

Paul and His Letters

Timeline

(based on Acts)

	Jews banished from Rome 44	Council meets in Jerusalem 49	Paul is arrested and travels to Rome 56-60?	Paul and Peter are martyred 64-65	Rome destroys Temple of Jerusalem 70
33	Jesus' death/resurrection	45 Paul meets Christ on road to Damascus	47 onward Paul on missionary journeys	64 Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome	66 Jewish revolt against Rome

Major Events in the Life of Paul According to Acts

- Present at stoning of Stephen (called Saul from Tarsus)
- Persecuting the church
- Meets Jesus on road to Damascus
- Blinded, goes to Damascus and is healed
- Starts preaching
- Leaves and starts his missionary journeys
- Goes to Jerusalem to attend council about Gentiles being circumcised
- More journeys, gets arrested and still keeps preaching including to a king
- Taken to Rome

Galatians & Corinthians on Paul's Encounter with Jesus

- Galatians 1:11-24 – former persecutor, Jesus appeared to him, near Damascus
 - No mention of light, no details about encounter
 - Went to Arabia for 3 years
 - Did NOT go back to Jerusalem for several years
 - There talked only with Peter James, brother of Jesus
 - Emphasis upon revelation of Jesus and what Paul was to preach
- 1 Cor. 15:3-11 – resurrection appearance, supports the idea of Paul as persecutor

“Paul the Problem”

- Paul's letters are “occasional”
 - Like listening to one side of a phone conversation
- Paul “dominates” the New Testament
 - The large percentage written by Paul does not necessarily reflect his prominence in his day
- Disagreements between Acts and Paul's letters make it hard to get to the historical Paul (e.g., conversion or call?)
 - Priority is usually given to Paul's letters over Acts
- Disagreement among scholars about which letters were written by Paul (see chart p. 262)
 - Agreement on Romans, 1 & 2 Cor., Galatians, Phillipians, 1 Thess., Philemon
 - Most reject 1 & 2 Tim. and Titus
 - Divisions over Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thes.
- Difficult to know when each letter was written

Other Problems

- Different branches in Christianity from the beginning
 - Jerusalem Christianity
 - Johannine
 - Those who opposed Paul directly
- Problems in critical scholarship
 - Does Paul reflect Hellenistic culture or gnosticism or mystery religions?
 - Does Paul reflect his Jewish background? Which part of Judaism? Hellenistic, Apocalyptic, Pharisaic?

Letters of Paul Bear Imprint of Early Church

- Paul wrote more letters than we have
- Many of Paul's letters have been edited
- Evidence of glosses and interpolations

Occasional Nature of Paul's Letters

- Problem of the "hermeneutic circle" – to understand the letters we need to understand what occasioned them; to understand what occasioned the letters we have to rely on the letters
- Problem of how Paul's views aimed at particular situations in his day would relate to the particular situations of our day
 - One scholar has suggested a method of correlation and analogy

Form of Paul's Letters

- Greco-Roman writing conventions – typical form
 - *Introductory statement* [name of sender and recipient, greetings, word of thanks to gods, maybe wish for gods' blessings on recipients]
 - *Body of letter* [subject matter]
 - *Conclusion* [final greetings to mutual acquaintances, closing prayer/wish to gods, sometimes date]
- Epistle vs. Personal Letters
 - Polished literature meant for publication?

Situating Paul's Letters in Greco-Roman Context

- Paul's letters seem to be midway between epistle and personal letter
 - Reflects Paul's personal relationship to a particular congregation, but meant to be read aloud

Paul's Adaptation of Greco-Roman Form

- Salutation – more elaborate in Paul
 - Word "greetings" is changed to "grace" and he adds "peace" [in Hebrew "shalom"] (see 1 Thes. 1:1)
 - Instead of thanks to gods for his health, Paul usually thanks God for readers' faith (see 1 Thes. 1:2-10)
- Body – Paul develops his theme in greater detail. Typically find three elements:
 - Subsections culminate in eschatological note
 - Indicates travel plans
- *Paraenesis* or closing exhortations, usually moral
- Closing – instead of "farewell" Paul gives wish for peace, benediction, and doxology, personal greetings to individuals (see 1 Thes. 5:23-28)

Paul's Modus Operandi

- Tent-maker plying his trade, sharing news about his travels with customers (rather than street corner preacher)
 - Converts were probably one or two at a time rather than en masse
- House church formed (see 283) and Paul would stay in contact by letters after leaving

1 Thessalonians

- ▣ What are important elements of the historical world? (when written, where is Thessalonica, what was going on there, what kind of people probably made up the church)

1 Thessalonians

- ▣ What are important elements in the literary world? (structure, key terms and phrases, metaphors, theological concern)
