

Paul's Letters In-depth

by Steve Page

Copyright © 2022. All rights reserved.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Does This Matter?.....	2
Notes on Geography.....	2
Anatolia.....	2
The Adriatic East Coast.....	3
The East.....	3
Acts.....	4
Luke's Purpose in Writing Acts.....	4
The Traditional Dating of Paul's Letters.....	6
Galatians (Alternate Dating).....	6
<i>Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon</i>	7
Philippians.....	7
<i>1 Timothy, Titus</i>	8
2 Timothy.....	8
Summary.....	8
The Evidence.....	10
Names of individuals.....	10
Acts.....	10
Summary.....	13
Paul's Early Ministry.....	13
Prisoners in Chains.....	14
Aquila and Priscilla.....	14
Aristarchus.....	14
Alexander the Jew.....	14
Proconsuls.....	14
Ephesus: Uneventful or Trials?.....	15
Paul's Treatment in Prison.....	15
Paul's Letters.....	15
Romans.....	15
Summary.....	15
1 Corinthians.....	16
Summary.....	16
2 Corinthians.....	17
Summary.....	18
Galatians.....	18

Paul's Letters In-depth

Summary.....	18
Ephesians.....	19
Summary.....	19
Philippians.....	19
Summary.....	20
Colossians.....	20
Summary.....	21
1 Timothy.....	22
Summary.....	22
2 Timothy.....	22
Summary.....	23
Titus.....	24
Summary.....	24
Philemon.....	24
Summary.....	25
Other Evidence.....	25
Mark.....	25
Clement's Letter to Corinth.....	25
Timothy and Titus, Bishops.....	26
Beast-fighting.....	26
Assassination of the Ephesian Proconsul.....	26
Saint Paul's Prison.....	26
Roman "Prisons".....	27
Integrating the Evidence.....	28
Gaps in Acts.....	28
Paul's Early Ministry.....	28
Imprisonment and a Death Sentence in Ephesus.....	29
Proconsuls in Ephesus in late 54 and early 55.....	29
Connection Between <i>Colossians</i> and <i>Philemon</i>	30
Connection Between <i>Ephesians</i> and <i>Colossians</i>	30
Aristarchus.....	30
Alexander.....	30
Paul's Fellow Prisoners.....	31
Paul Intended to Stay with Philemon.....	31
Paul's Imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome.....	31
Connection Between <i>1 Corinthians</i> and <i>2 Corinthians</i>	31
Circumstances of <i>2 Timothy</i>	32
Connection Between <i>1 Timothy</i> and <i>2 Timothy</i>	32
Connection Between <i>2 Timothy</i> and <i>2 Corinthians</i>	33

Paul's Letters In-depth

Connection Between 2 <i>Timothy</i> and 1 <i>Corinthians</i>	33
Paul, Demas and Mark.....	33
Paul after He Was Released in Rome.....	33
Does the Traditional Dating Fit the Evidence?.....	35
Summary.....	36
An Alternative Dating.....	37
Paul's Early Ministry.....	37
Paul's Ministry in Ephesus.....	37
Paul's Second Visit to Corinth.....	37
The Disturbance and Paul's Arrest in Ephesus.....	38
Paul's Appeal to Caesar in Rome.....	39
Final Months in Ephesus.....	39
Paul in Macedonia.....	40
56: The Lost Year.....	41
The Contribution, Jerusalem, and Imprisonment.....	42
Final Years.....	42
Conclusion.....	43

Paul's Letters In-depth

Introduction

The Apostle Paul wrote thirteen letters that the early Church included in the New Testament;¹ I accept that Paul was the author of all of them based on the Church's acceptance of them. The problem lies in determining *when* Paul wrote them. First, let me list the six letters for which the dates are reasonably sure.

Note that the dates I provide are generally give or take a year. This happens because very few events in the first century are dated to a precise year. For example, scholars believe the year in which Festus replaced Felix as governor of Judea was between 58 and 60, with some saying as early as 55 and others as late as 61. For my part, I am assuming 59. However, this doesn't affect the order in which Paul wrote. Here are my dates.

- *Galatians*, 47, from Antioch²
- *1 Thessalonians*, 50, from Corinth
- *2 Thessalonians*, 51, from Corinth
- *1 Corinthians*, 55, from Ephesus
- *2 Corinthians*, 56, from Macedonia or Greece
- *Romans*, 57, from Corinth

This leaves the following seven letters, grouped by type. In the first group of five letters, Paul was in prison, while Paul wrote the second group of two to his assistants Timothy and Titus.

Prison Letters

- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- Philemon
- 2 Timothy

Pastoral Letters

- 1 Timothy

1 I assume that Paul did not write *Hebrews*; the early Church eventually attributed that letter to Paul so that it could be included in the canon, and the author is now unknown.

2 There has been some debate among conservative scholars about this letter. Some claim that it was written between 54 and 56 or even later, saying that Paul wrote to Christians in Ancyra in central Anatolia rather the churches he founded in Psidian Antioch, etc. I'll address that position when I discuss the traditional theory.

Paul's Letters In-depth

➤ Titus

For these “uncertain seven” letters, we lack direct evidence to date them.

Does This Matter?

When we set out to understand any book of the Bible, we want to know the author, the audience, and the circumstances in which the author wrote. This is especially true of Paul's letters because they are situational; that is, Paul wrote to address specific situations. Knowing the context allows us to avoid misunderstandings about what Paul meant. However, while lacking context puts us at a disadvantage, having the wrong context can lead to errors. We should use the evidence to guide us to create context, and we should also reject theories that the evidence contradicts.

In addition, given that the world is increasingly attacking the credibility of the Bible, believers should make reasonable efforts to avoid giving its critics opportunities.

Notes on Geography

New Testament geography is complicated by its authors' use of both traditional names of geographic regions and Roman provincial names. The Romans tended to reconfigure the provinces periodically so that they covered different areas at different times. For this reason, maps found online tend to show very different boundaries. The maps on the site BibleStudy.org³ seem to portray the provinces accurately for the Apostolic period.

The following describes some of these regions, since they appear in the following discussion.

Anatolia

Anatolia refers to what is now modern Turkey.

Asia was a Roman province located in northwestern Anatolia. Ephesus was the Roman capital.

Galatia came into being during the third century BCE when a Bithynian king invited Celtic warriors from the west to assist him in a war. Having no further use for the Celts, he encouraged them to settle to the east of his kingdom around Ancyra. Over time, these Celts, eventually referred to as Gauls—after Gallia, what is now France, formed a kingdom that

³ Macedonia, Achaia—www.biblestudy.org/roman-empire/roman-provinces-in-new-testament/achaia.html
Asia, Galatia—www.biblestudy.org/roman-empire/roman-provinces-in-new-testament/achaia.html

Paul's Letters In-depth

expanded to the south and west. In 25 BCE, when the last king of Galatia died, the Romans made it into a province.

This province, which shared its western border with Asia, contained portions of traditional regions including Pisidia and Lycaonia, including the cities Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. After Paul's time, the Romans reconfigured the provinces so that Galatia became smaller. So, while these four cities traditionally belonged to different ethnic regions, they were all located in the Roman province of Galatia at the time of Paul's missionary journey.

The Adriatic East Coast

The Adriatic Sea's east coast formed the westernmost border of the regions in which Paul preached the Gospel before he returned to Jerusalem.

Macedonia was a Roman province stretching from the Adriatic Sea on the west to the Aegean Sea on the east. The province extended south into Thessaly. Thessalonica was the Roman capital, and Philippi was located at the eastern end. Nicopolis, a city mentioned in *Titus*, was located on the Adriatic coast and was part of Macedonia. Later, the Romans divided Macedonia and left it with only the territory in the east.

Achaia, or Achaea, was a Roman province covering what was southern Greece. Corinth was the Roman capital.

Illyricum and Dalmatia were roughly synonymous and covered the region along the Adriatic Sea's eastern coast north of Macedonia. Paul sent Titus to this region and later joined him there, *Romans* 15:19.

The East

I use the term, "the east," to refer to Achaia, Macedonia, and Anatolia, e.g., *Paul returned to the east from Rome*.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Acts

I must talk about *Acts* first, as it provides detailed information about Paul's ministry without which there would be no way of reconstructing the circumstances of Paul's letters. Also, Luke was meticulous in recording the events he described, and I fully trust his descriptions of the events. Unfortunately, Luke did not mention anything about Paul writing letters. If he had, our job would be much easier, but that was not part of Luke's purpose when he wrote.

Acts ends abruptly after Paul had spent two years in custody in Rome in mid 62. Presumably, Paul was released in Rome and continued his ministry after this, and scholars generally accept this idea. We don't know why Luke chose this abrupt ending, although one possibility is that he finished writing at that point and published.

Acts describes Paul being in prison more than briefly on two occasions. The first occurred from 57 to 59 in Caesarea, when the Roman governor Felix held Paul for two years, hoping that Paul would bribe him. The second occurred from 60 to 62 in Rome; Paul had appealed to Caesar, and the Roman governor Festus had transported Paul to Rome for trial. *Acts* provides no reason for the very long time Paul was held in custody in Rome, nor does it provide any indication of the outcome. Scholars assume that Paul was released at the end of the two years. I will refer to these two imprisonments in what follows.

Luke's Purpose in Writing Acts

Traditionally, conservative scholars assumed that Luke wrote *Acts* as a history of the early Church, and he did not omit significant events in Paul's ministry. This avoided endless speculation in which a scholar would assume that some event occurred and then build an argument around it.

This limitation had a large impact on the dating of Paul's letters since he wrote four of them from prison. This meant that they were either written from Caesarea, from Rome, or that Paul wrote them sometime after he was released.

While this approach stopped speculation, the assumption it was based on doesn't stand up to the evidence. Here's one example.

23 Are they servants of Christ? I'm talking like a madman—I'm a better one: with far more labors, many more imprisonments, far worse beatings, **many times near death**.

24 Five times I received the forty lashes minus one from the Jews. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day in the open sea. (2 Corinthians 11:23–25, CSB)

Paul's Letters In-depth

Acts doesn't mention the Jews lashing Paul, but that likely happened while he was in Tarsus before Barnabas called him, and Luke could reasonably have overlooked this. However, *Acts* only mentions Paul being beaten with rods once, and it doesn't mention any shipwrecks; *Acts* 27 happened three years after Paul wrote this. Furthermore, Paul mentioned "many more imprisonments"; *Acts* mentions only a night in the jail in Philippi. The only time in *Acts* that he was "near death" was after he was stoned.

This is just one example that points to Luke omitting significant events in Paul's ministry. As we examine the evidence closely, others will appear.

The modern approach to *Acts* says that Luke intended to write not a history of the Church but a legal defense for Paul. This explains why Luke was meticulous in relating events but related only events that served his purpose. This approach acknowledges that Luke only recorded select incidents in Paul's ministry. While it opens the way for speculation, it also allows for reasoned reconstructions based on evidence.

Paul's Letters In-depth

The Traditional Dating of Paul's Letters

I want to present the traditional theory about Paul's letters and some of the assumptions that went into it; however, there is not a definite consensus among conservative scholars about when or from where Paul wrote the "uncertain seven" letters. I'm going to provide a version of the traditional dating that I think reflects what I read most often.

As I mentioned above, the traditional approach to *Acts* assumes that Luke wrote it as a history, and it assumes that he didn't omit significant events from Paul's ministry. Part of the reason for this was to avoid speculation in which someone assumed a "missing" event and then built further claims around it.

Please note that I am relating the traditional theory without critically examining it.

Galatians (Alternate Dating)

Please feel free to skip this section; I include it only for those who are already aware of the disagreements. The early date of *Galatians* is well-supported by the evidence from the letter itself.

According to Lightfoot's *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, published in 1898, discussions of the dating of this letter go back to the early Church. What these scholars saw as a lack of evidence led them to speculate on alternatives.

Acts 15 describes a council in Jerusalem where Peter testified in support of Paul and James emphatically decided on Paul's behalf. Paul and Silas then delivered this finding to the churches in Galatia. There is no reason for Paul to write such a scathing letter after doing this, especially one in which he indicts both Peter and James. The traditional dating follows this reasoning and places the letter before the council in Jerusalem described by *Acts* 15.

The early Church scholars tended toward late dates for *Galatians*. It seems that they thought the Judaizers went through the churches founded during Paul's journey well *after* the the council in Jerusalem because *Acts* makes such slight mention of them. The more credible dating from the early Church scholars was that Paul wrote from Ephesus around 56.

Note that this approach still assumes that *Acts* omitted a very significant event, the presence of Judaizers among the churches in Galatia. It also assumes that the letter from the council in Jerusalem had no effect.

Another theory is that Paul somehow traveled to Ancyra in the heart of ethnic Galatia sometime after his second missionary journey. Judaizers came to Ancyra and disrupted the church, and Paul wrote to ethnic Galatians living in Ancyra.

Paul's Letters In-depth

There are three reasons behind this theory.

1. *Acts* makes only a slight mention of Judaizers in Antioch, as early Church scholars observed
2. Paul described a trip to Jerusalem that wasn't mentioned in *Acts*; therefore, the events must have happened after Paul's release in Rome
3. Some scholars complain that Paul wouldn't have called the believers from his first missionary journey "Galatians," an ethnic slur; a few argue that Paul traveled to Ancyra during his time in Ephesus in *Acts* 19—ignoring the reasons

Two of the reasons for the Ancyra theory are based on the idea that *Acts* doesn't omit significant events. The third reason is weak, considering Paul called his audience "*foolish Galatians*."

Again, I mention all this only to record that alternative dating exist; they are based on speculation or very slight evidence. I'm choosing to ignore them primarily because they make no sense in view of the council in Jerusalem and Paul's unresolved hostility toward James and Peter.

Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon

Ephesians and *Colossians* share several themes. Also, they share names, such as Tychicus, Epaphras, Archippus, and Onesimus, which strongly indicate that Paul wrote them at the same time and sent them out as a group; this is certain for *Colossians* and *Philemon*. The recipients were the churches in the province of Asia. Paul was clearly being held as a prisoner in chains as he wrote.

Apart from *Philemon*, Paul did not address specific situations in these churches. Instead, he wrote to build the faith of the believers. Thus, the letters could have been written at any time Paul was in prison.

Paul wrote from either Caesarea or Rome.

Philippians

Paul was again a prisoner, but his situation was more urgent, and he was unsure whether he would be executed or freed. In addition, Paul mentions the Praetorian, Caesar's personal guard, and that some of Caesar's household were believers and sent their greetings. This strongly points to Paul being in Rome and facing a trial before Nero.

Paul wrote early in his imprisonment in Rome.

Paul's Letters In-depth

1 Timothy, Titus

Neither of these letters gives any indication of conflict, much less that Paul was in prison. However, *1 Timothy* mentions that Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus on his way to Macedonia, while *Titus* mentions that Paul had left Titus in Crete. *Acts* makes no mention of Paul visiting Crete except for a brief stay while he was being transported from Caesarea to Rome.

To make sense of this, the traditional dating assumes that Paul returned to the east and resumed his ministry after he was released from prison in Rome in 62.

Paul wrote during the period between 62 and 66 from an unknown location in the east.

2 Timothy

In this letter, Paul again talked about being a prisoner in chains. Something had happened in Ephesus so that "all" the believers in the province of Asia had abandoned him, although one brother had traveled from Ephesus to Rome to supply Paul's needs. Furthermore, Paul said that "the time for my departure is near," and he told Timothy to come to him, presumably before his execution.

The traditional dating rules out a significant event in which Paul was arrested in Ephesus around 55 because *Acts* does not record such an event.

To make sense of this, the traditional dating assumes that Paul was ministering in Ephesus in late 66. Some plot against him had led the Roman authorities to arrest him and send him to Rome for trial before Caesar. Paul, imprisoned in Rome, then wrote to Timothy in Ephesus.

Summary

In summary, the traditional dating says that Paul wrote

- *Ephesians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon* from either Caesarea or Rome, between 57 and 62
- *Philippians* from Rome in 60
- *1 Timothy* and *Titus* from Asia or Macedonia after he was released in Rome in 62
- *2 Timothy* from Rome shortly before his death in 67

This theory assumes that

- Paul returned to the east after he was released from prison in Rome in 62 and that he ministered there for the next four years

Paul's Letters In-depth

- He was arrested in Ephesus in late 66, and he was transported to Rome for trial and execution
- Paul had sufficient time while he was imprisoned in Rome to write a letter to Timothy and expect that Timothy would be able to travel to Rome before his execution

Paul's Letters In-depth

The Evidence

We need to understand what makes for a valid theory to evaluate the traditional approach. A valid theory is an explanation that must meet two requirements.

- It must *explain* the existing evidence; that is, its accounting of events must explain how each piece of evidence fits in
- It must *predict* new conclusions that, when examined, turn out to be true; that is, the theory must create a context that makes sense of what Paul wrote

Therefore, the traditional dating is valid if it explains the evidence; this evidence comes mostly from references from *Acts* and Paul's letters, along with a few pieces of historical data and early Church tradition. Note that historical data and, especially, Church tradition are not hard facts and we must take care in using them.

Unfortunately, the evidence is composed of small details that must be assembled into broader conclusions. To accomplish this, I pull relevant details from *Acts* and Paul's letters. For each book, the details are summarized into broader findings. After that, the findings from each book are compared to draw conclusions.

Names of individuals

Many of the details involve the names of individuals. On one hand, almost all these names were common and could refer to more than one person. On the other, Luke and Paul did not insert people's names into their writings randomly. The people they mentioned were well-known to the audiences of their writings; this is especially true of *Acts*.

I have pulled out only names that help cross-reference Paul's letters in a meaningful way.

Acts

9:19b, 23, 26 Paul remained in Damascus after his conversion until he returned to Jerusalem. There are only vague indications of how long he was there.

9:23–25 Jewish opposition forced Paul to flee from Damascus, and they guarded the gates. However, Paul escaped by being lowered down from the wall.

9:27–30 Paul returned to Jerusalem where Barnabas accepted him and took him to the Apostles. Paul stayed for an unspecified time, until opposition forced him to return to Tarsus.

Paul's Letters In-depth

11:25–26 Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to Antioch, where they worked together for a full year. There is no indication of how long was in Tarsus or when Barnabas brought him to Antioch.

11:30, 12:25 Barnabas took Paul to Jerusalem to deliver famine relief. Luke then recounted the reign of Herod Agrippa, which lasted from early 41 to 44. Luke then has Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch.

12:3–7 In early 41, Herod Agrippa came to Judea and immediately began persecuting the Apostles. Having beheaded James, he arrested Peter. Luke twice mentions that Peter was bound with chains, specifically on his wrists. Note that in Greek *hand* refers also to the wrist and even to the entire arm.

13:2–4 Barnabas and Paul set out for Cyprus.

13:13-14 Paul and companions reached Pisidian Antioch.

14:19 Paul stoned in Lystra.

14:26 Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch.

15:1 Judaizers came to Antioch.

15:6 Jerusalem council met to decide between Paul and the Judaizers.

15:7 Peter supported Paul's position, noting that God had allowed Gentiles to enter the Church through him.

15:19 James, speaking for the elders, found for Paul.

15:22–24 The Apostles and elders wrote a letter with their findings. They noted that the Judaizers had gone out without their permission.

16:1,4 Paul and Silas traveled through Derbe and Lystra, and, by implication, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch as well, delivering the findings of the council.

16:22–26 Paul beaten with rods. He and Silas imprisoned overnight in Philippi. Luke specifically noted that their feet were bound in wooden stocks, and all the other prisoners were also bound.

18:2–3 Luke introduced Aquila and Priscilla, noting that they had come to Corinth because the emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome. Paul stayed and worked with them when he first came to Corinth.

18:18–19 Paul took Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus and left them there. We may assume that Paul intended for them to lay a foundation upon which he would build when he returned.

18:23–Paul visited the churches in Galatia.

Paul's Letters In-depth

19:1–20:1 During Paul's time in Ephesus, Luke made no mention of Paul having any problems personally. However 19:21–41 describes in detail a disturbance caused by Paul's success, but Luke clearly stated in 19:30–31 that Paul was not involved. After the disturbance, Paul left for Macedonia.

19:8, 10 Paul spent three months speaking in the synagogue followed by two years, probably parts of two calendar years, speaking in a lecture hall. Apparently, this was before the riot took place.

19:29 Aristarchus was dragged into the theater during the disturbance.

19:33–34 A Jew named Alexander attempted to address the crowd.

19:38 Luke noted a statement by the city official as he addressed the mob. He said there were "proconsuls," plural.

20:4 Luke said that Aristarchus was from Thessalonica and that he accompanied Paul with the contribution to Jerusalem.

20:19 While Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders, he spoke of "slaving for the Lord with all humility, tears, and trials that happened to me because of the plots of the Jews."

20:25 Paul told the Ephesian elders that they none of them would see his face again.

21:26–36 Paul was arrested after a riot in the Temple in Jerusalem.

24:23 The Roman governor Felix kept Paul in custody but gave him some freedom and allowed his assistants to serve him.

24:26–27 Felix held Paul in custody for two years because he hoped for a bribe and to gain favor from the Jews.

27:2 Luke said that Aristarchus traveled with Paul from Caesarea to Rome.

27:3 The Roman centurion transporting Paul to Rome treated Paul kindly and allowed him to stay with friends while in port in Sidon.

27:9–11, 21–26, 31–32, 33–36, 42–44 The centurion sought Paul's advice and allowed him to address the ship's crew.

28:3–10 On Malta, the centurion allowed Paul to move about freely.

28:16–17, 23, 30 In Rome, Paul was loosely guarded, allowed to have numerous visitors, and he stayed in "his own rented lodging" (NASB)¹ for two years.

1 The NASB is likely correct in translating the word μίσθωμα as "what is rented, a rented house", although "at his own expense" (ESV) is possible, so BDAG.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Summary

Paul's Early Ministry

Luke described Paul's conversion and portrayed him as remaining in Damascus until Jewish plots forced him to flee the city. Luke implied that the Jews were watching the city gates. Luke provided no indication of when Paul's conversion took place nor how long he was in Damascus.

After escaping the Jews in Damascus, Paul visited Jerusalem where Barnabas took him to the Apostles. He began to preach, but the Jews opposed him, and he went to live in Tarsus. Luke provided no indications of how long he stayed in either place.

He apparently lived in Tarsus for years until Barnabas sought him out and brought him to Antioch. Luke implied that a full year passed before Barnabas and Paul took famine relief to Jerusalem.

Barnabas and Paul visited Jerusalem to bring famine relief. We can't date this exactly because Luke split the visit by inserting a description of Herod Agrippa's three-year reign from 41 to 44. If the visit had taken place before or after Agrippa, Luke likely would have placed it entirely before or after his description of Agrippa. Most likely, the visit took place during Herod's reign, perhaps 43, and Luke didn't want their visit to interrupt his narrative of the more significant events involving Agrippa.

Thus, Luke provided virtually no information about the dates of Paul's conversion, his departure from Damascus, his departure from Jerusalem to Tarsus, or the length of time he lived in Tarsus. His second visit to Jerusalem likely took place between 41 and 44, which implies that Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch between 40 and 43.

Some time after Herod's death, Barnabas and Paul traveled to Cyprus and then to Pisidian Antioch in the Roman province of Galatia. After an unspecified length of time, they returned to Antioch.

The arrival of Judaizers in Antioch quickly led to the Jerusalem council. Luke made no mention of Judaizers coming to Antioch before this or traveling among the newly planted churches in Galatia.

At the council, Peter spoke in support of Paul, and James found for Paul against the Judaizers. In a letter, the Apostles and elders said that the Judaizers went out with their authorization. This removed any legitimacy from the Judaizers and made clear that the other Apostles and the Jerusalem church supported Paul and his Gospel.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul and Silas reported the council's findings to the churches in Galatia, starting Paul's second missionary journey. Jumping ahead, Paul again visited the churches in Galatia at the start of his third missionary journey.

Prisoners in Chains

Luke noted that both Peter and Paul and Silas were bound while incarcerated, either with chains or stocks.

Aquila and Priscilla

Aquila and Priscilla met Paul when he first arrived in Corinth. They had been forced to leave Rome due to a decree by the emperor Claudius. We may conclude that they were wealthy business owners; they were able to relocate to Ephesus where Paul had them prepare for his return to the city.

Aristarchus

He first appeared in connection with the disturbance in Ephesus, where the silversmiths dragged him into the theater. Subsequently, he traveled with Paul to Jerusalem to deliver the gift from the churches in Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece. Apparently, he remained with Paul in Caesarea for two years and then traveled with Paul to Rome.

Alexander the Jew

He attempted to address the crowd in the theater during the disturbance in Ephesus. The fact that Luke mentioned him by name indicates that he was well-known in connection with the disturbance even to Luke's audience in Rome.

Proconsuls

The city official used the word *proconsuls* instead of *proconsul*. The proconsul was the Roman provincial governor, so referring to one in the plural appears to be an error on Luke's part. However, Luke was too precise to make such an apparent mistake.

One explanation is that the city official used the plural form generically, referring to governors in general. While this is possible, it is unlikely; that Luke preserved the unusual usage is even less likely.

Another possibility is that the official spoke precisely and that for some reason more than one person was acting as governor at the time of the disturbance.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Ephesus: Uneventful or Trials?

In chapter 19, Luke portrays Paul's time in Ephesus as uneventful, apart from the disturbance, and Paul was not personally involved in that. However, as Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders, he said he served with humility, tears, and trials brought upon him by Jewish plots. In this, Luke deliberately contradicted himself and tacitly acknowledged that he overlooked ongoing Jewish plots against Paul while he was in Ephesus.

At this point, we have no evidence as to the nature of these plots except the fact that Luke spent a great deal of space describing a major disturbance and exonerating Paul from it.

Paul's Treatment in Prison

Paul spent some five years in custody, from 57 to 62, after his arrest in Jerusalem. This raises the question of whether Paul could describe himself as "in chains" during this time. Peter's experience in chapter 12 and Paul and Silas' in chapter 16 are typical, in that prisoners were kept in bonds of some sort. However, Luke's description of Paul's later custody indicates a much more lax situation.

Felix allowed Paul some freedom and allowed Paul's assistants to attend to him. During the voyage, the centurion treated Paul with respect and allowed him to roam freely on Malta and even in Sidon, where Paul could easily have slipped away. In Rome, Paul was allowed to live in his own rented house, with a guard present.

None of this suggests the sort of harsh treatment that a prisoner typically experienced. His time in Rome seemed quite productive.

Paul's Letters

Romans

15:19 Paul had preached the Gospel as far as Illyricum.

15:24, 28 Paul intended to work in Spain after he visited Rome.

16:3–5 Paul sent greetings to Aquila and Priscilla and the church meeting in their house.

Summary

Paul wrote from Corinth in early 57, and this was the last of his letters with known dates.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul said that he had preached as far as Illyricum, which contained Dalmatia. The province lay north of Macedonia along the Adriatic Sea. Paul almost certainly ministered there in 56, a year in which *Acts* provides no information.

Paul told the church in Rome that he intended to visit them after delivering the contribution collected in Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Greece to Jerusalem. After Rome, Paul intended to head west as far as Spain.

Paul greeted Aquila and Priscilla and the congregation in their home. This indicates that, after the death of Claudius, they had returned to Rome from Ephesus

1 Corinthians

4:9 Paul said, "For I think that God has made us Apostles least, having exhibited us as condemned to death, because we have become a spectacle to the World and angels and men."

5:1 Paul ordered the church to expel a man involved in gross sexual sin. The church had been overlooking his sin.

15:32 Paul said in passing while refuting a teaching that there would be no resurrection, "If for human purposes I *beast-fought* at Ephesus, how did that benefit me? If the dead are not raised, 'We should eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" Note that in Greek, *beast-fought* is one word, although modern translators typically have *fought with wild beasts*.

16:12 Paul had encouraged Apollos to visit Corinth, but Apollos had refused.

16:8–9 Paul said that he intended to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, which occurred in late spring. He noted, however, that many opposed him.

16:19 Paul sent greetings from Aquila and Priscilla, who were with him in Ephesus, along with the church in their house.

Summary

Paul wrote this letter from Ephesus, almost certainly during his ministry described in *Acts*.

In chapter 4, he described himself as a prisoner of war in a Roman triumph who is led through the streets of Rome as part of a parade and then executed. Nothing in his experiences described in *Acts*, starting with his stay in Corinth up to his ministry in Ephesus, warrant such a drastic description.

In chapter 5, Paul ordered the church to expel a man they had been tolerating. This seemed to be an exceptional situation, we may assume that the church grieved over this command.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul's passing reference to *beast-fighting* in chapter 15 is difficult. Acts doesn't indicate any events that warrant such a description, even if Paul meant it figuratively. However, Paul assumed that the church in Corinth knew of the events to which he alluded. Furthermore, Paul mentioned it casually and yet decisively as he argued that he would not have beast-fought for merely human reasons. This points to a specific and notorious event that no one would endure unless they looked forward to the next life.

Aquila and Priscilla were still in Ephesus at the time Paul wrote the letter. They owned a house large enough to hold a small congregation.

2 Corinthians

1:1 Timothy was with Paul as he wrote.

1:3–11 Paul spoke extensively of his sufferings, but he also said that God had and would continue to deliver him.

1:8–9 Paul said, "We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the tribulation that happened to us in Asia, that we were exceedingly burdened beyond our ability, so that we despaired even of life. Instead, we had in ourselves the death sentence, in order that we not have confidence in ourselves but in God, who raises the dead."

2:1–8 Paul implied that his previous visit had been painful and that he had recently written them a painful letter. In particular, Paul had ordered a brother to be expelled from the church, but the brother had repented, and Paul asked the church to restore him.

2:12–13 Paul had sought Titus at Troas but did not find him there, so he went on to Macedonia.

7:5–8 Titus found Paul in Macedonia and brought news from Corinth about their response to Paul's letter. Apparently, Titus had delivered the first letter, spent time with the church while they digested it, and then returned to Paul with news about their response. Paul was still distressed when he reached Macedonia, with conflicts and afflictions. However, Paul was deeply encouraged by the church's response to his previous letter.

11:24–25 Paul said, "Five times I received the forty minus one from the Jews, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a day and a night in the depths of the sea." The *forty minus one* refers to a whipping performed in a Jewish synagogue; the Law of Moses prohibited more than 40 lashes. The Jews gave 39 lashes in case of a miscount.

11:32–33 Paul said that Aretas, king of Arabia, sent a ruler to Damascus to arrest him. Paul escaped by being lowered from the wall.

Paul's Letters In-depth

13:1–3 Paul was preparing to make his third visit to Corinth; this visit most likely occurred in late 56 or early 57. The first visit was probably the time when Paul spent over a year there, establishing the church. During the second visit, Paul had warned a group of unruly individuals.

Summary

Paul implied that he wrote from Macedonia and that Timothy was with him. Titus had recently returned from delivering a letter that had caused sorrow in the church but had resulted in repentance.

Paul spoke of an ordeal in Asia that had led him to despair of his life. He spoke of a death sentence.

The church had expelled a brother at Paul's command, but the brother had repented, and Paul asked the church to restore him.

Paul listed extreme events that had occurred during his ministry. These included being beaten with rods three times, a punishment inflicted by Roman authorities, and three shipwrecks.

Paul had made a second visit to Corinth before writing letters, and that visit had been painful.

Galatians

1:17 Paul left Damascus, spent time in Arabia, and then returned to Damascus after he believed.

1:18 Paul left Damascus and returned to Jerusalem three years after his conversion. He spent fifteen days there.

1:21 Paul returned to Cilicia, presumably to Tarsus.

2:1–2 Paul visited Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus with him. He called this a private visit to meet with James, Peter, and John to discuss the Gospel. He said this visit took place 14 years after his first visit.

2:11–12 Peter visited Antioch, leading to Paul confronting him. Paul mentions Judaizers whom he claimed James had sent.

Summary

Paul said that he left Damascus and spent time in Arabia before returning to Damascus.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul spent three years in Arabia and Damascus after his conversion. He then visited Jerusalem after 14 years in which he met privately with James, Peter, and John. Using inclusive date calculations,² this provides relative dates for Paul's conversion, first visit to Jerusalem, and second visit to Jerusalem: $Y_{\text{conv}} + 2 = Y_{\text{V1st}}$, $Y_{\text{V1st}} + 13 = Y_{\text{V2nd}}$. Reasonable dates are then 31 for his conversion, 33 for the first visit, and 46 for the second visit.

Sometime after Paul's visit, he indicated that Peter came to Antioch. Peter, influenced by Judaizers, stop eating with Gentile believers, leading Paul to rebuke him. Paul clearly believed that James had sent the Judaizers.

Ephesians

1:3 The words *at Ephesus* in the greeting are missing from three important early manuscripts, as well as from some early writers. This gap seems to be original and intentional.

3:1 Paul said he was a prisoner. The Greek word means *one in bonds* or *one in chains*.

3:13 Paul said that he was suffering.

4:1 Paul again said he was a prisoner.

6:20 Paul referred to himself as an ambassador in chains.

6:21–22 Paul said Tychicus would tell them of his circumstances. Most likely, Tychicus delivered the letter to the churches.

Summary

Paul was a prisoner in chains at the time he wrote this letter, and he was suffering. He assumed that the audience understood the reasons for his suffering, but it probably went beyond just the fact that he was imprisoned.

Paul probably intended the letter to be read to all the churches in Asia. The reader was to insert the name of the city in which he was currently reading the letter. This also explains why the letter has few personal touches; he mentions only Tychicus, who was carrying the letter to the churches.

Philippians

1:7 Paul said that he was in chains.

² Inclusive date calculations, as used at the time, considered any part of a period to count as a full period. So, starting in 31, a three year stay could end in 33: part of 31, 32, part of 33. 33 plus 14 would yield 46 as the likely date of this visit.

Paul's Letters In-depth

1:13 Paul said, "so that among the whole praetorian and all the rest, it has become apparent that my chains are because of Christ."

1:21–25 Paul said, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If to live in the flesh, to me this is fruitful labor, and I don't know what to choose. I am hard pressed by the two, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, for this is much more preferable. But it is necessary to remain in the flesh with you. Persuaded of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith." Paul was facing the possibility of death, yet he was fairly confident that he would avoid it.

2:19–24 Paul said that he hoped to send Timothy to them, and he was confident that he would also be coming shortly.

2:25–30 The church in Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to meet Paul's needs. However, Epaphroditus had become ill, so Paul sent him back.

4:18 Epaphroditus had brought support to Paul.

4:22 Paul said, "All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household."

Summary

As Paul wrote, he was in chains, and he was facing death, although he was hopeful that he would be released.

Paul mentions the praetorian, which could refer to a military headquarters or the Praetorian Guard, Caesar's personal soldiers. Paul also mentions members of Caesar's household who were Christians, noting that they sent greetings. This points to Rome, and the praetorian would then be the guard, which would be responsible for holding prisoners making appeals to the emperor.

Therefore, Paul most likely wrote from Rome while being held as a prisoner in chains. The fact that he didn't know if he would live or die indicates that he had been sentenced to death and that, as a Roman citizen, he had appealed to Caesar and was waiting for his case to be heard.

Paul told the church that he intended to send Timothy to them. This strongly implies that Timothy was with him in Rome.

Paul wrote to the church in response to their sending him support by Epaphroditus.

Colossians

1:7 Paul implied that Epaphras had started the church in Colosse.

1:24 Paul rejoiced in his sufferings.

Paul's Letters In-depth

2:1 Paul implied that he had not been to Colosse.

4:7 Paul said that Tychicus would tell them of his circumstances.

4:8 Paul said that he would send Onesimus with Tychicus.

4:10 Paul said that Aristarchus, his fellow prisoner, sent greetings.

4:10 Paul said that Mark sent greetings.

4:12 Paul said that Epaphras sent greetings.

4:14 Paul said that Luke and Demas sent greetings.

4:17 Paul called Archippus to fulfill his ministry.

4:15 Paul also wanted this letter read in Laodicea and to have a letter to Laodicea read in Colosse.

4:20 Paul asked them to remember his imprisonment.

Summary

Paul wrote to the church in Colosse. Most likely, Epaphras had started the church, and Paul had not visited there, nor other churches around Asia.

Paul sent the letter by Tychicus, and he wanted the letter to be read in nearby Laodicea. He also wanted a letter sent to Laodicea to be read in Colosse.

Paul mentions several individuals in this letter who sent greetings, implying they were with Paul. Jailers typically allowed friends of the prisoner to meet his needs; these individuals were most likely Paul's assistants.

- Epaphras, who had started the church
- Tychicus, who carried the letter
- Onesimus, who was from Colosse and whom Paul was sending with Tychicus
- Aristarchus, who was a prisoner along with Paul
- Mark
- Luke, who eventually wrote a Gospel account and *Acts*
- Demas

In addition, Paul gave instructions to Archippus, who was apparently leading the church in Colosse.

Paul's Letters In-depth

1 Timothy

1:3 Paul said that he had left Timothy in Ephesus when he left for Macedonia.

3:14 Paul intended to visit Timothy “soon.”

1:20 Paul said that he had expelled Hymenaeus for teaching false doctrine.

Summary

Paul wrote what appears to be an ordination letter to establish Timothy's authority over the church in Ephesus. Paul didn't indicate that he was experiencing any hardship. Paul seemed to have been moving about freely.

Paul mentioned that he had expelled a man named Hymenaeus for teaching false doctrine, apparently to reinforce his decision to the church.

2 Timothy

1:4 Paul implied that Timothy had wept at their last parting.

1:8 Paul was concerned that Timothy would be ashamed of him as a prisoner and fearful of suffering as Paul had.

1:15 Paul said everyone in Asia had deserted him

1:16–18 Paul said a man of Ephesus, Onesiphorus, had provided Paul with relief many times and that he was not ashamed of Paul's chains. Furthermore, he had searched for Paul in Rome and met his needs. Note that Paul said *when* he was in Rome, indicating that Paul was no longer there.

2:9 Paul said that he suffered hardship, including being imprisoned as a criminal. Whether he was currently a prisoner is unclear.

2:16–18 Paul warned against Hymenaeus, who was teaching false doctrines.

4:6–8 Paul spoke as if his death were imminent. The time for his departure had come, he had fought the good fight, finished the course, and kept the faith. His future was the coming of the Lord and a crown of righteousness.

4:9–13 Paul asked Timothy to come to him quickly. Demas had deserted Paul. In addition, another assistant had gone to Galatia, Titus had gone to Dalmatia, and Paul had sent Tychicus to Ephesus. Only Luke was left with him. Paul seemed to imply that he had sent his assistants to these places. Paul also wanted Timothy to bring Mark, whom Paul found to be useful. Finally, Paul said that he had left a cloak and some books in Troas, and he wanted

Paul's Letters In-depth

Timothy to pick them up on his way and bring them. Troas was a port city at the northwestern tip of Asia where Paul would have taken a ship to Macedonia.

4:14–15 Paul warned against Alexander the metalsmith, who had strongly opposed him.

4:16–17 Paul said that at his first defense no one supported him, but they deserted him. However, God strengthened him and rescued him from the lion's mouth.

4:19 Paul sent a greeting to Aquila and Priscilla, along with Onesiphorus. This indicates that Aquila and Priscilla were in Ephesus.

4:21 Paul told Timothy to come before winter.

Summary

Paul wrote to Timothy in a very personal manner; we may wonder how this letter became public so that the Church included it in the New Testament. Paul was deeply distressed about recent events in Ephesus, and Timothy shared Paul's distress. Paul spoke of suffering imprisonment, and he seemed to have been speaking of a recent imprisonment.

Paul indicated that he had recently been in Troas and that he had left suddenly without a cloak and his books. Paul wanted Timothy to come to him, picking up his belongings along the way. Possibly, Paul was in Macedonia as he wrote.

Paul also wanted Timothy to bring Mark with him. This implies that Mark was in or around Ephesus, and Paul wanted Mark to assist him with his ministry. The fact that Paul had sent out all his assistants indicates that Paul was actively ministering.

However, one of his assistants, Demas, had deserted him.

Paul twice said that he had been abandoned, first by "everyone" in Asia, and then at his first defense. This strongly implies that Paul had been arrested and put on trial in Ephesus by the Roman authorities. That he had a first defense implies that he had a second defense.

A metalsmith named Alexander was a key opponent, presumably in connection with these events.

At the first defense, Paul said that God had strengthened him, and "he had been rescued from a lion's mouth." Perhaps Paul referred to *Daniel* 6:16ff, but we would then expect him to say, "from *the* lion's mouth." Regardless, Paul had survived to mount a second defense.

Paul didn't refer to his second defense, which implies that it had gone better than the first.

That God had rescued Paul contrasts with his earlier remarks that he had reached the end. Perhaps Paul was simply venting to Timothy about recent events that still distressed him.

Paul twice mentions a man from Ephesus named Onesiphorus who strongly supported him. In the past, Onesiphorus had come to Rome and sought out Paul to meet his needs. However,

Paul's Letters In-depth

this event had taken place in the past; Onesiphorus was back in Ephesus, and Paul had left Rome.

Paul's mention of Onesiphorus was tightly linked with the fact that many others in Asia had deserted Paul. Thus, Paul had made his first defense, where many had deserted him and he had been rescued from a lion's mouth. Soon after, Onesiphorus had traveled to Rome to provide support to Paul. At the time of writing, Paul had left Rome. This strongly implies that Paul's second defense had been at Rome before Caesar, that Caesar had acquitted him, and Paul had left Rome.

Paul also sent greetings to Aquila and Priscilla, who were in Ephesus.

Titus

1:5 Paul had left Titus in Crete to appoint elders

3:12 Paul intended to send Tychicus to relieve Titus, so Titus could join Paul in Nicopolis during the winter. The Nicopolis Paul mentioned was most likely the one in northwestern Greece on the coast of the Adriatic Sea.

Summary

Paul wrote Titus what is likely an ordination letter, establishing Titus' authority over the churches in Crete. Paul had recently left Titus in Crete, and he wanted Titus to complete his work in time to join him before winter.

Paul didn't indicate that he was experiencing any hardship.

Philemon

1:1 Paul said he was a prisoner.

1:1 Paul greeted Archippus as a fellow soldier.

1:9 Paul called himself an old man and a prisoner.

1:10 Paul said that he wrote on behalf of Onesimus, who had become a Christian while Paul was in chains. Onesimus turned out to be Philemon's runaway slave.

1:13 Paul again mentioned his chains.

1:23 Paul asked Philemon to prepare a place for him to stay, as he hoped to be released soon.

1:23 Paul mentioned that Epaphras was also a prisoner; he sent greetings.

Paul's Letters In-depth

1:24 Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke also sent greetings.

Summary

Paul wrote to Philemon, a Christian leader who owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus had run away and come to Paul while Paul was in prison; Onesimus had then become a Christian. Paul wanted Philemon to take Onesimus back without punishing him; Philemon likely felt pressure from fellow slaveholders to punish Onesimus severely.

Paul was a prisoner in chains as he wrote. He mentioned several individuals.

- Archippus, who was in the same city as Philemon
- Epaphras, who was also a prisoner
- Mark
- Aristarchus
- Demas
- Luke

Paul also asked Philemon to prepare a guest room, as Paul was confident that he would soon be released and intended to visit.

Other Evidence

Mark

Acts does not mention John Mark after Paul's quarrel with Barnabas. However, *1 Peter* 5:13, written from Rome, sends greetings from Mark, and Peter calls Mark his son. Very early Church tradition says that Mark was a key assistant to Peter in Rome, and that Mark wrote his Gospel account shortly after Peter's death, which occurred around the same time as Paul's, to record Peter's version of the Gospel.

Clement's Letter to Corinth

Around 96, Clement, the bishop of Rome, wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, which was again experiencing divisions. In chapter 5, he described Paul's ministry as having reached the extreme limit of the west, which would have been Spain. After this, Paul was put to death in Rome. Clement said this was out of envy, which implies that someone betrayed Paul to the authorities. This happened during Nero's persecution of the Christians.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Tradition says that Clement was consecrated by Peter, which implies that Clement knew both Peter and Paul and that he was in Rome when they were martyred.

Timothy and Titus, Bishops

The Church historian Eusebius, in *Church History*, book 3 chapter 4.6, said that Timothy was the first bishop of Ephesus, and that Titus was the first bishop of Crete.

Beast-fighting

Ignatius was the second bishop of Antioch. Around 108, he was arrested and condemned to die in Rome. As he was being transported to Rome, he wrote several letters to various churches.

In his letter *Ephesians*, chapter 1 verse 2, he said that he expected to be executed in Rome by means of beast-fighting, the same word used by Paul in *1 Corinthians*. In this context, beast-fighting was clearly a death sentence imposed on Ignatius.

The *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG) list two entries for this word. The first is, “be forced to fight with wild animals as a punishment, fight with wild animals.” The second is “to be in a position of having to contend with adversaries, struggle with, contend with”. However, the second entry is based largely on *1 Corinthians* and Ignatius’ *Ephesians*, based on the assumption that Paul was not sentenced in Ephesus. Furthermore, the support for the second entry says of Ignatius, “I am fighting with wild animals,” when the Greek clearly says “I will beast-fight.” This is an example of assuming an interpretation and then forcing the data to support it. Clearly, both Paul and Ignatius meant they had been sentenced to beast-fighting.

Assassination of the Ephesian Proconsul

In October 54, Agrippina poisoned her husband, the emperor Claudius. The Roman historian Tacitus, in his *Annals* 13.1, described how she next ordered an equestrian and a freedman in Ephesus to assassinate the proconsul Marcus Junius Silanus, Claudius’ brother. In late 54, the pair committed this crime openly. The equestrian was eventually prosecuted, although Nero delayed the trial until after the equestrian died.

Saint Paul's Prison

In 1904, Sir William Ramsey published *Letter to the Seven Churches*. In chapter 17, Ramsey noted that he found a fort on top of a ridge on the far western edge of Ephesus; local

Paul's Letters In-depth

tradition called this fort "Saint Paul's Prison." The fort itself, because it was isolated from the rest of the city, was well preserved. However, Ramsey went on to say that "there is no reason to think that he was ever imprisoned in Ephesus." He said this because the consensus at the time said that Paul was not imprisoned in Ephesus. At the same time, Ramsey clearly had no reason to invent this discovery.

Roman "Prisons"

Prisons as we understand them did not exist in Roman times, as imprisonment was not used as a form of punishment. Instead, people were held prisoner only while they waited to go on trial or for their sentences to be carried out, and both typically happened quickly. Prisoners were often guarded by soldiers in the barracks, which is why they were kept chained.

John the Baptist, held for an extended period by Herod Antipas, was an exception. Herod feared executing John, yet his wife prevented John's release.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Integrating the Evidence

The evidence above is a number of disconnected facts. Next, I will integrate the facts into conclusions. This will provide a basis for examining the traditional dating to see if the evidence supports it. If not, I will provide an alternative dating and test it against the evidence.

Gaps in Acts

Comparing Luke's accounts of Paul's time in Damascus and then in Ephesus with Paul's, it is clear that Luke omitted various events; in fact, he did this deliberately. Luke himself contradicted himself regarding the nature Paul's time in Ephesus.

This is not an indictment of Luke; instead, it demonstrates that scholars traditionally mistook his intentions. Luke wasn't writing a history, he was writing a defense of Paul's ministry. He was careful to record what he did accurately, but he also omitted anything that didn't help Paul's case.

The original recipients of *Acts* knew full well about the events Luke omitted, and their understood and accepted what he did. We should do the same.

Thus, arguments based on *Acts* *not* mentioning events are invalid, even as *Acts* is invaluable in creating a framework of events that *did* happen.

Paul's Early Ministry

Luke and Paul differ on a few points of his early ministry.

Luke indicated that Paul remained in Damascus before he returned to Jerusalem because of Jewish plots. Paul, however, said that he went to Arabia during this time and then returned to Damascus. He also said that the Arabian king had sent a ruler to arrest him, forcing him to flee.

Luke mentioned that Paul and Barnabas made a public visit to Jerusalem no later than 44. Paul mentioned a private visit around 46. This means that Luke didn't mention one of Paul's visits. This seems rather trivial, but scholars discussing *Galatians* seem to put great weight on it.

Luke indicated that Judaizers came to Antioch, and this led to the Jerusalem council. He gave no indication that the Judaizers traveled through Galatia and disrupted the churches. Luke did mention that the Apostles and elders in Jerusalem, presumably including James, said that the Judaizers had gone out without their authorization.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul told a different story. At some point before Paul wrote *Galatians*, Judaizers had come to Antioch. In addition, Peter had also visited Antioch and was led astray by the Judaizers, leading Paul to rebuke him. Paul was sure that James had sent the Judaizers.

When the Judaizers learned of Paul's efforts in Galatia, they had traveled there and disrupted the newly planted churches. When Paul found out, he wrote *Galatians*. Most likely, it was the letter itself that led to the Jerusalem council.

Nothing in *Galatians* dates the letter, and the circumstances that Paul described don't fit with Luke's description of the circumstances leading up to the Jerusalem council.

However, Paul's indictments of Peter and especially James make little sense after the Jerusalem council. Paul himself delivered a letter to these churches which specifically denied that James sent the Judaizers to those churches. Even if the churches followed the Judaizers *after* Paul visited them again, he had no reason to attack James and Peter or bring up old events in Antioch.

Imprisonment and a Death Sentence in Ephesus

Taken together, *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians* clearly indicate that Paul faced a death sentence by beast-fighting in Ephesus during Paul's ministry there. While each mention could be taken figuratively, the sum of them rules this out. This also makes sense of Luke's odd treatment of the disturbance in Ephesus and his subsequent acknowledgment that Paul was afflicted by Jewish plots.

At this point, the evidence only tells us that whatever happened occurred before Paul wrote *1 Corinthians*.

Proconsuls in Ephesus in late 54 and early 55

Acts oddly mentions "proconsuls" in 19:38, which ordinarily made no sense. However, the proconsul in Ephesus was assassinated in late 54 by two Roman officials. Putting these two facts together indicates that the two took over until a replacement arrived and restored order. The disturbance occurred shortly after the assassination, and the city official tactfully called them "proconsuls," as Luke recorded. This provides a rare hard date for Paul's ministry of late 54. This then indicates a date of 55 for *1 Corinthians*.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Connection Between *Colossians* and *Philemon*

These two letters are connected at several points, the strongest being that Paul mentions in *Colossians* that he is sending Onesimus the runaway slave with Tychicus who carried the letters. This demonstrates that Philemon lived in Colosse and that the two letters arrived together.

Connection Between *Ephesians* and *Colossians*

Tychicus delivered both letters, and Paul was in chains in both letters. Beyond this evidence, scholarly consensus is that the content of the letters is very similar. The evidence is not conclusive, but Paul probably wrote both letters around the same time. The letter to Laodicea that Paul mentioned in *Colossians* could have been *Ephesians*.

Aristarchus

Aristarchus appears three times in *Acts*; he was dragged into the theater during the disturbance in Ephesus, he accompanied Paul while taking the contribution to Jerusalem, and he sailed with Paul from Caesarea to Rome.

In addition, Aristarchus appears in *Colossians* and *Philemon*. *Colossians* notes that he was Paul's fellow prisoner. At the same time, he was not a prisoner when he traveled with Paul to Jerusalem, and there is no evidence that he was held as a prisoner in Caesarea or Rome.

The evidence we have, that Aristarchus was involved in the disturbance in Ephesus and that he was held prisoner with Paul, points to Aristarchus being arrested and held prisoner shortly after the disturbance in Ephesus, and this would then point to Paul also being arrested and held prisoner at that same time. However, this is not definitive; it is only a possibility.

Alexander

Alexander was a very common name, but *Acts* and *2 Timothy* both name an Alexander who was notorious. *Acts* describes a Jew who attempted to address the mob in the theater in Ephesus, but the mob shouted him down. *2 Timothy* describes a metalworker who did great harm to Paul in Ephesus. The disturbance was started by the silversmiths, and Paul said in *Acts* 20 that he was tested by the plots of the Jews. Possibly, there was one Jewish metalworker in Ephesus named Alexander who participated in the disturbance that ensnared Paul.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul's Fellow Prisoners

Only in *Colossians* and *Philemon* does Paul mention fellow prisoners; in these two letters, he mentions both Aristarchus and Epaphras. This is significant in that all three of them had to be in the same place for this to occur. While *Acts* tells us that Aristarchus was in Ephesus, Caesarea, and Rome, assuming that he completed the voyage with Paul, we have no indication of Epaphras being anywhere except in Colosse and wherever he was imprisoned with Paul.

Paul Intended to Stay with Philemon

As noted under *Philemon*, Paul was confident that he would soon be released, and he intended to stay with Philemon. Whether Paul actually made good on his intention, his circumstances gave him reason to think that he could. This creates two restrictions. First, Paul was being held reasonably close to Colosse, such as near Ephesus. Second, he had good reason to think that his imprisonment would soon end, which was typical in the Roman world.

Paul's Imprisonment in Caesarea and Rome

Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea was very unusual in that he was held for two years. Luke made clear that this occurred because the governor Felix was corrupt and kept Paul in limbo. We don't know why Paul was held in Rome for two years. Possibly, it was because he couldn't appear before Caesar until his accusers arrived as well, and the Jews didn't bother to travel to Rome. Again, Paul was kept in a legal limbo.

Acts indicates that Paul was not treated as prisoner in either place; instead, the authorities trusted him to not run away. We have no reason to think that Paul was in chains or that he was suffering, apart from the fact that he was not free to leave.

Connection Between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians

The letters are obviously connected because Paul wrote both letters to the church in Corinth. However, many scholars have assumed that Paul wrote a third "painful" letter in between these two, claiming that the first letter was not sufficiently painful to cause the response in the second letter.

Two pieces of evidence indicate that Paul wrote the two letters one after the other. First, the pain experienced by the church in the second letter had to do with a man who Paul had ordered them to expel. In the first letter, Paul had ordered them to expel a man involved in

Paul's Letters In-depth

sexual sin whom the church was tolerating. This specifically, along with the rest of the corrections contained in the first letter, are more than enough to make it painful. Second, Paul made clear in the second letter that he had anxiously waited for Titus to bring him news from the church in response to the first letter. Given the time required to travel between Asia and Greece and back, Paul seems to have written the letters only a few months apart.

Thus, there is no need for a third letter between the two that we have. Paul also mentioned a second visit to Corinth; *Acts* provides no information about such a trip. However, we have no evidence that the second visit did not occur *before* Paul wrote *1 Corinthians*, perhaps during his ministry in Ephesus.

Circumstances of 2 Timothy

Paul wrote to Timothy because of his recent hardships in Ephesus. He clearly had been put on trial more than once, either two separate trials or a trial and an appeal. If the latter, then he most likely made the appeal to Nero. This rules out a hearing later than late 64 when Nero began to blame Christians for the fire in Rome that summer and actively persecuted them.

Regardless, Paul said that God had rescued him, implying that these hardships were in the past. Paul was sending out Titus and other assistants, indicating that he was actively pursuing his ministry in the east. The fact that he asked Timothy join him and to bring Mark along supports this.

The fact that Mark was with Timothy at the time also argues against a date in the 60s; Mark was working closely with Peter for years in Rome.

Aquila and Priscilla were with Timothy in Ephesus, yet they had returned to Rome by the time Paul wrote *Romans* in early 57. A date after early 57 requires that they had returned to Ephesus.

Connection Between 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy

Apart from the fact that Paul wrote both letters to Timothy, the letters share references to Hymenaeus. In *2 Timothy*, Paul warned against him; in *1 Timothy*, Paul stated that he had expelled Hymenaeus from the church. Although this evidence is not definitive, Paul most likely warned Hymenaeus first and subsequently expelled him when he did not repent; warning a man who had been expelled and subsequently restored makes little sense. In addition, Paul probably did not allow the problems surrounding Hymenaeus, which involved false teaching, to fester for much longer than a few months.

Paul's Letters In-depth

This evidence points to Paul having written *2 Timothy* first and then *1 Timothy* no more than a few months later. Note that the letters are named because *1 Timothy* is longer than *2 Timothy* and for no other reason.

Connection Between *2 Timothy* and *2 Corinthians*

In *2 Corinthians*, Paul mentioned that he had stopped in Troas after leaving Ephesus, but he left because he didn't find Titus there. He subsequently found Titus in Macedonia. Paul also said that Timothy was with him as he wrote the letter.

In *2 Timothy*, Paul mentioned that he had sent Titus west to the Adriatic coast. He also mentioned that he had left some belongings in Troas and asked Timothy to retrieve them as he traveled to where Paul was.

One possibility is that Paul received news from Titus about Corinth, sent him out again, and then wrote to Timothy. After Timothy arrived, Paul wrote again to the church in Corinth. This would lock the date of *2 Timothy* into late 55 to early 56.

Connection Between *2 Timothy* and *1 Corinthians*

In *1 Corinthians*, Paul mentioned beast-fighting in Ephesus. In *2 Timothy*, he said that God shut a lion's mouth. Possibly, Paul was referring to the same event.

Paul, Demas and Mark

Paul mentioned Demas as a co-worker in *Colossians* and *Philemon*. However, in *2 Timothy*, Paul mentioned that Demas had deserted him.

Paul mentioned Mark in *Colossians* as a co-worker and then asked Timothy to bring Mark with him in *2 Timothy*.

These references indicate that both men were with Paul at the time he wrote *Colossians*. They also may point to the letters being written within a relatively short timespan.

Paul after He Was Released in Rome

Paul, in early 57, told the church in Rome that he intended to visit them and then to travel west to Spain. Shortly after that, he told the Ephesian elders that they wouldn't see him again. Possibly, Paul changed his plans and contradicted himself by returning to the east after his release in Rome.

Paul's Letters In-depth

However, Clement clearly stated that Paul did indeed head west from Rome, and that he was betrayed in Rome and executed during Nero's persecution. Clement's testimony isn't scripture, but the early Church often considered his letter to be canon until it was finally excluded. While his testimony isn't certain, it, along with Paul's own words, provide a strong indication that Paul didn't return to the east.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Does the Traditional Dating Fit the Evidence?

The traditional dating is based on the assumption that Luke didn't omit significant events in *Acts*; however, the evidence clearly shows that assumption to be incorrect. This doesn't invalidate the traditional dating by itself, but it does raise alarms.

The traditional dating rejects the idea that Paul was arrested and tried in Ephesus; however, this ignores the evidence from *Acts 20* and *1 Corinthians* and *2 Corinthians*.

The evidence is clear that Paul wrote *Colossians* and *Philemon* at the same time, and he may have written *Ephesians* around that time as well. The traditional dating places these letters during Paul's imprisonments in Caesarea or Rome.

However, Paul lists co-workers who were with him as he wrote, and he mentions Aristarchus as a fellow prisoner. However, Paul said that Aristarchus and Epaphras were also prisoners with him. There is no indication that Aristarchus was a prisoner in Caesarea or Rome, although he apparently stayed with Paul during this time. There is no indication that Epaphras was a prisoner at this time, either. Mark was also present, which would only make sense if Paul wrote from Rome and Mark had found his way there, as there is no evidence at all that Mark was in Caesarea.

Onesimus was also with Paul as he wrote the letters. This would require that a slave had traveled as far as Caesarea, or more likely, Rome, become a Christian, and Paul intended to return him. This assumes that Onesimus, an unbeliever and runaway slave, had managed to raise the funds for such a journey for the purpose of seeking out Paul. This is possible but unlikely.

In addition, the context of Paul's custody in Caesarea and Rome does not fit his self-portrayal as a suffering prisoner in chains. In particular, Paul was living in his own house and entertaining guests and preaching.

The evidence from *Philippians* also argues against Paul's time in Rome as the date of that letter. Paul was not in a life or death situation, nor was he even being held by the Praetorian Guard; instead, he was living in a rented house while waiting for someone to bring an accusation against him. There was no reason for the church in Philippi to suddenly become concerned about Paul almost three years after his initial arrest in Caesarea.

However, the traditional dating could move *Philippians* to after Paul's release in Rome.

The traditional dating is forced to assume that Paul returned to the east after he was released in Rome, yet all the evidence indicates that didn't happen. This removes the constraints of *Acts* on speculation.

Paul then wrote *1 Timothy* and *Titus*.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Paul conducted a second ministry in Ephesus. Some unknown circumstances led to Paul's arrest and transport to Rome, where he wrote Philippians. After this, Paul returned to Ephesus.

Finally, *2 Timothy* assumes that a major event occurred in Ephesus in 66 that led to Paul's arrest and his first defense, when everyone abandoned him and he "was rescued from a lion's mouth." Next, Paul was transported to Rome for execution. Once he arrived there, he wrote to Timothy, telling him to come quickly, and to bring Mark with him, presumably from Ephesus. Paul was then executed.

However, during Nero's persecution, there was no reason for Paul to appeal to him. As typically happened, his sentence would have been carried out within days. He had little time to write a letter, much less time for it to reach Ephesus and then for Timothy and Mark to travel to Rome.

Paul requested that Timothy and Mark join him, presumably in Rome. At the time, the emperor Nero was persecuting Christians in Rome, and Paul was facing death. Why would Paul want two key assistants to join him in Rome when it meant putting their lives in danger? Why would he want a cloak and some books when he was about to die? How did he leave belongings in Troas if he was being transported to Rome as a criminal?

The evidence around Hymenaeus indicates that Paul wrote the letter *before* he wrote *1 Timothy*. This is a serious problem for the traditional dating.

Paul sent greetings to Aquila and Priscilla, but they had moved to Rome in 56. The traditional dating must assume that they had moved back to Ephesus.

How was Mark with Timothy in Ephesus? The evidence points to him having spent years in Rome working with Peter.

Summary

The traditional dating provides contrived explanations for Paul's letters that ignore key evidence and requires substantial speculation. This doesn't disprove the theory, but it certainly begs for an alternative that offers a better explanation.

Paul's Letters In-depth

An Alternative Dating

This proposed sequence of events, which includes Paul writing his letters, much better fits the evidence.

Paul's Early Ministry

Paul began persecuting the church in Jerusalem within months after Pentecost. In 31, he traveled to Damascus, where Jesus met him on the road. After traveling to Arabia, where he apparently ran into trouble with the king, he returned to Damascus and then went to Jerusalem in 33. His stay there lasted 15 days, when forced to leave, he ended up settling in Tarsus.

Around 42, Barnabas brought him to Antioch, and they brought famine relief to Jerusalem in 43. In 45, Paul made a second visit to Jerusalem, where he met with James, Peter, and John. Shortly after that, Peter visited Antioch; his visit was marred by Judaizers who also came from Jerusalem.

Paul traveled to Crete and Galatia in 46-47 and returned to Antioch. Soon after, Judaizers went to Galatia and disrupted the churches, leading Paul to write *Galatians* in 47. His letter created a controversy that led to the council in Jerusalem in 48.

Paul quickly took the council's letter and Silas and set out for Galatia. Having reached Corinth, he wrote *1 Thessalonians* in 50 and *2 Thessalonians* in 51. He then visited Ephesus and returned to Antioch.

In 52, he set out for Galatia for a third visit and then settled in Ephesus.

Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

Luke portrayed Paul's ministry in Ephesus as effective and uneventful; this was half true. Paul's preaching had a great effect, and the Jews quickly became jealous and began to plot against him, following a familiar pattern in *Acts*.

Paul's Second Visit to Corinth

In the second or third quarter of 54, Paul visited Corinth. This visit had not turned out well, as a group of dissidents was forming in the church that despised Paul because of his lack of formal Greek-style training. This situation was made worse by Apollos because he fit their expectations of an eloquent and learned speaker, although Apollos had no part in it. A year later, as Paul wrote *1 Corinthians*, Apollos refused to visit the church.

Paul's Letters In-depth

The Disturbance and Paul's Arrest in Ephesus

In October of 54, Agrippina assassinated her husband, the emperor Claudius, and had her son, Nero, appointed emperor. She then sent instructions to Ephesus to have the proconsul assassinated as well. The two assassins then took on the role of proconsul for two to three months, until a proper replacement was sent by the Senate. The delay was caused by difficulties traveling during the winter.

In the fourth quarter of 54, shortly after the assassination of the proconsul, the Jews plotted to use a mob to do away with Paul. One of their number, a metalworker named Alexander, helped incite the silversmiths to create a disturbance. Perhaps the Jews chose this time because the Roman government was disrupted. The silversmiths, led by Demetrius, proclaimed that Paul's teachings threatened Artemis, whose temple was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This event had strong parallels to the one in Thessalonica as described in *Acts 17:5ff*.

Aristarchus and at least one other of Paul's assistants were swept up and dragged into the theater, but Paul's friends prevented him from going in as well. With the mob gathered in the city theater and ready to riot, Alexander attempted to address them. However, his plan backfired when the mob realized that he was a Jew, and they simply chanted for some two hours.

Finally, the city official addressed the crowd, warning them that the Romans could bring severe consequences upon the city because of the disturbance. He told them that the courts were in session and that there were proconsuls, tactfully acknowledging the unusual governance arrangement.

Paul's opponents took advantage of the fake proconsuls and brought Paul before them. Some of Paul's assistants were also arrested, including Aristarchus and Epaphras. The false proconsuls condemned Paul to beast-fighting, even though Paul, as a Roman citizen, was exempt from the more cruel punishments. At this time, many of the Christians in Asia distanced themselves from Paul. The punishment was carried out, but the beast, possibly a lion, refused to attack Paul, as sometimes happened.

The proper proconsul arrived in the first quarter of 55, in time to prevent further attempts to execute Paul. He found Paul condemned to death and his associates also confined, so he conducted another trial, during which Paul appealed to Caesar. The proconsul then kept Paul imprisoned, possibly in the fort west of Ephesus later known as Saint Paul's Prison, along with his assistants, until he could transport Paul to Rome in late March.

During this time, Onesimus managed to run away from Philemon and take refuge with Paul. Under Paul's influence, Onesimus became a Christian, and Paul persuaded him to return to

Paul's Letters In-depth

Philemon. Paul wrote what seems to be a personal note to Philemon, but the note was likely read to the church in Philemon's house, adding to the pressure Philemon felt to take Onesimus back.

Paul also wrote *Ephesians* and *Colossians*, as he could not visit the churches himself, and fear and uncertainty gripped them all. Paul sent Onesimus back with Tychicus to Philemon in Colosse.

The exact relationship between *Ephesians* and *Colossians* is unclear. Perhaps Paul wrote *Ephesians* first and sent Tychicus to deliver it to Ephesus and then to the churches to the north and east. As Tychicus went about this task, Paul then wrote *Colossians* and *Philemon*. Tychicus returned to Paul, picked up the additional letters, and then headed southeast to Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

Paul's Appeal to Caesar in Rome

Early in the second quarter of 55, the proconsul in Ephesus sent Paul to Rome to appeal to Caesar. At least Timothy accompanied Paul. Onesiphorus immediately followed after Paul, knowing that someone would have to meet Paul's needs while he was held as a prisoner in Rome. In addition, the church in Philippi sent Epaphroditus for the same reason.

Paul was held in the Praetorian Guard barracks, where he would be kept in chains. However, his positive attitude and refined behavior soon gained the respect of the Guard. Some Christians who were members of Caesar's household also had access to Paul and met his needs.

Epaphroditus arrived from Philippi in poor health and expressed the concern of the church. Paul quickly wrote *Philippians* from Rome.

Nero, or perhaps his mentors, heard Paul's appeal and acquitted him. Perhaps the circumstances around his arrest and the illegal punishment Paul had survived worked in Paul's favor. In addition, Nero, then 16 years old, abhorred the death penalty in his youth and was inclined to clemency. Paul was transported back to Ephesus, arriving sometime in the third quarter of 55.

Final Months in Ephesus

Shortly after Paul's return, he received news from Corinth telling him of various serious problems in the church there. The divisions had grown worse, and all sorts of sin and disorder went unchecked. Paul's beast-fighting sentence was common knowledge, and this no doubt encouraged those opposed to Paul.

Paul's Letters In-depth

In response, Paul wrote *1 Corinthians*. Once he was passed the greeting in the first nine verses, Paul's tone was cold, admonishing, and lacking affection. In chapter 5, he rebuked the church for tolerating an immoral man and ordered that he be expelled. In one of his last sentences, he said, "If someone does not love the Lord, let him be cursed!" Paul seemed to be exhausted and lacking the patience and concern that marked *1 & 2 Thessalonians*.

In the letter, Paul said that he wanted to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost, which occurred during the spring. However, he was still facing a great deal of opposition.

Paul sent the letter with Titus and waited for him to return with news of how the letter was received. However, for whatever reason, Paul did not remain in Ephesus. Instead, late in the third quarter or early in the fourth quarter of 55, he headed north to Troas and settled there to minister. Again for reasons that are not clear, Paul suddenly left Troas, leaving a cloak and some expensive books behind. He crossed over to Macedonia, where he found Titus.

Paul in Macedonia

Late in the fourth quarter of 55, Paul found Titus and heard about the situation in Corinth. Titus came with good news and bad news. Overall, the church was deeply grieved by what Paul wrote and moved to repentance. They had expelled the immoral brother, as Paul had commanded, but the brother had repented, and the church was uncertain how to respond.

In addition, the faction opposed to Paul had dug in; furthermore, highly trained Jewish Christians had come to Corinth as teachers, and a faction had hired them to teach against Paul. Paul had wanted the church to deal with these issues on their own, but these teachers forced Paul into an eventual showdown.

Paul was shaken by the news; he wanted to reply, but he needed to heal before he addressed the church in Corinth again. At the same time, he wanted to put Ephesus behind him and start his ministry again. As he prepared to send out his assistants, Demas deserted him and returned to Ephesus. Paul, intending to travel west to the coast of the Adriatic Sea, sent Titus on ahead of him, and he sent his other assistants to different places so that only Luke was left. He then wrote a highly personal and urgent letter to Timothy late in the fourth quarter of 55.

In *2 Timothy*, Paul opened up about how difficult the prior year had been, even as he encouraged Timothy to keep up the fight. At one point, Paul actually talked as if he had done as much as he could and that he wanted God to take him. However, Paul gathered himself, acknowledged how God had strengthened and protected him, and told Timothy to come to him quickly, bringing Mark with him. He also wanted Timothy to gather his belongings in Troas as well. In addition, Paul warned Timothy about Hymenaeus and his false teaching.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Timothy soon arrived, and Paul sat down to write *2 Corinthians*. He wanted to address two groups in the church. The first was the main part of the church who were struggling to live faithfully. They had been wounded by Paul's previous letter, and Paul wanted to pour himself out to them. The second was the dissidents, whom Paul intended to rebuke and even threaten. However, he wanted to approach them in a way that would cause the rest to sympathize with him against the dissidents.

To accomplish this, Paul wrote in three distinct sections. The first section is full of Paul's love and concern for the church. He praised them for obeying his command to expel the immoral brother, but he also encouraged them to receive the repentant man back and comfort him.

The second section dealt with the contribution on behalf of the church in Jerusalem that Paul was amassing in Greece, Macedonia, Asia, and Galatia. Paul encouraged the church to give diligently but cheerfully and not under compulsion.

The third section slammed the dissidents. Paul did this by pretending to accept the many criticisms made against him even as he made clear that he would not tolerate the fractious behavior any longer. Finally, he openly threatened the faction, warning them that he planned to visit the church again within the year.

56: The Lost Year

After Paul wrote *2 Corinthians* in early 56, we have little evidence about what he did for the rest of the year. *Acts* says only that Paul spent three months in Greece before he began to carry the contribution for the church to Jerusalem in early 57. We know that Paul headed west and preached in Illyricum, where he had recently sent Titus. Paul spent the last part of the three months in Greece, some of that in Corinth.

One of Paul's goals during this year was to be able to leave the churches in the east able to move forward without him. He likely wrote *1 Timothy* in the first quarter of 56; it appears to be an ordination letter. Paul was setting up Timothy as bishop over Ephesus, and by extension, all of Asia. The letter was meant to be read publicly, with Timothy present, and it discussed various issues that Paul wanted Timothy to address going forward. In the letter, Paul also reinforced that he had expelled Hymenaeus from the church after he refused to repent.

During the middle of 56, we may speculate that Paul and Titus traveled to Crete to visit churches that had sprung up there. Paul introduced Titus to the churches and then left. Shortly after that, Paul wrote an ordination letter for Titus. Perhaps the letter for Titus was shorter because Titus was older and more experienced than Timothy; *Galatians* 2:1–3 indicate that Titus had traveled with Paul to Jerusalem around 46. In the letter, Paul told Titus that he intended to spend the winter in Nicopolis, on the Adriatic coast of northwestern Greece. This fits with Luke's description of Paul spending three months in Greece.

Paul's Letters In-depth

The Contribution, Jerusalem, and Imprisonment

Paul spent at least the beginning of 57 in Corinth. He was pulling the contribution for Jerusalem together and preparing to travel as soon as it was safe. While he was doing this, he took time to write to the church in Rome.

Paul wrote *Romans* early in the first quarter of 57. He had promised to visit the church there and his plans had fallen through. In addition, the church in Rome was struggling. Early church tradition is vague, but Peter seems to have helped found the church in the 40s, working among the very large Jewish population in the city. Then, around 49, the emperor Claudius expelled “all” the Jews from Rome because of disturbances that seem to have had to do with Christians. In reality, mostly wealthy and prominent Jews were forced to leave, but among them were the Jewish leaders in the church, including Aquila and Priscilla. In early 55, after Claudius’ death, Jews had begun to return, Aquila and Priscilla among them. The Christian Jews found that the church was led by Gentiles.

This led to conflicts between the Jews and the Gentiles in the church, with the Jews claiming that the Gentiles were too lax and the Gentiles claiming that the Jews were legalistic. In addition, Paul’s legal issues posed a problem for the Gentile leaders, and some Jews opposed Paul’s message of faith apart from the observance of the Law of Moses. Paul wrote to defend his Gospel message and to address the breaches between the Jews and the Gentiles.

This was the last of Paul’s letters that were included in the New Testament.

Acts covers the next five years of Paul’s life in detail, from his journey to Jerusalem, the disturbance there and his subsequent arrest, his trials and detention in Caesarea, his journey to Rome, and his detention there.

Final Years

After this, we must rely on tradition. Clement of Rome said that Paul ministered as far west as Spain. In addition, Paul had a significant impact on the church in Rome, so he is frequently mentioned with Peter as a founder of the church. Sometime around 67, Paul and Peter were both handed over to the Roman authorities, and Paul was beheaded.

Paul's Letters In-depth

Conclusion

First, the evidence is not sufficient to prove that any dating is correct. Too much of it is circumstantial, and Luke simply left gaps in describing Paul's ministry in *Acts*. At the same time, the evidence is sufficient to invalidate the traditional dating.

The traditional dating generally does not fit with the evidence that we do have, at some points the evidence contradicts it, and it openly ignores or rationalizes Paul's own words in his letters to the church in Corinth by claiming that Paul's ministry in Ephesus went smoothly. On this basis, the traditional dating must be set aside. No dating is better than a bad one.

The proposed dating I supplied fits the evidence, although it does require a good deal of guesswork to fill in the gaps. However, the supplied narrative flows smoothly and provides context for Paul's letters that makes sense of the overall tone of each. As long as it is taught with the caveat that it involves some informed guesswork, it is better than no dating at all.