.1:1.

Paul leaves no doubt that this book was sent from the city of Corinth where he had been presently ministering. Paul identified Gaius as his host—Rom. 16:23. Of course, Gaius is a Corinthian—I Cor. 1:14. Erastus is said to be the “treasurer of the city” (Rom. 16:23) and was likewise a resident of Corinth (II Tim. 4:20). Phoebe was coming to Rome to do a service for Paul. She is from Cencrea, which is just a few miles from Corinth (Rom. 16:1,2). She may be the very one who will be bearing the Epistle to the Roman saints. Paul clearly indicates that he is first going back to Jerusalem to deliver a contribution to the saints there. This contribution is from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia where Paul had been ministering—Rom. 15:26 & 28. This likewise synchronizes with the book of Acts record—Acts 19:21 & 20:3.

GALATIANS

The time of the writing of the letter to the Galatians has been debated for a long time by many who feel that it is hard to determine just where it fits. In reality, it is not difficult at all to note the evidences that place the book of Galatians in close proximity to the book of Romans. And indeed that is where it is placed by the best chronologers (See the works by Conybeare and Howson, and Frank J. Goodwin).

It bears Paul’s name—Galatians 1:1. It also bears the statement, “and all the brethren who are with me”—Gal. 1:2. This is important to Paul, because his fellow ministers share in his concerns and in his dealing with the problems that are facing the Galatian believers. We might ask who are these other brethren with Paul. The answer is forthcoming from the list of fellow travelers with Paul that are given us in **Acts 20:4**. Their names are the following: Sopater, Aristarcus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus (and probably Luke). These men were all leaving Corinth with Paul on his trip back to Jerusalem.

Paul spoke of his “first visit” to the Galatians (Gal. 4:13) which implied that there was a second visit. So this letter is sent to them after these two visits (Acts 16:6 & 18:23). In addition, it is implied that this letter was sent to them not too long after the second visit because Paul exclaims, “I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you...” (Gal.1:6). The epistle would be written just about four years after his previous visit (Acts 18:23).

The internal evidences in the book of Galatians show a remarkable similarity to that of Romans. Romans is a larger exposition in an orderly manner. Galatians represents excerpts from Paul’s thoughts in Romans, but delivered in a more hasty manner and with pointed severity. The multiplicity of problems at Corinth had been a deep burden for the apostle, in addition to the fact that increasing persecution at Corinth made Paul change some of his plans—see Acts 20:3 & Gal. 6:17.

Note the comparisons: Abraham’s faith counted for righteousness, Gal. 3:6 with Romans 4:3; Abraham the father of all who believe, Gal. 3:7-14 with Romans 4:11-18; The just shall live by faith, Gal. 3:11 with Romans 1:17; “Abba Father,” Gal. 4:6 with Romans 8:15; the discussion of the battle between the flesh and the spirit, Gal. 5:17-25 with Romans 6:12-23, etc.

Thus the time of **Acts 20:4** fits perfectly with all the evidences. The time would be similar to that of Romans, approx. **A.D. 57-58**.

THE FOURTH GROUP OF EPISTLES WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

EPHESIANS, COLOSSIANS, PHILEMON, PHILIPPIANS & HEBREWS

These epistles are placed together because they represent what are called “the Prison Epistles” of the apostle Paul. They all make reference to Paul’s being in bonds in Rome. Because of internal evidences it is clear that they all were written sometime towards the close of Paul’s “two years” in Roman confinement—**Acts 28:30**. This confinement concluded in about **A.D. 62-63**.

Though many scholars express doubt about the Pauline authorship of the book of Hebrews, it is merely because of superficial reasons. Paul’s authorship was attested to by early Christian tradition, and most certainly by many internal evidences. Therefore, it is included in this grouping. As will be seen there are several parallel statements in Hebrews with the epistle to the Philippians, and it is obvious that Paul wrote Philippians.

All these letters were addressed by the name of the apostle Paul with the exception of Hebrews—Eph. 1:1; 3:1; Col. 1:1,23; 4:18; Philem. 1,9 & Philip. 1:1.

All these epistles were written while the author was **a prisoner in bonds** (in Rome), including the book of Hebrews:

- Eph. 3:1 “For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus...”
- 4:1 “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord...”
- 6:20 “for which cause I am an ambassador in bonds...”
- Col. 4:3 “for which cause I am also in chains.”
- 4:18 “Remember my chains.”
- Phile. 9 “...Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.”
- Philip. 1:7 “...in as much as both in my chains and...”
- 1:13 “...that my chains are in Christ,”
- 1:14 “...having become confident by my chains...”
- 1:16 “...to add affliction to my chains.”
- Heb. 10:34 “...for you had compassion on me in my chains...”
- 13:3 “Remember the prisoners as if chained with them...”
- (13:24 “Those from Italy greet you.”)

All these epistles mention **Timothy**, with the exception of Ephesians.

- Col. 1:1 “...and Timothy our brother...”
- Phile. 1 “...and Timothy our brother...”
- Philip. 1:1 “Paul and Timothy...”
- Heb. 13:23 “Know that our brother Timothy...”

Two of these epistles mention that **Timothy** was expected to **shortly be released**.

Philip. 2:19 “I trust in the Lord to send Timothy to you shortly.”
Heb. 13:23 “Know that our brother Timothy *has been set free.*”

Three of these epistles mention that **Paul** is also soon expected **to be released.**

Phile. 22 “But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers *I shall be granted to you.*”

Philip. 2:24 “But I trust in the Lord that *I myself shall also come shortly.*”

Heb. 13:22 “Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, *with whom I shall see you* if he comes shortly.”

Three of these epistles mention (or include) **Tychicus** and **Onesimus.**

Eph. 6:21,22 “...Tychicus...”

Col. 4:7-9 “...Tychicus and Onesimus...”

Phile. 10-21 “...Onesimus...”

Two of these letters mention **Epaphras.**

Col. 1:7 & 4:12 “...Epaphras...”

Phile. 23 “...Epaphras...”

Two of these letters mention **Marcus, Aristarcus, Demus and Luke.**

Col. 4:10-14 &

Phile. 24.

It becomes obvious from all these comparisons that these five letters were written in the same proximity at the close of Paul’s two-year imprisonment at Rome.

When we remember that Paul’s letter to the Romans was written in approx. A.D. 57, and at the time he was leaving Corinth to return to Jerusalem, we can calculate: 1.) a few months for the return to Jerusalem; 2.) the “two year” imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24:27); 3.) approximately 6 months for Paul’s travel to Rome, and; 3.) Paul’s two year imprisonment in Rome. This amounts to almost five years, and would make the close of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome at approximately **A.D. 62-63.**

THE FIFTH AND FINAL GROUP OF EPISTLES WRITTEN BY THE APOSTLE PAUL

I TIMOTHY, TITUS & II TIMOTHY

At the end of Paul’s two years as a prisoner in Rome, he informed his readers that he was expected to soon be released (Phile. 22; Philip. 2:24 & Heb. 13:23). In these three letters Paul also expressed that as soon as he would be released he would be traveling to see them—Phile. 22; Philip.1:26; 2:24 & Heb. 13:23.

Now, when we read this final group of letters it is obvious that Paul had been traveling to a wide variety of the assemblies and even to some new areas. Two of these

letters say nothing about being in prison again, whereas the last letter to Timothy not only expresses that Paul is again in bonds, but that he also expects to soon get his departure to be with Christ—II Tim. 1:16,17 & 4:6-8. We know therefore, that II Timothy is the last letter Paul wrote and I Timothy and Titus are written earlier. As to the various places Paul traveled, note the following: “Ephesus” and “Macedonia,” I Tim. 1:3; (In addition, note Paul’s expression, “hoping to come to you shortly,” and “till I come,”—see I Tim. 3:14, & 4:13); “Crete,” Titus 1:5; “Nicopolus,” Titus 3:12; “Ephesus” again, II Tim. 1:18; “Dalmatia,” II Tim. 4:10; “Troas,” II Tim. 4:13; “Corinth,” II Tim. 4:20 & “Miletium,” II Tim. 4:20.

Because these letters are concerned with pastoral duties of those ministering they are called the “Pastoral Epistles.” It is fitting that Paul closed his ministry with these exhortations to the younger ministers following him. The date of the first of these letters is probably around **A.D. 64-65**. The date of the last letter is approximately **A.D. 67-68**.

(Most all the dates for the writing of Paul’s Epistles determined in this paper are on or within the range of that designated by most Conservative, Evangelical scholarship. See for example *The Ryrie Study Bible*, *The New Schofield Reference Edition*, *Harper’s Study Bible*, *The Life and Epistles of Paul* by Conybeare and Howson and *A Harmony of the Life of Paul* by Goodwin.)

THE END