



The Life and Writings of St. Paul

Lesson 2

Lesson 2 Commentary

The First Journey and the Council of Jerusalem

Lesson 3 Questions

The Second Journey and the Beginning of the Third Journey

Introduction

Last session, we brought you up to the point where Paul changed from being a zealous persecutor of the followers of Jesus to be a zealous follower of Christ himself! This sets up the beginning of Paul's life as a founder of churches and a writer. Before we go further, I want to spend a little time talking about the Pauline Corpus and its inclusion in the Canon of Scripture.

Pauline Corpus

There are 13 books that have historically been attributed to Paul. Early on, the book of Hebrews was included as a 14th book in the Pauline Corpus. However, most scholars today do not believe that Hebrews was written by Paul. In all the epistles below, the author claims to be Paul. However, the contested letters may have been written by disciples using Paul's name, which was a common and accepted practice in Paul's day.

Seven letters considered genuine by most scholars:

- First Thessalonians
- Galatians
- First Corinthians
- Philippians
- Philemon
- Second Corinthians
- Romans

The letters on which scholars are about evenly divided:

- Colossians

- Second Thessalonians

The letters thought to be pseudepigraphic (written in Paul’s name) by more than 50% of scholars:

- Ephesians
- First Timothy
- Second Timothy
- Titus

Paul’s own writings are often thought to indicate several of his letters that have not been preserved:

- A first epistle to Corinth, referenced at 1 Corinthians 5:9
- A third epistle to Corinth, also called the Severe Letter, referenced at 2 Corinthians 2:4 and 2 Corinthians 7:8–9
- An earlier epistle to the Ephesians referenced at Ephesians 3:3–4
- The Epistle to the Laodiceans, referenced at Colossians 4:16

It appears that some of Paul’s letters were considered authoritative by the time that 2 Peter was written.¹ By the late first century, about ten letters were circulating together. 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus were not included, which leads some to believe that they were pseudepigraphic. Some also believe that Ephesians was a cover letter written by the followers of Paul that was sent with the ten letters circulating together. At the Council in Hippo² in 393 AD all 13 letters were considered canonical. In 405 AD, Pope St. Innocent I closed the canon, indicating no further books could ever be added. I will argue that all were written or dictated by Paul, and I will show that they can reasonably fit into the timeline provided by Acts. Also, I use the forms of the verbs dictate, write and pen, interchangeably. I am not concerned with which letters were written by Paul’s hand and which were dictated.

The Beginnings of Paul’s Ministry to the Gentiles

After Paul went back to Tarsus, there is about a decade gap before we hear from Paul again. In Acts, Barnabas goes to Tarsus to look for Paul to take him to Antioch.³ There were several cities named “Antioch” in Paul’s day. Remember the zealous Mattathias in the last session? He rebelled based on the actions of one Antiochus VI Epiphanes. Antioch was a name given to cities in honor of Antiochus VI Epiphanes, just like Alexandria was a city named in honor of Alexander the Great or Caesarea was a name given to several cities in honor of “Caesar.” In this

¹ 2 Pet 3:15-16. All Biblical citations are from the NABRE.

² The Council approved the current Old and New Testaments of 73 books.

³ Acts 11:26.

case, it was a city named Antioch about 250 mile north of Jerusalem, located in Syria, in Paul’s day (modern day Turkey). “It was a major crossroads and trading center.”⁴ It is not the same Antioch that Paul visits in Chapter 13 of Acts, which is “Antioch in Pisidia.”⁵ Pisidia is also in current day Turkey but was northeast of Tarsus. After completing their mission in Antioch, they returned to Jerusalem. This “return” to Jerusalem was probably the same trip to Jerusalem concerning which Paul writes to the Church in Galatia:

Then after fourteen years I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. I went up in accord with a revelation, and I presented to them the gospel that I preach to the Gentiles—but privately to those of repute—so that I might not be running, or have run, in vain. Moreover, not even Titus, who was with me, although he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised, but because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, that they might enslave us—to them we did not submit even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain intact for you.⁶

From the very beginning, Paul must battle those who believe that to follow Jesus one must become Jews first, entering the “religion” by circumcision. Those who converted fully, even submitting to circumcision, were called proselytes. But Paul and Barnabas stood their ground. Titus was the test case. Paul and Barnabas stood their ground: no circumcision was necessary for the Gentiles.

Paul’s First Journey



⁴ N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 88.

⁵ Acts 13:14.

⁶ Gal 2:1-5.

“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”⁷ This is the call which sets in motion the first journey of Paul. This will be the only journey that Barnabas accompanies Paul. In addition to Barnabas, Paul is also accompanied by John “as their assistant.”⁸ This is believed to be the same person mentioned in Acts 12:12 and 12:25 as the John, also called Mark, who is believed to be the author of the Gospel of Mark.

They head to the coast where they set sail for Cypress stopping in two locations. In each location, they first go to the synagogue. In the second location, Paphos, they meet “the proconsul Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence.”⁹ Interestingly, it is directly after meeting Sergius Paulus that Saul “changes” his name to Paul. While it is not known whether Paul used both names before this point, it was common for persons in multi-ethnic locations like Tarsus to have both Jewish and Roman or Greek names. As mentioned in the first session, “Saul” was a royal name with historical significance. “Some have speculated that he deliberately set aside this name, with its high-born overtones, in order to use a Greek word connected to the adjective *paulos*, “small, little” – a sign, perhaps, of a deliberate humility, “the least of the apostles.”¹⁰ One other point that N. T. Wright makes is that “*saulos* was an adjective meaning “mincing” in Greek, as of a man walking in an exaggeratedly effeminate fashion.”¹¹ Irrespective of reason for the name change, from this point forward Saul of Tarsus is known as Paul.

Leaving Cyprus, the team heads to the mainland of Asia Minor, landing in Perga. For some reason John Mark leaves the group and heads back to Jerusalem. We will see that this bothers Paul for a long period and, ultimately, causes a break between Barnabas, not surprising since Barnabas is the cousin (or possibly uncle) of John Mark.¹² After Perga, they move to Antioch in Pisidia. Pisidian Antioch was thought of as “New Rome” as it was the home to many military veterans from the Roman civil wars after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BC and to many high-ranking Roman officials.¹³ They arrive on the Sabbath, and like any practicing Jew, they head directly to the synagogue. After being invited by the synagogue officials to speak, Paul begins by giving the congregation a history of Israel which all in attendance would know. Then comes the decisive turning point: in Acts 13:23, he states that Jesus is the descendant of David and the promised savior. He then draws from one of the most significant messianic prophetic Psalms of his day: “I will proclaim the decree of the LORD, he said to me, “You are my son; today I have begotten you.””¹⁴ The next Sabbath, Gentiles arrived in droves, upsetting the Jews. Quoting Isaiah’s second suffering servant song, Paul says, “For so the Lord has

⁷ Acts 13:2.

⁸ Acts 13:5.

⁹ Acts 13:7.

¹⁰ Wright, *Paul*, 116.

¹¹ Wright, *Paul*, 116.

¹² Col 4:10.

¹³ Wright, *Paul*, 118.

¹⁴ Ps 2:7; Acts 13:33.

commanded us, ‘I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth.’”¹⁵ “The Jewish reaction [that is, the Jews becoming upset at Paul’s words] itself confirmed his scripture-fueled sense that, when Israel’s God did for Israel what he had promised, then the nations as a whole would come into the promised blessing.”¹⁶ The non-Jews were elated at the words of Paul and, accordingly, the Jews expelled Paul and Barnabas from the city.

After jumping quickly from city to city, Paul cures a lame man in Lystra, and the crowds think that Barnabas is Zeus and Paul is Hermes, Zeus’s messenger. Some contend that this shows that Barnabas was the leader of the group, otherwise Paul would have been thought to be Zeus. Barnabas and Paul quickly try to correct the crowd’s belief. However, some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium had followed them and stirred up the crowd against Paul and Barnabas. Paul is stoned and left for dead. There is no mention of what happened to Barnabas, but the next day, the two are reunited and they leave for Derbe. After retracing their steps, they sail back to Syrian Antioch.

Paul in Antioch

In Galatians, Paul makes a bold accusation against Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. “And when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he clearly was wrong.”¹⁷ He goes on to explain that “some people from James” came to [Syrian] Antioch. When that happened, Peter, who had been eating with Gentiles and clearly considered all foods clean,¹⁸ for some reason withdraws from eating with Gentiles. While Peter was probably trying to avoid conflict, Paul considered this hypocritical. There is no evidence that James, one of the pillars, sent the delegation. It may be that they claimed to be “from James” or they were followers of James that used his name to establish credibility. Given what happens in Chapter 15, it is doubtful that James sent them. Regardless, Paul calls Peter out. Not only did Peter withdraw from table fellowship with the Gentiles, but “even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”¹⁹ Something had to be done!

There is a great deal of debate over the order in which the Epistles are written. I believe that the epistle to the churches in Galatia was written at this time, before the Council of Jerusalem. The majority opinion is that Galatians was written after 1 Thessalonians. Without going into detail, the argument hinges on whether Galatians was written to the churches in Northern Galatia or Southern Galatia. The contents of the letter better fit the Southern Galatia visit during Paul’s first journey that he just completed. It appears from the letter to the Galatians that, just as the

¹⁵ Is 49:6; Acts 13:47.

¹⁶ Wright, *Paul*, 118.

¹⁷ Gal 2:11.

¹⁸ See Acts 10:10-15.

¹⁹ Gal 2:13.

men from James had come to Antioch, a group came to the Galatians with a similar message: namely, follow the Laws of Moses or you are not a true follower of Jesus. Evidently, these men also made a personal attack on Paul, also. The letter represents “Paul’s attempt to define the essence of the New Covenant in Christ over against the Old Covenant that gave birth to it. This is why circumcision is the towering issue of the letter, with the Judaizers promoting it, Paul attacking it, and the Galatians caught in the crossfire.”²⁰

The Council of Jerusalem

This is the first ecumenical council of the Church, meaning the whole church is represented. There have only been a few of these in the history of the Church. “Clearly things could not go on as they were, with different groups sending frantic and contradictory messages this way and that.”²¹ The early Church had to act to avoid a complete collapse of unity. Interestingly, Paul never refers to the Council in his writings, leading some to question the historicity of its occurrence. Given that we believe the Bible is without error, there must be another explanation. The best and simplest explanation is that Paul’s writings were not meant to be comprehensively historical. Rather, they were meant to address specific questions and situations that prompted each epistle.

Again “Brothers from Judea”²² came to Antioch saying that one must be circumcised to be a true follower of Christ. Paul and Barnabas argued vehemently against this and all agreed that a meeting in Jerusalem was necessary. I would imagine that the trip down was a bit awkward. Keep in mind that even Barnabas pulled away from the Gentiles with Peter. After a great deal of debate, Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, rises and agrees with Paul and Barnabas. Peter says, “Why, then, are you now putting God to the test by placing on the shoulders of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?”²³ James agrees with Peter, but says that the Gentile converts should follow “certain aspects of the law that would facilitate fellowship with Jewish believers.”²⁴ A letter was drafted for all the churches. “The contents of that letter, however, do not appear to have remained determinative for the church’s ongoing mission; neither the letter nor its stipulations concerning Gentile behavior are mentioned in any other NT document.”²⁵

²⁰ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 329–330.

²¹ Wright, *Paul*, 163.

²² Acts 15:1.

²³ Acts 15:10.

²⁴ Mark Allan Powell, “Jerusalem Council,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 456.

²⁵ Powell, “Jerusalem Council,” ed. Mark Allan Powell, *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, 456.

Above, I spoke about Paul and Barnabas taking Titus to Jerusalem. In many translations of the Bible, the Galatian 2 story is labeled, “The Council of Jerusalem.”²⁶ There is a great deal of discussion about whether the Galatian 2 and the Acts 15 meetings are the same. I believe that it is an earlier meeting as there would be some ‘discrepancies’ between the two if they were the same meeting.

At the end of Acts 15, we see a heated disagreement between Barnabas and Paul over including John Mark on the next mission. As stated above, if you only read Acts, it might seem surprising that Barnabas would take such a stand. However, when you supplement Acts with the contents of Paul’s epistles (in this case Colossians 4:10), it makes all the sense in the world.

²⁶ See the NABRE, for example

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

The Second Journey and the Beginning of the Third Journey

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read Acts 16:1-24, Galatians 2:1-3, 1 Corinthians 9:20-23

Why do you think Paul had Timothy circumcised, but not Titus?

What happens to the “voice” between Acts 16:1-9 and verse 10? Why do you think this is? (Hint: Read Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24, and 2 Timothy 4:11).

Day 3 – Read Acts 16:25-17:9

Paul used his Roman citizenship to get the magistrate to apologize to them. What do you think of that from a Christian perspective of “turn the other cheek?”

Day 4 – Read Acts 17:10-34 and the handouts on First and Second Thessalonians (attached after questions). Scan First and Second Thessalonians

When you read of Paul’s appearance before the Areopagus, how would you characterize the event (e.g., trial for a crime, presentation to interested listeners, etc.)?

Write down one or two things that jumped out to you about First Thessalonians.

Write down one or two things that jumped out to you about Second Thesalonians.

Day 5 – Read Acts 18:1-28, Numbers 6:1-21

When Paul cuts his hair, what is he doing?

Day 6 – Read Acts 19:1-22

When Paul first went to Ephesus, he encountered disciples that had been baptized by the baptism of John, which did not convey the Holy Spirit, only repentance. Do you ever feel that you have not received the Holy Spirit? How might you overcome that?

THE FIRST LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

Purpose and Themes First Thessalonians is a predominantly pastoral letter with a pastoral focus. Paul wrote out of a deep concern for these recent converts who were unexpectedly left alone to withstand the rising tide of persecution and the constant pressures of paganism. Absent in person and eager to return (3:10), Paul sent the epistle in his place to strengthen them through these difficult times (3:3–5), to encourage them to be chaste and charitable (4:1–12), and to console the bereaved among them with the hope of resurrection (4:13–14). Expressions of joy, gratitude, and encouragement punctuate the letter as Paul affirms them for their astonishing growth (1:8) in faith, hope, and love (1:3; 3:6; 5:8). There are no rebukes for the Thessalonians, only appeals to stay on the same course (4:1; 5:11).

The substance of the letter, though more personal than theological, is not lacking in doctrinal content. This is evident in Paul’s emphasis on eschatology (teaching concerning the end times). At least once in every chapter he mentions the return of Jesus Christ in glory. According to Paul, Christ will come again from heaven to deliver us “from the wrath to come” (1:10) and give us the final “salvation” for which we yearn (5:9). His prayer is that Christ will perfect the “love” of his readers (3:12) and establish them forever in “holiness” at his arrival (3:13; cf. 5:23). The apostle is confident he will be proud of the Thessalonians on that day and expects to wear them like a “crown” before the Lord (2:19). The subject of eschatology has pressing importance for certain readers who are anxious about the fate of their deceased relatives and friends (4:13). Paul assures them that, as God raised Jesus from the dead and carried him into heaven, so too he will raise the righteous at the blast of the final trumpet and escort them into glory (4:14–18). Because the last day will “come like a thief” (5:2), Paul challenges readers to stay awake both morally and spiritually in anticipation of the Second Coming (5:1–11). Otherwise they will be caught unprepared when Jesus returns as Judge to avenge the wicked for their evil deeds (4:6). In Paul’s mind, this itinerary for the end of days is revealed to give comfort and hope to the saints struggling on earth (4:18).²⁷

²⁷ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 371.

THE SECOND LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

Purpose and Themes Paul sent 2 Thessalonians as a follow-up letter to 1 Thessalonians, which was partly ignored and partly misunderstood by his readers. There was need now to correct the way certain believers were thinking and living in light of Christ’s expected return. The letter addresses this twofold problem with doctrinal exposition and moral exhortation. **(1) Doctrinal Exposition:** As in his first letter, Paul gives readers an eschatological vision of things to come. This is necessary because some of the Thessalonians are shaken by an alarming idea, based on a misunderstanding of his first letter (1 Thess 4:13–5:12) and reinforced by another letter forged in Paul’s name (2 Thess 2:2), that the end times have arrived and the Second Coming of Jesus is just around the corner. Paul considers this a deception (2:3) because Christ will not return in glory until a whole series of events have taken place first. Specifically, Paul insists that a nefarious “man of lawlessness”, an agent of Satan, must first be allowed to spread confusion throughout the world and impress the wicked with signs and wonders of his power (2:3, 9–10). This villain has yet to arrive because a mysterious force restrains him from showing his face until the appointed time (2:7–8). Only after this period of turmoil and tribulation will Christ come again as the divine Warrior and Judge to slay the offender and condemn the ungodly (2:8). **(2) Moral Exhortation:** Confusion about the timing of Christ’s coming has led certain believers into strange and disorderly conduct. We can infer from Paul’s comments in 3:6–15 that some in Thessalonica were so convinced that Jesus would return at any moment that they had quit their jobs and stopped working for a living. Paul has nothing good to say about this behavior and seems annoyed that his readers have not heeded his earlier appeals to “work” diligently (1 Thess 4:11) and “admonish the idle” (1 Thess 5:14). The congregation is charged with addressing this problem decisively but charitably (2 Thess 3:14–15). In Paul’s mind, these freeloaders who live on the charity of others will better prepare themselves for Christ’s return by working than by sitting around waiting.²⁸

²⁸ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 379.