



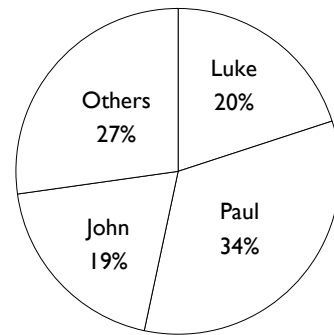
## The Context: The New Testament

### Contents of the New Testament

The Old Testament contains 39 books which were written by dozens of authors over the course of over one thousand years. In contrast, the New Testament contains 27 which were written by only 9 different authors over maybe 50-60 years. Three of those authors wrote nearly 75% of the total content of the New Testament. The apostle Paul himself wrote over one-third of the New Testament.

Whereas each Old Testament book can be very lengthy and consist of multiple literary genres all within one book, the New Testament books are much shorter and follow a consistent literary genre. The New Testament contains only three different literary genres 1) Historical Biography; 2) Epistle, and 3) Apocalyptic literature.

**New Testament Authors**



### Historical Biographies

The first four books are called the gospels, and they tell of the words and deeds of Jesus. The word “gospel” means “good news,” for they proclaim the good news of Christ’s life and death and resurrection. The fifth book, Acts, recounts the history of the early church and especially the words and deeds of the apostle Paul as he spreads the gospel throughout his journeys. While often the gospel and Acts are considered separate literary genres, the style of the gospels and Acts is very similar.

### The Epistles

The epistles are letters written by the early apostles to churches and individuals. Most of the epistles were written by the apostle Paul to churches he founded or was going to soon visit. For these “Pauline Epistles”, the name of the book tells us the recipient of the letter. For the rest of the epistles (known as the “General” epistles) the name of the book tells us the sender of the letter.

Gospels & Acts	Pauline Epistles	General Epistles	Apocalyptic
Matthew	Romans	Hebrews	Revelation
Mark	1 Corinthians	James	
Luke	2 Corinthians	1 Peter	
John	Galatians	2 Peter	
Acts	Ephesians	1 John	
	Philippians	2 John	
	Colossians	3 John	
	1 Thessalonians	Jude	
	2 Thessalonians		
	1 Timothy		
	2 Timothy		
	Titus		
	Philemon		

Most of these letters were written to address specific issues faced by the recipient. As such, the content of the epistles are fairly unique and narrow in focus and are not exhaustive treatises on theological topics. When studying the epistles, determining the occasion for which each letter was written becomes a key to

understanding the book.

Nonetheless, there are a few themes which are repeated throughout the epistles. Paul is particularly concerned with the unity of the church and potential split between Jewish and Gentile Christians. His letters repeatedly speak to living in harmony and reminding his readers that the Gentile Christians are not required to obey the Old Testament law. The General epistles focus more on the problem of heresy and the need for the church to be on guard against false teaching.

### **The Apocalyptic Literature**

The New Testament closes with a very unique book. The Revelation of Jesus Christ is an apocalyptic book, describing a vision seen by the apostle John. The vision is highly symbolic and focuses on the victorious return of Jesus Christ at the end of this age. While Revelation is the only apocalyptic book in the New Testament, this was a popular genre in the first century. The Essenes wrote numerous apocalyptic books describing the coming of the Messiah in symbolic terms.

## **The Background: Judaism & the Roman Empire**

### **The Roman Empire**

#### **The Rise of Rome**

##### *Persia (424-331 BC)*

The Jewish people had been conquered and carried into exile by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Seventy years later, after the Persians conquered Babylon, the Persian king Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland. While very few of the Jews ever left Babylon to return, nonetheless under the Persians the Jews regained a limited amount of self-government and a significant amount of religious freedom. The temple was rebuilt and the daily sacrifices restarted.

Because most Jews remained scattered throughout the Babylonian and Persian empires, it was during this time that Judaism began to shift its focus away from temple worship to the synagogue and from the sacrifices to the practical application of the law. This practical application of the law developed from the Torah to a detailed expansion of the Torah to fit new times and places.<sup>1</sup>

##### *Greece (331-167 BC)*

In 334 BC, Alexander the Great defeated the Persian army by the River Granicus in 334 BC, and subsequently began occupying the whole of the Persian Empire. Alexander took control of Palestine in 331 BC. In a few short years, Alexander had conquered an empire which spanned from Greece in the west to India in the west, and from the Caucasus Mountains in the north to Egypt in the south.

Alexander died unexpectedly at the age of 33. He left no obvious heir to his empire; so after a great struggle, his four greatest generals entered an agreement to divide the empire into four domains. Cassander would rule Macedonia; Lysimachus would rule Thrace and Bithynia; Seleucus would rule Babylon and Syria; Ptolemy would rule Egypt and Palestine. These four kingdoms turned into long lasting dynasties.

Alexander's design for his empire was to unite all his conquered lands under Greek philosophy, culture and language. The result was a combining of the Greek culture with the local cultures. This combining took place in Judaism as well, as Greek philosophy began to intermix with classic Jewish beliefs. Likewise, it is from this period that the Greek language became the *lingua franca* or the common worldwide language for commerce and government.

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<sup>1</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*. (Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman. 1997), 9.

Under the Greek rule, the Jews were given significant freedom and lived in relative peace. Furthermore, Greek philosophy and thought continued to grow in its influence over Judaism, for most Jews still lived outside of Palestine, mostly in Babylon or Alexandria, where Greek language and culture remained strong. Alexandria would become a very significant center for Jewish philosophy and religion, and was the location where the Greek translation of the Old Testament (known as the Septuagint) was created.

#### *Rome (63BC through the entire NT era)*

For the most part, the Greek rulers continued a policy of non interference with the Jews, allowing them to worship freely and maintain a local government, until 175 BC when Antiochus IV (also known as Antiochus Epiphanies) came to power. During his reign, the relationship between the Seleucids and the Jews changed dramatically and resulted in a Jewish rebellion, resulting in a short-lived independent Jewish state. However, the independence granted Israel at this time had as much to do with a growing threat the Greek rulers faced from the west- Rome.

In 64 BC the Roman general Pompey the Great defeated the Seleucids and annexed the territory into the Roman Empire. Pompey seized Jerusalem in 63 BC, putting an end to 80 years of Jewish independence. The Jews would not have political independence again until AD 1948.

Rome often ruled through vassal kings such as this, allowing Rome to control the territory without the expense of maintaining a full contingent of the army. In the case of Palestine, the Romans gave power to the Herodian dynasty, which lasted from 63 BC until AD 70.

#### *The Jewish War*

Beginning in AD 66, the Jews revolted against Rome. Herod Agrippa remained loyal to Rome and requested assistance in putting down the insurrection. In AD 70 the Roman general Titus laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the city and the temple and to this day the Jews have been without their temple.

#### *Pax Romana*

With the exception of skirmishes around the far borders of the empire (such as the Jewish war), by the first century AD, the Roman Empire was a stable and peaceful society. The Romans had created an empire stretching from Spain in the west, Palestine in the east, Britain to the north, and Egypt to the south. The entire shoreline of the Mediterranean Sea was under Roman control. Politically, the emperors brought freedom from civil war. Economically, the stability of the empire brought great prosperity. Technically, the empire brought about unprecedented engineering marvels, including a highly developed network of roads providing relatively easy travel. Socially, the prosperity and stability produced new philosophical and religious thoughts and ideas. As a result, this was a time known as the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome.

This peace provides the apostle Paul with the ability to travel extensively without need of a passport and with the relative ease provided by the empire's transportation network.

### **Greek and Roman Religion**

The first century was a time of great change in the Greek and Roman religious practices and understanding. Old religions were passing out of favor and people were increasingly willing to hear new religious ideas.

#### *Traditional Pantheism*

Classical Greek and Roman pantheism believed in numerous gods and goddesses who each exercised dominion over an aspect of life. The chief of these gods was known as Zeus (Greek) or Jupiter (Romans). Devotion to the gods was at its apex in the fourth and fifth centuries BC. But by the first century few people truly believed in the pantheon, and the ceremonial worship of the gods was mostly just tradition.

### *Greek Philosophy*

The Greeks are well known for their great philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Stoicism was probably the most influential of philosophy of the first century. Stoicism taught that there is a distinction between matter and spirit. Matter, of which the body was a part, was passive and something to be subdued by the spirit. The spirit, which was called the *logos* (Greek for “word”) was conceived of divine logic or reason, and that one could find fulfillment through conformity to the *logos*. Stoicism has four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice and temperance<sup>2</sup>.

Stoicism had such a wide spread influence that it even was incorporated in Judaic and Christian thought in the first and second century.

### *Mystery & Magic Religions*

The mystery religions were secret societies where the few elite would be allowed to enter into secret knowledge and rituals. In combination with this was the belief in magic rites, incantations, spells, and rituals through which one could coerce the gods.

### *Gnosticism*

Gnosticism was a belief that deeper knowledge was the key to personal fulfillment. It grew out of the Platonic dualistic philosophy which stated that the material world was evil while the spiritual world is good. This led to one of two extremes: either an ascetic lifestyle which tried to suppress the evils of the body, or hedonism which indulged the body since only the spirit survived.

### *Emperor Worship*

As the Roman army systematically conquered other nations, belief in the national gods who were to protect them waned. If the Roman emperors could defeat those gods, then the emperor must be a god himself. The first emperor to be deified was Julius Caesar. Augustus was also declared a god, but only after his death. Nero was the first to try to enforce the worship of himself while he was alive. The emperor Domitian tried to enforce widespread worship of himself throughout the empire, leading to great persecution of Christians who refused to worship him.

### *The Rise of Christianity*

This diversity in religious thought brought an openness in the people of the empire to new ideas. Judaism itself had grown in popularity throughout the empire, and Christianity would find great acceptance among the people. This unprecedented time of openness allowed the apostle Paul to enter a thoroughly pagan city, such as Athens, and discuss and debate philosophy and find a fertile ground for Christianity.

### **Social Structure**

The Roman Empire was primarily driven by agriculture. There were some craftsmen and merchants, but this was by far the minority. The land was owned by a relatively small number of wealthy land owners.

There was very little technology involved in farming, and as such landowners required a great deal of human labor in order to work the fields and tend the flocks. In that day, labor came from two sources: slave labor, and free laborers. Slaves were usually the descendents of people conquered by the Romans. In cases of extreme poverty, people could also voluntarily become slaves as a means of economic support. These people could buy there way back out of slavery if they accumulated enough wealth.

Slavery, while a harsh way to live, did not carry the same social stigma as American slavery in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many great Roman scholars, teachers, musicians and craftsmen were slaves to the

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<sup>2</sup> "Stoicism," Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2004. <http://encarta.msn.com>. 1997-2004. Microsoft Corporation.

Roman aristocracy. For those slaves who found themselves with a benevolent master, slavery was a secure way of life.

The Roman family household was the predominant social structure. The patriarch (father) of the household had absolute authority over all the members of that household, including the slaves, the wife and the children. Roman patriarchs could even order the execution of a member of his household. The absolute rule of the patriarch was seen as a microcosm of the absolute authority of the Roman emperor, and was the basis of all social and political power in the empire.

The apostle Paul, in his epistles, will challenge this absolute authority, telling the patriarch that he should lead his household like Christ leads the church— out of love and sacrifice rather than power.

## First Century Judaism

### **Movement from Sacrificial Rituals to the Law**

As a result of the Babylonian exile, a majority of the Jews lived outside of the Holy Land. Because of this, the worship of God through the temple sacrifices became less important. The focal point of worship moved to knowledge of and obedience to the law. The synagogue grew in importance as the center of Jewish communities and worship. This transition made prayer and good works as a replacement for the sacrifices.

### **First Century Jewish Religious Groups**

#### *Sadducees*

The Sadducees were heavily influenced by Greek culture. They believed that only the Torah could be used to determine proper doctrine and they rejected all oral traditions on the Law.

The Sadducees were a small group comprised mostly of the wealthy aristocracy. By the time of Jesus they controlled the Jewish Sanhedrin, the local governing body. They didn't protest the Roman occupation as they benefited from the status quo. The Sadducees controlled the priesthood and therefore were more concerned with temple rituals and the animal sacrifices. Because of this the Sadducees died off after the destruction of the temple in AD 70.

In modern terms, the Sadducees would be the liberal Christians whose morality and doctrine are largely determined by secular culture.

#### *Pharisees*

The word Pharisee means "separatist." This group opposed the Greek cultural influences, and they were strongly opposed to the combining of the priesthood with political power. There were frequent conflicts between the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were not part of the priesthood, but were laymen who had great influence in the synagogues. Most of the prominent rabbis came from the Pharisees, and they were very popular with the common folk.

The Pharisees believed in the inerrancy of all the Old Testament scriptures and in the direct application of the scriptures to every day life. These applications of the law developed into a rich oral tradition on how to keep the law. In the centuries following Jesus these oral traditions would be written into what is known today as the Mishnah and the Talmud. Because their domain was the synagogues and the oral law, they Pharisees not only survived the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans, but this branch of Judaism defines much of what is Judaism today.

Doctrinally the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, heaven and hell, angels and demons and a combination of predestination and free will. While Jesus opposed the legalism of the Pharisees, his doctrine aligned more with the Pharisees than the Sadducees. The apostle Paul was a devout Pharisee prior to his conversion to Christianity.

In modern terms, the Pharisees are the conservative evangelical Christians who hold to an inerrant scripture and a devotion to biblical morality.

## First Century Church

### The Expansion of Christianity

After the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the church grew rapidly among the Jews. There were thousands of converts amongst the Jews in Jerusalem and throughout Judea. But Christianity at this point was merely a sect of Judaism, and the first Christians would have still considered themselves Jews.

However, as the ruling Jewish leadership began persecuting this sect for their blasphemous beliefs in a divine messiah, the Christians began to flee from Jerusalem and spread their message throughout Judea, Samaria, and Syria. There, the Christians spread the gospel message to the Jewish communities throughout the region. But the message also began to spread amongst the Gentiles.

In the city of Antioch, the Gentiles began converting to Christianity in great numbers. But the question came up- do these Gentiles need to convert to Judaism before becoming Christians? Most specifically, does a Gentile need to be circumcised before he can enter the church?

As Paul travels throughout Asia Minor, more and more Gentiles join with the Christians. The response of the Gentiles, however, brings new questions as to the role of Jewish law in Christianity. The early church is struggling for its identity; namely, is Christianity a sect of Judaism or is it something entirely new.

Paul had been teaching that Christ brings freedom which the Law can not bring. But many in the church in Jerusalem believed that upon conversion Gentiles needed to be circumcised and begin following the practice of the Jewish law.

### The Jerusalem Council

The debate was settled in the only recorded church council in scripture. James summed up the argument by showing from the Old Testament that the witness to the Gentiles had been part of the plan all along (15:16-18), and that the earthly kingdom would not take place until the “uttermost parts” knew the gospel. The Gentile believers did not have to be circumcised, nor did they need to keep the Law (15:28). All they were to do was to avoid idolatrous practices and sexual sin (15:29).

The official position of the church was that Gentiles did not have to follow the Law. But the debate and the tensions within the church regarding this matter remained throughout the first century. This discussion is the major overriding theme of the Pauline epistles.

## The Author: The Life of the Apostle Paul

### A Hebrew of Hebrews

#### Context of Acts 22

Towards the end of his recorded missionary journeys, Paul decides to return to Jerusalem. Paul's Christian friends warn him that he is a wanted man in Jerusalem and if he returns he will surely be imprisoned. Nonetheless, Paul is sure that this is the path God has for him.

Sure enough, as soon as Paul arrives in Jerusalem, there is trouble. Jews from Asia had reported to the Jewish authorities that Paul had been preaching against the Law in synagogues throughout Asia Minor and into Greece. He had been teaching that Gentiles could have a relationship with God outside of the Law. This was a position with which many Jews within the church struggled, let alone those Jews outside the church. Interestingly, it was not the fact that Paul was teaching that Jesus was the Christ which upset the Jews, but that the Law was moot because of Christ. This issue, with which the church itself had been struggling, ultimately became more of a dividing line between Jews and Christians than the Messianic claims of Jesus!

In this context Paul falsely accused of having brought a Gentile into the temple, which was a clear violation of Jewish law and was punishable by death. As a result, the entire city erupts into

chaos as a lynch mob tries to seize Paul. In the midst of the chaos, Roman troops arrest Paul for disrupting the police. However, because of his standing as a Roman citizen, Paul is allowed to address his Jewish accusers and defend himself. Acts 22 records this address in which Paul gives a defense of his teaching.

### **Paul's Upbringing (Acts 22:1-3)**

The author of Acts tells us that Paul gives his defense speech in Acts 22 in the Hebrew language rather than Greek. The effect of this is that the crowd becomes silent. The accusation against Paul is that he is preaching a message of salvation for the Gentiles outside of the Jewish traditions, so just by speaking in Hebrew he catches the crowd off guard and they become intrigued by what he might be saying to them.

He starts defense with an autobiography. Paul is a Jew. He may have been born in the Greek city of Tarsus, but he had been sent to Jerusalem for his education. Indeed, he was tutored by the famous conservative Jewish rabbi Gamaliel and taught strict adherence and zealous defense of the Jewish law (Acts 22:3).

Throughout his epistles, Paul made note of his Jewish heritage. No one would be able to accuse him of being more Jewish than he (2 Corinthians 11:22). He was a son of Abraham and of the tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1), and his Jewish name, Saul, comes from the most famous Benjaminite, King Saul. He had been circumcised eight days according to Jewish Law, and was raised as a Pharisee. Pharisees believed in a literal and strict interpretation of the Jewish law. And by using such a strict interpretation, Paul was able to claim that he was blameless under the law (Philippians 3:6). Indeed, Paul was "a Hebrew of Hebrews" (Philippians 3:5).

While Paul was indeed a Hebrew of Hebrews, he also could fit well into the Gentile world. He inherited Roman citizenship from his father. Roman citizenship would be given as an honor for services rendered to a Roman official, perhaps by Paul's father. Nonetheless, Paul would use his citizenship to his advantage throughout his journeys.

### **Paul Persecution of the Church (Acts 22:4-5a)**

Paul was so zealous in his defense of the Law that when a new sect called "the Way" arose teaching a more liberal understanding of the law, he actively persecuted its members (Acts 22:4). Acting under orders of the High Priest and the Jewish ruling council, he imprisoned and was complicit in the execution of those in this sect (22:5). He was present and complicit in the execution of the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 8:1, 22:20).

Paul's persecution of the church was something which he would come to deeply regret. While before his conversion to Christianity he had been "acting in ignorance" (1 Timothy 1:13), he always considered himself the "least of the apostles" because of his persecution of the church (1 Corinthians 15:9). His forgiveness for his violent harassment of the church also gave him a deep appreciation for the grace of God (1 Timothy 1:14).

## **Conversion and Call**

### **Events on the Road to Damascus (Acts 22:5b-16)**

On one occasion Saul sought to go to Damascus in Syria to round up the Christians and return them to Jerusalem for persecution (22:5b). On the road to Damascus Paul encounters Jesus. A bright light comes from heaven, and he hears a voice cry out "Saul, why are you persecuting me." Paul asks who it is that is calling to him from heaven. The voice responds, "I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting." Paul asks Jesus what to do, and Jesus instructs him to go on to Damascus, where he would be given instructions (22:10). However, he had to be led to Damascus because he had been blinded by the bright light (22:11). In Damascus, Paul meets Ananias, another devout, conservative Jew (22:12). Ananias miraculously heals Paul's physical blindness (22:13) and his spiritual blindness (22:14-16).

### Chronology of Paul

Date	Epistle	Events in Paul's Life
AD 33		Jesus died and rose
34		Paul's conversion. Preached in Damascus. Spends time in Arabia
37		Barnabas introduces Paul to the church in Jerusalem. Faces persecution Paul returns to live in Tarsus
47		Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch First Missionary Journey
49	Galatians	The Jerusalem Council
50-51	1 & 2 Thessalonians	Second Missionary Journey – 18 months in Corinth
	1 & 2 Corinthians Romans	Third Missionary Journey – 2 years in Ephesus
57		Paul imprisoned in Jerusalem
60		The Journey to Rome
61	Philemon Colossians Ephesians Philippians	Paul imprisoned in Rome
62		Paul released from prison. Further travels
63	1 & 2 Timothy Titus	Reimprisonment & Martyrdom

Sources:

Robert H. Gundry. *A Survey of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1994), 318-19

R. Alan Cole. "The Life and Ministry of Paul." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998). Electronic edition STEP file.

### His Call as Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 22:17-21)

After his conversion, Paul's desire was to preach the gospel to the Jews. After all, he was trained as a Pharisee. He knew the law; he knew the Jewish mind. He had better training and education than any of the apostles did. What better person to convince the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah? So Paul went to Jerusalem and preached convincingly to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:22). But this was not to be Paul's calling.

While he was able to use his education and training to make convincing arguments supporting Christ to the Jews, his ministry was ineffective. Paul's preaching in Jerusalem brought opposition by the Jews, and at the same time, the Christians were skeptical of his conversion thinking he may be working undercover and seeking to expose him (Acts 9:26). So, one day while in the Jewish temple, Paul had a vision in which Jesus commanded him to leave Jerusalem (22:17-18). Paul tried to argue with Jesus, telling him of how his background made him the perfect person to preach to the Jews (22:19-20). But Jesus again told him to leave for "I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

While Paul would always earnestly desire for his countrymen to accept Jesus as their Messiah (Romans 9:2-3), this was not to be his calling by Jesus. He was to be the apostle to the Gentiles. This was Paul's calling from before he was born (Galatians 1:15-16). This was a calling not from the other apostles (Galatians 1:17-24).

So Paul was taken by Barnabas and they left Jerusalem (Acts 9:27-30) and for many years Paul waited in Arabia and Damascus to fulfill the calling of the Lord (Galatians 1:17-21).

### **His Basis of Apostolic Authority**

Paul had seen the glory of God, recognized Him as Lord. The Lord identified himself as Jesus. Paul may not have been an eyewitness to the ministry of Jesus, but this serves as Paul's witness of Jesus resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:8). This put him on-par with the apostles who had walked with Jesus and had been eyewitnesses to his life and his resurrection (1 Corinthians 9:1).

Paul had been called by Jesus himself to be His apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15, 22:21, 26:16-18). His calling as such did not come from the other apostles, but from Christ himself (Galatians 1:11-12). The other apostles, having heard of Paul's calling, accepted and affirmed him as the apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:2, 9).

Nonetheless, there would be many who doubted Paul's role as an apostle, both in Jewish Christians who struggled with his teaching that Gentiles did not have to follow the Jewish Law to be Christian and amongst the Gentile Christians who did not like his teaching. Paul's defense of his own apostleship becomes one of the major sub-themes raised throughout his epistles.

## **Mission and Ministry**

### **The Missionary Journeys**

#### *Antioch: The Sending Church*

In Acts 11:19, persecution spreads the Christians out from Judea and Samaria, to the city of Antioch. At first the Christians only share with the Jews in Antioch, but soon some men from Christians from Cyprus arrive in Antioch and begin proclaiming the gospel to the Greeks (11:20). This concerns the apostles, so Barnabas is sent to investigate (11:22). Barnabas investigates and finds that that many are coming to believe in Antioch. He then travels to Tarsus to find Paul, and the two of them stay in Antioch and teach them for a year.

Antioch was a very large city, second only to Rome itself in population. Because of its size and political influence, the church in Antioch becomes an important center for Christianity, second only to Jerusalem itself. This is the first church to preach to the Gentiles. This is the first church where disciples are called Christians.

This is the first church to send out missionaries. In Acts 13:1 this church in Antioch sends Barnabas and Paul on a mission to Asia Minor to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. After years of waiting, Paul begins to fulfill the calling he received from Christ.

#### *Paul's Itineraries*

Paul's first missionary journey took him and Barnabas through central Asia Minor, probably as far up as southern Galatia (Acts 13-14). It is at the end of this journey that Paul and Barnabas find themselves back in Jerusalem defending their ministry to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem Council.

As Paul and Barnabas head out on their second missionary journey, they part company due to a disagreement over whether or not to take John Mark with them on the journey (Acts 15:36ff). Barnabas and Mark sail to Cyprus, while Paul takes Silas as his partner and they head back to Asia Minor. However God tells Paul that they are not to continue in Asia Minor, but are to cross the Aegean Sea in Europe (Acts 16). Paul's second missionary journey takes him into Macedonia and Greece, where he establishes churches in Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9) and Corinth (Acts 18). Paul stays in Corinth for 18 months supporting and teaching in the church there. At the end of that 18 month period he returns briefly to Antioch.

Paul's third missionary journey is dominated by a two year stay in the city of Ephesus. Rather than a "journey" like the first and second trips, this really is a description of Paul's move to Ephesus and his leaving Ephesus as he journeys back to Jerusalem (Acts 19). While in Ephesus, Paul's ministry is so impact that "all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

After two years in Ephesus, Paul is determined to go to Rome. But for Paul, the road to Rome goes east out of Ephesus towards the city of Jerusalem. Paul would go to Jerusalem because he knew that he would be arrested, after which he would appeal to Caesar, as was his right as a Roman citizen, thus providing him with a trip to Rome with all expenses paid by the Roman empire. This brings us back to Acts 22, where he is arrested and after several years of sitting in a jail in Caesarea, he is finally brought to Rome to await his trial before Caesar. That is where the book of Acts ends.

The rest of Paul's life is the subject of much conjecture. Tradition has that he was acquitted in his trial, and afterwards he traveled to Spain to establish churches there. Eventually he returned to Rome where he was finally arrested and martyred late in life.

### *Paul's Process*

Wherever Paul went preaching, he followed a consistent pattern. First, Paul earned his living not by requiring donations from the churches. He was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), and supported himself in this ministry. This freed him from the accusation that his preaching was just for the money (2 Corinthians 11:7-10) and keep him from being a burden to the churches he established (1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

Throughout Paul's journey, whenever he came to a city, he followed a similar pattern in his preaching. He always began teaching Jews in the synagogue, leading many Jews to Christ. Those Jews, however, who did not believe eventually throw him out of the synagogue. So Paul then begins preaching to Gentiles in the city. As such, the churches he establishes throughout Asia Minor and Europe are built on the foundation of Judaism, but have strong Gentile presence. These mixed Jewish and Gentile churches represent in a microcosm the greater melding of Jew and Gentile into something new and unique, the church.

### **His Hardships**

Throughout Paul's journeys he faced tremendous persecution, both from Jews who disliked his teaching and from Gentile authorities. He had been whipped with 39 lashes on five different occasions, thrice beaten with rods, three times shipwrecked, and even stoned and left for dead. He was imprisoned in Philippi, Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome. In fact, he probably spent nearly as much time in prison as he did during his missionary journeys.

In addition, Paul speaks of having a "thorn in the flesh" in 2 Corinthians 12:7. There is much conjecture as to what this ailment is, including a persistent temptation, a physical ailment, or bad eyesight. But whatever the weakness, and whatever hardship Paul endured, he always looked to Christ for his strength (2 Corinthians 12:9) and he counted it a privilege to share in the suffering of Christ (Colossians 1:24).

## The Pauline Epistles

### **The Character of Paul**

The Apostle Paul's missionary journeys were very important to the spread of Christianity amongst the Gentiles. But his greater legacy would not be the churches he established throughout the Roman Empire, but thirteen letters he sent to encourage, teach and even chastise these churches.

In fact, Paul's real strength lies not in his charisma or in his speaking abilities, but in his writing. Paul was, in fact, probably a rather unimpressive individual.

The apocryphal book, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* describes Paul as:

*...a man small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well-built,  
with eyebrows meeting, (and) rather long-nosed...<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Excerpted from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 8*. Accessed on line at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0816.htm> on January 8, 2006.

In addition, from the scripture, it appears that he had bad eyesight, was prone to having a temper, and was a poor public speaker (2 Corinthians 11:6).

*For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible."  
(2 Corinthians 10:10 NASB95)*

His letters express sometimes his extravagant joy (Philippians 1:3-4) and other times his deep depression (2 Corinthians 1:8-9). Yet he always shows an intensity and zeal for the cause of Christ. His writing was bold and theologically deep.

While Paul's letters may be "weighty and strong," they have a simple, warm conversational style. The texts seem to indicate that Paul dictated his letters to a scribe, resulting not in well edited and rhetorically concise treatises, but in a more free flowing discussion. It is as if we are sitting having a conversation with a friend rather than sitting in a lecture hall listening to a professor.

### **Accreditation of Paul's Letters**

In fact, Paul's writing was perceived sometimes as being too deep. As we study the Pauline epistles, we will find that, while his theology is profound, his writing style sometimes is a bit confusing. We are not alone in this observation, as the apostle Peter found Paul difficult to read as well:

*"...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. " (2 Peter 3:15-1,)*

Peter acknowledges that Paul's letters can be difficult to understand, and that they are often distorted. But Peter also equates Paul's letters to scripture. Peter tells his readers that they should adhere to the principles found in Paul's letters, and strive to understand what Paul is saying so as to avoid doctrinal error.

### **Nature of Paul's Letters**

Often time Paul is perceived by modern biblical scholars as having developed a different theology than the other apostles or even Christ himself. For this reason he is often considered the "second founder" of Christianity. Such a charge would have been considered a great insult to Paul. Throughout his epistles he affirms that the gospel he teaches is the same gospel taught by Christ and the apostles. In Galatians 1 he shows that his message has been confirmed by the apostles. Finally, Peter himself confirms the inspiration of Paul's letters.

Such a view of Paul's letters comes from two misunderstandings:

#### *1. Missing the Theme*

The development of the major themes in Paul's letters is missed in the minutia. Paul is perceived by many readers as a harsh legalist enforcing a difficult morality upon the church. To see Paul in this way is to miss the fact that the theme of most of Paul's letters is "justification by faith" and is written to oppose legalists who would impose strict moral codes as a means to salvation.

This misunderstanding comes from those who disagree with Paul's condemnation of homosexuality or struggle with Paul's requirement that a wife should submit to her husband. In both of these examples, the reader has missed both the immediate context and the overall theme of his letter.

## 2. *The Occasional Nature of the Epistles*

The Pauline epistles are letters written to specific people in specific situations. The epistles are addressing their specific concerns and issues. Paul is not writing a theological textbook or expounding a systematic teaching of doctrine. When reading Paul's letters we are looking in on private correspondence. It is like listening to only one side of a telephone conversation and not knowing who is on the other side.

Paul's decision to include or exclude certain items from his letters relate to specific controversies facing his readers. Often he glosses over important subjects because he has already taught them about these topics and they understand it well. Other times he dwells on relatively minor points because these are areas of debate within that church.

Therefore one can not assume that the epistles contain the whole of Paul's doctrine. In fact, Paul's speeches recorded in the book of Acts may give us a better understanding of Paul's gospel than the epistles. If that is the case, we find that Paul's speeches directly parallel the teachings of Peter, Stephen and others in the New Testament church.

As R. Alan Cole states:

*None of Paul's letters (not even Romans) are theological treatises, though they are profoundly theological in content. They were called into being by the needs of particular situations; the balance and presentation of doctrine is therefore what was appropriate in the circumstances<sup>4</sup>.*

Paul is not reinventing Christianity. His teaching is very much consistent with that of Christ and the apostles. However, his letters do allow us to see how the gospel of Christ should be applied to certain specific situations.

### **Interpretation of Paul's Letters**

Therefore having an understanding of to whom and where each epistle was written is critical to understanding Paul. Background studies become a critical tool in the study of the Pauline epistles.

After completing our background study, we then must remember some basic rules when interpreting the Pauline epistles<sup>5</sup>:

- The text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his readers.
- Wherever we share common particulars with the readers, it is the same to them as it is to us.
- We need to distinguish between the central core of the message of the epistle and what is dependent on or peripheral to it.
- One must distinguish between what Paul presents as inherently moral and what he presents as a cultural expression.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Alan Cole. "The Life and Ministry of Paul." *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1998). Electronic edition STEP file.

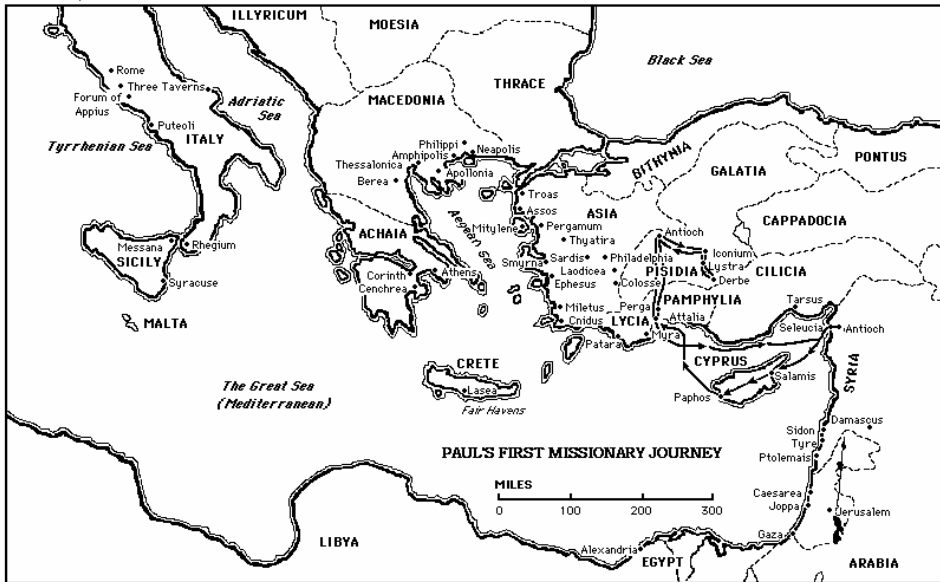
<sup>5</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2003).

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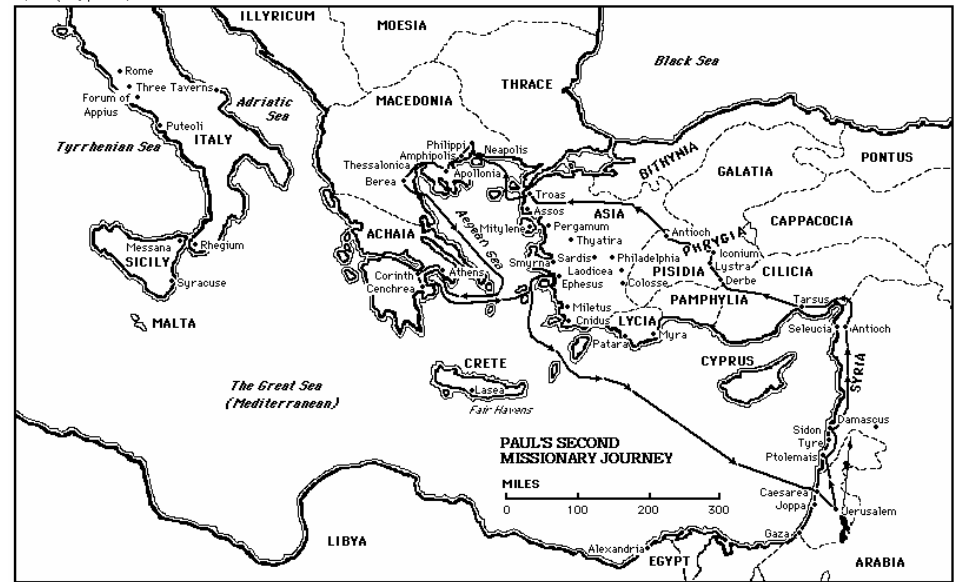
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# Paul's Missionary Journeys

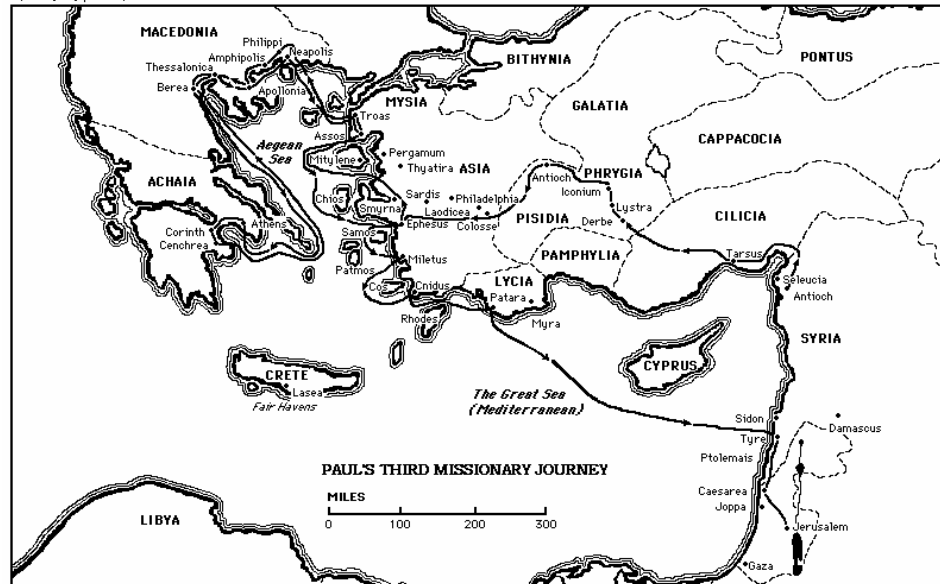
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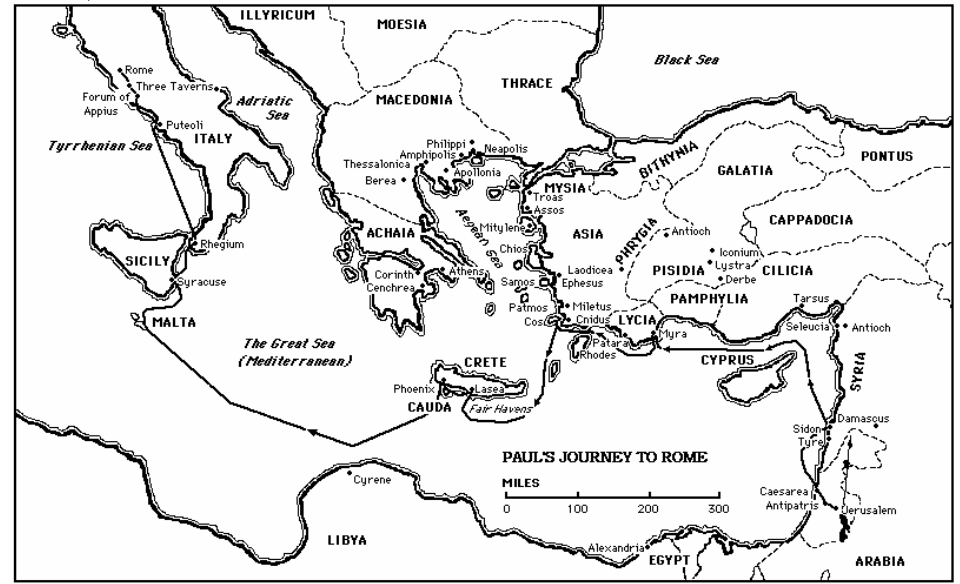
(BKC [NT] p. 397)



(BKC [NT] p. 406)



(BKC [NT] p. 425)



Source: Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. 1983-c1985. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition Of The Scriptures*. Victor Books: Wheaton, IL