

CHAPTER 1

Pauline Chronology

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Methodological Questions

A decisive factor in any reconstruction of Pauline chronology is the evaluation of the available sources. With regard to the letters in the name of the apostle, methodological caution dictates that we begin with those letters that scholarship generally considers to be genuine: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. Even here, evaluation of the letters may be influenced by the assumption that the letters to the Corinthians and Philippians, in particular, were assembled from various writings, implying that the correspondence was conducted over a protracted period of time. In the following analysis, the unity of all the letters is assumed since we lack text-critical evidence, literary parallels, and any indication in post-New Testament literature that would support breaking up the letters (cf. Carson and Moo 2005, 429–444, 509–510).

On the historical value of the Acts of the Apostles for the chronology of Paul, three positions have been taken.

(1) For historical purposes, the Acts of the Apostles is all but worthless, and a chronological reconstruction should be based exclusively on the genuine letters of Paul (Buck and Taylor 1969; Hyldahl 1986; Knox 1987). This position is problematic, however, since no statement in Paul's letters allows a clear connection to a concrete date from contemporary history, rendering the establishment of an absolute chronology effectively impossible. For this reason, reference is often made to Acts in spite of the desired methodological rigor. The isolated chronological indicators in Paul's letters leave much room for interpretation. Hence, reconstructions differ greatly from one another, and no consensus seems possible along these lines (Riesner 1998, 10–28).

(2) Others, while assigning the letters basic priority, nonetheless include individual traditions deemed reliable from Acts. These traditions, however, must be tested critically before they can be added to information derived from Paul. If greater confidence is placed in Acts because, for example, the “we”-narratives (Acts 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16) are thought to be based on the travel diary of one of Paul’s companions, then the course of events for longer narrative sequences may be judged trustworthy (Jewett 1979; Donfried 1992). If, on the other hand, all that is thought credible are a few fragments of tradition, then their arrangement becomes much more a matter of subjective judgment (Suhl 1975; Lüdemann 1984).

(3) Finally, many see in the Acts of the Apostles the work of Luke, an occasional companion of Paul (Hemer 1990; Hengel and Schwemer 1997, 6–11), and as such at least in part a primary source (Riesner 1998; Porter 2000a, 205). This does not mean, however, that the reports of Acts can be used uncritically. It is remarkable how chronological indicators appear with differing frequency and degrees of specificity in the various parts of Acts. Such indications are most striking in the “we”-narratives and segments closely related to them. On the whole, the first main section (Acts 1–15) offers only very general chronological pointers. This allows an inference to be drawn about Luke’s approach: where he possessed neither personal knowledge nor traditions with specific chronological details, he clearly refused to invent them in order to lend greater authenticity to his presentation. Conversely, this increases our confidence in information that he might plausibly have acquired from first-hand experience or later inquiry. Details from the Pauline letters also require critical assessment whether, for example, they present events in a compressed fashion for rhetorical reasons. Wherever possible, the information of both sources should be further tested by correlating it with profane historical or patristic sources.

The reconstruction of a Pauline chronology should involve three steps. (1) An attempt must be made to ascertain individual chronological details by combining information from a plurality of sources. The goal of this step is to obtain as many absolute dates as possible. (2) The letters of Paul offer a few relative dates and also allow a few chains of events to be recognized. (3) Finally, the attempt is made to establish an overall picture that is as coherent as possible, combining the individual chronological details, the chains of events derived from Paul’s letters, and temporal and sequential information discernible in Acts.

Individual Chronological Dates

The crucifixion of Jesus

The crucifixion of Jesus is a chronological fixed point (*terminus post quem*) after which the call of the Pharisee Saul to become the Christian apostle Paul necessarily occurred. Pontius Pilate was prefect of the “special” Roman territory of Judea from 26 to 36 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.89–95, 122–126; see Riesner 1998, 35–36), and was for this reason Jesus’s judge in Jerusalem (Mark 15:1–15). John the Baptist appeared as a public figure “in the fifteenth year of the reign [*hēgemonia*] of Emperor Tiberius”

(Luke 3:1).¹ The Greek expression refers to the co-regency that began in 12/13; hence, the information from Luke's special source points to the year 26/27. This fits well with the fact that, in parts of the Jewish world, the year 27/28 was considered to be an apocalyptic jubilee (Wacholder 1975). The Baptist, according to the evangelists, was awaiting the imminent coming of the Son of Man/Messiah (Matt 3:7–12; Luke 3:7–9, 15–18). For the public appearance of Jesus in 27/28, we have the evidence of John 2:20, since the construction of the temple by Herod the Great (*Jewish Antiquities* 15.380), which was begun in 20/19 BC, now lay forty-six years in the past. If we then follow the narrative of John, allowing a two- to three-year period for Jesus's public activities (John 2:13; 6:4; 12:1), the Passover of his death can be placed between 29 and 31.

According to all the evangelists, the crucifixion took place on the Day of Preparation (*paraskeuē*) before a Sabbath (Matt 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54–56; John 19:31, 42), and thus on a Friday. According to John, the Sabbath was also the start of the Passover (John 18:28; 19:14), a dating supported by Paul, who describes the crucified Jesus as a “sacrificed” Passover lamb (1 Cor 5:7). He calls the resurrected Jesus the “first fruits” (*aparchē*; 1 Cor 15:20), and speaks of the resurrection “on the third day” (1 Cor 15:4). The first fruits of the barley harvest were dedicated to God on Nisan 16 (Lev 23:10–11), and so the day on which Jesus died was Nisan 14 (Riesner 1998, 48–49; White 2007, 123–131). According to the most reliable astronomical calculation, between the years 26 and 36 it is certain that Nisan 14 fell on a Friday on April 7, 30 (Finegan 1998, 359–365); the other proposed date, April 3, 33 (Humphreys and Waddington 1989; Hoehner 1992), is very uncertain (Riesner 1998, 54–58). The date of April 7 (Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 1.21.146) and the year 30 (Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 8)² are also to be found in the oldest traditions of the church (Strobel 1977). Thus, there is a relatively widespread consensus that Jesus was crucified on April 7, 30 (Dunn 2003, 312).

Paul's call

For the year that Paul was called by the risen Jesus near Damascus, early Christian tradition offers two competing dates. The first places the stoning of Stephen in the “seventh year” after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (Strobel 1977, 116). Thus, if we count from 30, we arrive at 36/37. At this point there was a vacancy in the governorship following the recall of Pilate (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 18.89, 237; see Riesner 1998, 36–37), during which an unauthorized Jewish proceeding against Stephen (Acts 6:8–15; 7:54–8:1) is conceivable (Dockx 1984, 223–230). Against this tradition is the fact that it is relatively late and that it can be explained as derived from speculation about providential seven-year epochs. The second tradition can be found in relatively early (i.e., from the second century) and very diverse sources, such as the Jewish-Christian *Ascension of Isaiah* (9:16), the gnostic *Apocryphon of James* (Nag Hammadi Codex I.2.19–24), and the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (see Gebhardt 1902, 130), which are all of the view that Paul's call occurred around one and a half years after the resurrection, or “in the second year after the ascension.” That would give us the year 31/32 (Riesner 1998, 59–74; Dunn 2009, 257).

The flight from Damascus

At the time of Paul's flight from Damascus, "the ethnarch [*ethnarchēs*; NRSV "governor"] under King Aretas guarded the city" (2 Cor 11:32). The Nabatean king Aretas IV is the only person mentioned both in the undisputed letters of Paul and in other contemporary historical sources. Scholars who try to construct a chronology on the basis of the letters alone see here a fixed point on which to build (Campbell 2002). But neither a handing over of the rule of Damascus to Aretas IV by the Emperor Caligula in the years 37–39 (Welborn 1999), nor a violent occupation of the city by the Nabateans (Bunine 2006; cf. Bowersock 1983, 68–69), can be established on the basis of the literary sources (Hengel and Schwemer 1997, 129–131; Riesner 1998, 79–84) or the numismatic evidence (Knauf 1998). The "ethnarch under King Aretas" was likely the overseer of the Nabatean quarter in Damascus (Knauf 1983; Sack 1989, 14). The same expression is used for the overseer of the Jewish quarter in Alexandria (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.117; Strabo, *Geography* 17.798), whereas for a military governor the term *stratēgos* would be expected. The only certain chronological point (*terminus ante quem*) is the death of Aretas IV in 40, before which the flight of Paul must have occurred.

Persecution under Agrippa I and the famine under Claudius

According to Acts 12:1–2, (Herod) Agrippa I had James, the son of Zebedee, "killed with the sword." Agrippa ruled over Judea from 41 to 44 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 19.343). The demonstrative use of the *ius gladii* and the popular proceeding against a deviant religious minority such as the Jewish Christians are more likely to belong to the early part of his reign in 41/42. The persecution may have been ignited by the "Hellenists" who were driven out of Jerusalem into Syrian Antioch and had begun a mission to Gentiles (Acts 11:19–21), arousing the suspicion of the Roman authorities, who called the new group "Christians" (Acts 11:26). Evidently, there were Jewish riots against them in Antioch in 39–40 (*Chronicle of John Malalas* 244–245). Luke mentions a collection journey of Paul and Barnabas from Antioch to Jerusalem around the time of the death of Agrippa in early 44 (Acts 11:29–30; 12:25). The Jewish Christians there were suffering from "a severe famine" that struck "all the world" during the reign of Claudius (Acts 11:28). The entire reign of Claudius (41–54) was characterized by famines (Suetonius, *Claudius* 18.2), which were particularly severe in Palestine in 44/46 (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.51–53, 101; Eusebius, *Chronicle* [Helm edition, 181]).

The Cypriot proconsul Sergius Paullus

According to Acts 13:6–12, Paul met the proconsul Sergius Paul[us] on his first missionary voyage with Barnabas to Cyprus. Three inscriptions have been cited in order to establish the proconsul's dates. An inscription from Soloi in North Cyprus (*Inscriptiones*

Graecae ad Res Romanas III 930) should be excluded, since it belongs to the second century (Mitford 1980, 1302–1303). An inscription from Kytheria in Cyprus mentions a Quintus Sergius (*Inscriptiones Graecae ad Res Romanas* III 935) for whom dates during the reign of Claudius were long proposed, but he is now thought to have held office during the time of Gaius Caligula (Mitford 1980, 1300; cf. Christol and Drew-Bear 2002, 187) or Tiberius (Campbell 2005). These last two datings present a major problem for the framework of Acts, which puts the proconsulship of Sergius Paullus after the death of Agrippa I, and thus after 44 and within the reign of Claudius. But it is by no means evident from the fragmentary inscription that the cognomen of Quintus Sergius is to be restored as Paullus. Scholars who, in an attempt to topple the historical framework of Acts, read the cognomen Paullus into this fragmentary source are guilty of arguing in a circle. The inscription most likely to be connected to this proconsul comes from the city of Rome (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI 31545). It mentions an L. Sergius Paullus, who was presumably curator of the Tiber in 41/42 (Weiss 2009b). The occupancy of this office would fit well with a later career as proconsul of a senatorial province such as Cyprus.

Claudius's edict of expulsion from Rome

As Paul reached Corinth from Athens on his second missionary journey, he met “a Jew[ish Christian] named Aquila ... who had recently [*prospatōs*] come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome” (Acts 18:2). Much later than Luke, around 130, Suetonius also mentions an expulsion of Jews from Rome under the same emperor “because, incited by Christ [*impulsore Chresto*], they were constantly causing riots” (*Claudius* 25.4). Dio Cassius mentions a ban on meetings of Roman Jews (*Roman History* 60.6.6) in connection with the beginning of Claudius's reign. Scholars who see all three sources referring to the same event draw on Dio in dating it to 41/42. This assumption, too, results in an insurmountable difficulty for the framework of Acts (Murphy-O'Connor 1996, 9–15). The reconstruction of events is made more complicated by the fact that neither Josephus nor Tacitus mentions an expulsion edict of Claudius, and the work of Dio on the later period of this emperor's rule is only inadequately preserved by Byzantine excerpts. The solution least burdened with additional hypotheses and already preferred by ancient historians (Levick 1990, 121; Botermann 1996) claims that Dio referred to an early action of the emperor that was later sharpened by the banishment that Luke and Suetonius (and perhaps also a Scholion on Juvenal 4.117) jointly attest.

Suetonius's rather unclear mode of expression suggests that claims of Jesus's Messiahship made by Jewish Christians in Rome led to disturbances in synagogues, as Luke reports happened in other cities (Acts 14:1–6, 19–20; 17:1–9) and as Paul, too, presupposes (2 Cor 11:24–25). Beginning in 48, serious zealot disturbances began in Judea (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.232–246; *Jewish Antiquities* 20.118–136), and in the same year there is evidence for a Jewish persecution of the Christian community in Antioch in Syria (*Chronicle of John Malalas* 247). Paul Orosius, a Christian writer on world history in the fourth/fifth centuries, dates the Roman edict of expulsion to “the

ninth year of Claudius" (*Against the Pagans* 7.6.15–16), that is, to the year 49. Orosius relied on Josephus, who does not, however, supply any such information. It is possible, however, that just such a chronological indicator was present in the historical work of the Jewish Christian Hegesippus, who visited Rome around 180 (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.11; 4.22; Riesner 1998, 180–186). In any event, it is not possible for Orosius to have derived this year from Acts.

The Achaian proconsul Gallio

According to Acts 18:12–17, during Paul's first stay in Corinth, the capital of the senatorial province of Achaia, he was brought before the proconsul Gallio by a segment of the Jewish synagogue community. A turning point for the discussion of Pauline chronology came with the publication in 1905 of an inscription from Delphi, to which additional fragments were later assigned (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* [third edition] 801; Hemer 1980, 6–8). The inscription is a rescript of Claudius on the basis of which Gallio's term as the proconsul of Achaia can be dated: its beginning can thus be assigned the date of July 1, 51 (Riesner 1998, 203–207). It seems, however, that Gallio did not serve the full year of office, but rather left Corinth earlier for reasons of health (Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 104.1), possibly even before the end of shipping on the Mediterranean in October 51.

Paul in Ephesus

According to Acts 19:23–40, during Paul's extended stay in Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia Minor, disturbances took place, ignited by the local silversmiths. Perhaps also in the background was the discontent of the Ephesians over an edict of the governor Paullus Fabius Persicus in the year 44 (Weiss 2009a) censuring the administration of funds at the temple of Artemis (I. Ephesos 17–19). While Luke normally refers to proconsuls by name, in Acts 19:38 he uses the undefined plural *anthypatoi*. This could be an indication of the confusion that prevailed in Ephesus after the death of Claudius (October 13, 54). After his death, Agrippina, his wife and the mother of the later emperor Nero, had immediately given orders for the murder of Silanus, proconsul of Asia Minor (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.1; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 61.6.4–5), which occurred at the latest in December 54 or January 55. While the office was vacant, administration fell into the hands of three deputies; a number of scholars see this as the reason for Luke's use of the generalizing plural (Bruce 1990, 421).

Of relevance for Pauline chronology, and especially for the order of some of the letters (Philippians, Philemon, and possibly Colossians) is the question whether or not Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus, as the Marcionite prologue to the letter to the Colossians maintains (Kümmel 1972, 14). In support of such an imprisonment is Paul's recollection of a life-threatening situation "in Asia" (2 Cor 1:8–10), which could well mean the provincial capital of Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:16). In the letter to the Romans, Paul implies an imprisonment together with Aquila and Priscilla (Rom 16:4, 7), which

is perhaps best seen as occurring in Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor 16:19). For these reasons, a good number of scholars favor an imprisonment in Ephesus (Trebilco 2004, 83–87). Luke, whose report on Ephesus is both detailed and suggestive, may have passed over this imprisonment out of consideration for the Asiarchs who were “friendly” to Paul (Acts 19:30–31; Riesner 1998, 214–216). According to Acts 20:17–18, Paul avoided a later visit to Ephesus, presumably because he risked arrest there. Second Corinthians 11:23–25 show that Luke by no means reported all of the dangers faced by the apostle.

The last journey to Jerusalem

Acts 20:6–21:15 describe, partly in the form of a “we”-narrative, a seven-week trip by Paul from Philippi to Jerusalem in order to celebrate Pentecost there. Apparently, the apostle left Philippi immediately after the end of the Christian Passover celebration (“after the days of Unleavened Bread” [Acts 20:6]). The reference to the “first day of the week” in Troas (Acts 20:7) must mean a Sunday (cf. Luke 24:1). Since Luke reckons a day from sunrise to sunrise (Acts 4:3–5; 10:3–23, etc.), the Christian assembly he describes took place on Sunday, not Saturday, evening, and the subsequent departure on Monday morning (Marshall 1980, 325–326). Since Paul remained for seven days (reckoned inclusively) in Troas (Acts 20:6), he must have arrived there on Tuesday of the previous week. If we subtract the five days of travel from Philippi (Acts 20:6), we arrive at a Friday as the departure date, so that the Passover began and ended on a Thursday. Between 52 and 60, it is very probable that Nisan 14 fell on a Thursday only on April 7, 57 (Goldstine 1973, 88–89).

When Paul was arrested in the temple courtyard, the Roman tribune thought it possible that he might be a certain “Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness” (Acts 21:38). According to Josephus, this uprising took place after the death of Claudius in October 54 (*Jewish War* 2.261–263; *Jewish Antiquities* 20.167–172). Because the leader, an Egyptian Jew, had escaped (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.171–172), a repeat of the rebellion was feared. Since the disturbance followed a series of actions taken by Nero (20.158–164), the event can be dated no earlier than 55. It is possible that the rebellion took place during the Passover festival of 56, due to apocalyptic expectations raised by the Sabbath year 55/56 (Wacholder 1975, 216).

The change in governorship from Felix to Festus

Paul was a prisoner under both the Roman procurators Felix and Festus in Jerusalem and Caesarea. According to Acts 24:10, Felix had already occupied this office “for many years,” and in reality he probably entered office first in 49, not 52 (Schwartz 1992, 223–236). After his dismissal, Felix was protected from more severe punishment by his brother Pallas (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.182). It has been assumed that this would only have been possible prior to 55, when Pallas lost his office as the head of the imperial finance administration (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.14). But the charges against Pallas

were dropped a year later (*Annals* 13.23), and until Nero ordered him to be poisoned in 62 (*Annals* 14.65), he retained great influence due to his legendary wealth (Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 62.14.3; Green 1992). The last coins that can with certainty be dated to the procuratorship of Felix are from the first year of Nero (54/55); coins from the year 56/57 are still lacking. In the fifth year of the emperor (58/59), a surprisingly large number of new coins were issued in Judea, which may well be due to the arrival of a new governor (Smallwood 1976, 269 n. 40; Kindler 1981). An earlier date has also been considered on the basis of Eusebius (Barrett 1998, 1117–1118), but his contradictory reports (*Chronicle* [Helm edition, 181–182]; *Ecclesiastical History* 2.22) can be attributed to a misinterpreted source (probably Justus of Tiberias), which gave the date of 59 (Riesner 1998, 222–223).

Intervals and Series of Events in Paul's Letters

Three series of events can be established from the letters of Paul.

(1) From the autobiographical reflections at the beginning of the letter to the Galatians, it follows that, after his calling near Damascus (implied by Gal 1:17), Paul went to "Arabia" and again to Damascus (1:17); "after three years" he went to Jerusalem (1:18); later he was in Syria and Cilicia (1:21), and "after fourteen years" again in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1). It is debated whether the conflict with Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14) occurred after the second visit to Jerusalem or was placed at the end for rhetorical reasons (Lüdemann 1984, 57–59). This controversial point can only be decided as part of a complete chronological reconstruction. The letter does not tell us when the communities in Galatia were founded, or how much time had elapsed between the second visit to Jerusalem, or the incident in Antioch, and the composition of the text.

(2) A second series of events is based on 1 Thessalonians. Before the founding of the community in Thessalonica, the capital of the province of Macedonia, the apostle visited Philippi (1 Thess 2:2; cf. Phil 4:15–16); after his departure from Thessalonica, he visited Athens (1 Thess 3:1). It is probable, though not entirely certain, that the trip included Corinth as a further stop (cf. 2 Cor 11:7–9).

(3) A third series is linked to a collection, organized by Paul in communities that he had founded, to support the early church in Jerusalem. This sequence allows us to reconstruct the following order for the letters: 1 Corinthians – 2 Corinthians – Romans. Without attempting to refine the order further by adopting one of the many divergent hypotheses about the division of the letters, we have the following sequence of events: 1 Corinthians was written in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:9); 2 Corinthians looks back on a time of severe distress "in Asia" (2 Cor 1:8–10) and on a visit to Troas (2 Cor 2:12), and was evidently written in Macedonia (2 Cor 2:13). Mention is made of a forthcoming trip to Judea (2 Cor 1:16; cf. 1 Cor 16:3–4), to be preceded by a visit to Corinth (2 Cor 9:4), as well as of Paul's intention to pursue missionary work in new regions (2 Cor 10:16; cf. Rom 15:20). An intermediate visit to Corinth, widely presumed to have taken place on the basis of 2 Corinthians, is as uncertain as the presumed identification of the collection mentioned in Galatians 2:10 with the one discussed in 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans (see below). With the sequence of events deduced from the letters to the

Corinthians, various statements in the letter to the Romans can be linked, since the latter presupposes that the collection has been completed (Rom 15:25–26) and was apparently written in Corinth (see below). A trip to Spain via Jerusalem and Rome was planned (15:23–29).

It is clear that this third sequence based on 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans comes toward the end of Paul's career. How much time elapsed between the stay in Ephesus and the one certain earlier visit to Corinth cannot be determined from the letters alone. It is also not possible to determine in this way whether the stays in Macedonia and Achaia, which are attested by the second sequence, should – when brought into relation with the first sequence – be placed before or after the meeting of the apostles described in Galatians 2:1–10. Even John Knox admitted that an answer to this question can only be conjectural if one excludes evidence from Acts (1987, 40–52). But such an exclusion should be resorted to only if a synthesis of the evidence from Paul's letters and from Acts proves impossible. In the following attempt, possible speeds of travel and the missionary strategy of Paul are both taken into account (Riesner 1998, 235–317).

Chronological Synthesis of the Letters of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles

From Macedonia via Achaia to Jerusalem and Rome (Acts 20–28)

For this period, a particularly large number of indicators are available from Acts that can be connected to external data. The change of the governorship of Judea from Felix to Festus (Acts 24:27), and with it the sending of Paul to trial before the emperor in Rome, can be dated to 59. This agrees with the fact that in this year, the critical date for the Mediterranean voyage – that is, the Jewish Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9) – fell very late. The credibility of this piece of information enhances our confidence in the very detailed chronological indications found within the “we”-narrative covering the trip from Philippi to Jerusalem (Acts 20:6–21:17), indications that point to the year 57 for that trip (see above). If Paul came to Jerusalem for Pentecost of this year, it is understandable that he could be confused with the Jewish troublemaker from Egypt (Acts 21:38), who presumably caused an uprising at the Passover festival of 56. With this dating of the events, there are precisely two years between the apostle's arrival in Jerusalem and his transport to Rome in 59, matching the two years that Luke indicates for the imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). We ought therefore to take seriously the reference to “two whole years” for Paul's subsequent Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30), so that the narrative of Acts extends approximately to early 62.

It agrees with Luke's account that, according to Paul, too, the trip to Jerusalem was preceded by a stay in Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 20:1–3; 2 Cor 2:13). “Erastus, the city treasurer [*oikonomos tēs poleōs*],” who sends greetings in Romans 16:23, may be identified with the Corinthian Erastus (Acts 19:22), who is probably known as well from epigraphic evidence³ (see Theissen 1982, 75–83; Gill 1989). Luke also knew that Paul wanted to travel to Rome via Jerusalem (Acts 19:21). He mentions the collection at

least briefly (24:17) and seems to presuppose it in other places (cf. 20:4; 24:26). According to Luke, the apostle made his travel plans known for the first time in Ephesus (19:21), which corresponds well to the fact that the first undisputed mention of the Jerusalem collection appears in 1 Corinthians 16:1–4 and 2 Corinthians 8–9. Dating Romans to the early part of 57 also makes understandable why Paul pays special attention to the problem of paying taxes (Rom 13:1–7). An oppressive tax at that time led to a wave of complaints in 58 and to related reforms by Nero (Tacitus, *Annals* 13.50–51; Jewett 2007, 798–799).

From the meeting of the apostles in Jerusalem to Ephesus (Acts 15–18)

If there is such a thing as an “anchor” for Pauline chronology, it is the Gallio inscription. At the latest, it allows the hearing with the proconsul to have taken place between July 51 and June 52, though Gallio had probably already left Corinth in the fall of 51. The expulsion edict of Claudius that affected Roman Jews (Acts 18:2) can be dated to 49. It forced Paul to abandon his long-cherished plan (Rom 1:13; 15:22–23), which had presumably been established already during the second missionary journey (Bornkamm 1971, 51), to travel from Thessalonica along the Via Egnatia to the Adriatic in order to reach Rome (Riesner 1998, 295–296). News of the edict must have reached Paul by early 50 at the latest. The one and a half years of his stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11) point, even by a very generous calculation, to a departure at the latest at the end of 51. This calculation corresponds nicely to a probable reconstruction of the Gallio incident (Riesner 1998, 208–211). The complaint against Paul was brought forward immediately after the arrival of the governor, as the leadership of the synagogue did not yet know about his anti-Jewish sentiments (Acts 18:12–17). For the relatively short period from 49 to 51, the reports of three independent sources – the Gallio inscription, Acts, and Orosius – converge remarkably closely. If Paul left Corinth at the end of 51 to travel to Syria and Judea via Ephesus (Acts 18:18–22), it must have happened before the end of the shipping season in October. Since the Taurus mountains would then be impassable, a continuation of the journey from Jerusalem and Antioch through the Phrygian part of Galatia to Ephesus (Acts 18:22–23; 19:1) would not have been possible until the early part of 52.

Paul’s chronologically well-defined first stay in Corinth makes it possible to establish dating for his (so-called) second missionary journey. Founding of the communities in Philippi and Thessalonica took place in the year 49/50. First Thessalonians was written very soon after the sudden departure of the apostle from that community, and for this reason the great majority of scholars date the letter to the beginning of his stay in Corinth in the year 50 (Carson and Moo 2005, 542–543).⁴ The anti-Jewish polemic of 1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 may have been provoked by the immediate impression of the persecution in Syria in 48 (Bockmuehl 2001) and the negative effects of Claudius’s edict of 49 on Paul’s missionary plans (Riesner 1998, 352–354). The journey that took Paul from Jerusalem, with a stop in Antioch, over the Taurus mountains to visit the communities in the southern part of the province of Galatia, and then through the western part of Asia Minor to the Aegean (Acts 15:30–16:8), cannot have taken place

entirely in the year 49. The apostolic council of Acts 15 is therefore to be dated, in agreement with many scholars, to the year 48. The order in which the communities in Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, and Corinth were founded is also confirmed by Paul (1 Thess 2:2; Phil 4:15–16; 1 Thess 3:1; 2 Cor 11:7–9).

From Ephesus to Achaia (Acts 18–20)

Here there is, at most, one date that can be somewhat narrowly defined, but the sequence of events in Acts can be placed chronologically with the help of the previous and subsequent series. From the arrival of Paul in Ephesus in the first half of 52, the slightly less than three years of his stay (Acts 20:31) lead to a departure at the end of 54 or early 55. Yet uncertainty in the provincial capital of Asia Minor made precisely the turn of 54 to 55 a dangerous period for the apostle. According to Acts 19:23–40, he was obliged to break off his stay due to local disturbances; 2 Corinthians 1:8–10, too, presuppose a relatively recent life-threatening situation in this province. For this reason, 2 Corinthians should be dated to 55/56. With the death of Claudius in 54, the edict expelling Jews from Rome became invalid. As a result, already with 2 Corinthians 10:16 (as the point of contact with Rom 15:20–24 indicates), plans for a trip to Spain, and with it a stay in Rome, began to take shape. Paul's travels after leaving Ephesus more likely required two winters rather than one (Riesner 1998, 300–301). Some have placed missionary activity in the eastern part of the province of Macedonia and as far as Illyricum in this period (Bruce 1990, 423; Schnabel 2004, 1250–1257, cf. Rom 15:19). Acts and Paul agree that, after the stay in Ephesus, Troas was a site of Paul's activities, although, to be sure, they also mention different visits to Macedonia before and after the completion of 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 2:12; Acts 20:5–6).

First Corinthians belongs to the Ephesian period (1 Cor 16:8–9). Since, at the time it was written, there were already a number of “churches of Asia [Minor]” (16:19), this too is an indication of a longer stay. The letter should probably be placed toward the end of this stay, in 54 (before the Passover? [1 Cor 5:8]). Opposition was already evident (1 Cor 15:32; 16:5–9), but the apostle delayed a trip to Corinth because he hoped his mission would bear further results (1 Cor 16:8–9). A possible point of congruence between the letter and Acts can be seen in the sending of Timothy to Macedonia (Acts 19:22) or Corinth (1 Cor 16:10–11). It is possible that 1 Corinthians 7:26 alludes to the consequences of a famine between 52 and 54 (Winter 1989). The frequently proposed hypothesis of an intermediate visit from Ephesus to Corinth is not strictly necessary. With early church tradition (see Ambrosiaster 2009, 213, 234–235), one can identify 1 Corinthians with the “tearful letter” (2 Cor 2:3–4; 7:8–9) and think that Paul twice cancelled a planned trip (cf. 2 Cor 13:1; Hyldahl 1986, 88–106). Since, at the time Paul wrote Philippians, he expected his imminent release and planned a visit to Philippi (Phil 1:18–27; 2:24), many scholars have dated the letter to an Ephesian imprisonment (Thielman 2003), which must then be placed in 54/55. But there are also those who argue strongly that Philippians was written in Rome (Bockmuehl 1998, 25–32). The slaveowner Philemon evidently belonged to the community in Colossae (compare Col 4:9, 17 with Phlm 2, 10–12), and Paul met his escaped slave Onesimus

during an imprisonment (Phlm 10), which can hardly have been in Caesarea or Rome. For this reason, and because Philemon 22 mentions a visit in Asia Minor, many scholars also put the composition of the letter to Philemon in Ephesus (Fitzmyer 2000). For Colossians, the list of greetings of which (Col 4:7–17) is similar to that in Philemon (23–24), Ephesus is explicitly claimed in one tradition as the place of composition (see above).⁵

From Paul's call near Damascus to the council of the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9–15)

In the autobiographical reflections of Galatians 1–2, Paul indicates that, after his call near Damascus (1:15–17), he visited Jerusalem “after three years” and again “after fourteen years” (1:18; 2:1). A number of uncertainties surround these statements. If the years mentioned are partial rather than full, the intervals amount to less than two and thirteen years respectively. Moreover, the “fourteen years” may be counted either from his original call or from his first visit to Jerusalem. The majority of scholars identify the visit to Jerusalem of Galatians 2:1–10 with the apostolic council depicted in Acts 15. On the other hand, Acts 11:28–30 and 12:25 mention an earlier collection trip to Jerusalem taken with Barnabas. At the moment, a growing number of exegetes identify this latter journey with the one mentioned in Galatians 2:1–10 (Porter 2000a, 207; de Roo 2007, 175–216; Schmidt 2007, 84–98). The result is a sequence of events that not only corresponds with Acts, but is also historically plausible (Bauckham 1995; Schäfer 2004): at the time that Paul wrote Galatians, when he wanted to cite his second visit to Jerusalem to support his claim that Gentile Christians ought not to be circumcised, he could only point to Titus as a precedent (Gal 2:3); a fundamental decision had not yet been made. After the growth of mixed communities in Syria and the emergence of largely Gentile Christian communities in southern Galatia, the threat from zealot branches of Judaism (see above) increased, as did tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Gal 2:12–13; 6:12; Acts 15:1–2). This explains the concerns of the early church in Jerusalem and the vacillating of Peter and even Barnabas (Gal 2:13–14).

A mission of Paul in the region of Galatia can be demonstrated neither from Acts 16:6; 18:23 nor from Galatians (Riesner 1998, 286–291); hence the letter is addressed to the communities founded during the first missionary journey in the Phrygian and Lycaonian parts of the province of Galatia (Acts 13–14; Witulski 2000). Evidently, Galatians was written soon after their founding (Gal 1:6) and in immediate reaction to the incident in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14). The letter is best dated shortly before the council of the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15; cf. Witherington 1998, 8–20; Carson and Moo 2005, 461–468). If Galatians appeared before 1 Corinthians rather than after, it is also clear why, in the latter letter, Paul mentions Peter, the Lord's brothers, and Barnabas without any apparent strain (1 Cor 9:1–6). Galatians 2:10 can be understood as looking back to the collection he had delivered with Barnabas (Longenecker 1990, 60–61). If twelve to thirteen years (Gal 2:1) are added to the date of Paul's call in 31/32, then this collection took place in 44/45 and thus at the time of the death of Agrippa I (Acts 12:20–23). The first visit to Jerusalem two to three years after his call (Gal 1:18; also mentioned in Acts 9:26–29) would have taken place in 33/34. Paul and Luke agree

that this was followed by a stay in Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1:21) or Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:30).

It is entirely possible that Paul aimed for a mission among Jews in the eastern diaspora following his call near Damascus (Bauckham 2000). A number of scholars, however, believe he started at once in the Nabatean kingdom (cf. Gal 4:25), perhaps even evangelizing Gentiles and Jews in its capital, Petra (cf. Gal 1:17; Hengel and Schwemer 1997, 106–113). For this reason, he was also persecuted by the Nabatean king Aretas (2 Cor 11:32–33). Luke, for his part, knows nothing of this; Acts 9:23–25 are not, however, by any means irreconcilable with the remarks of Paul (Harding 1993). According to Acts 22:17–21, Paul first received his call to undertake a Gentile mission through a vision in the temple during the visit to Jerusalem that followed his call. If Paul speaks of a “secret” (*mystērion*) of God’s salvific plan that included Gentiles (Rom 11:25–26), then exegesis of Isaiah 6 lies in the background (Kim 2002). Acts 22:17–21, too, echo the vision of the prophet Isaiah in the temple (Riesner 2004, 150–152). Furthermore, Paul saw Jerusalem as the starting-point of his eschatologically based mission to Gentiles (Rom 15:19). Romans 15:16–28 draw on Isaiah 66:18–21; at the end of the book of Isaiah, Paul evidently found the path of his mission sketched out (Riesner 1998, 245–253). In the terms of ancient Jewish geography, the stations of that mission were Jerusalem, Tarsus, Cilicia, Lydia in Asia Minor, Mysia, Bithynia, Macedonia/Greece, and the western end of the world. That corresponds remarkably to the route of the Pauline mission according to Acts, and thus enhances the latter’s credibility. Perhaps, too, the dispersal of the sons of Japhet according to the table of nations in Genesis 10 had an influence on the apostle’s missionary strategy (Scott 1995).

Occasionally, scholars have connected the ecstatic experience that, according to Paul, took place “fourteen years” before the writing of 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 12:2–9) with the vision in the temple (Hyldahl 1986, 118–120). But this is problematic chronologically, since the “fourteen years” would bring us to 42/43 as the date of the temple vision, which is too late. Moreover, according to 2 Corinthians 12:4, what Paul experienced at that time could not be communicated with human words, whereas Acts 22:17–21 speak of the reception of a prophetic message. Chronologically, 42/43 was the time of Paul’s transition to the Antiochene mission (Acts 11:25–26), and since he mentions the ecstatic experience as part of his apostolic defense (beginning in 2 Cor 11:5), there may well be a connection (Martin 1986, 399). Buck and Taylor (1969, 222–226) identify the ecstatic experience with the call, which they place in 32. This compels them to date 2 Corinthians 10–13 to 47, and thus even before the Gallio incident.

Paul before his call

A scribal education (Acts 22:3) and activity as a persecutor in Jerusalem (Acts 8:3) are presupposed by Paul himself (Gal 1:13–14, 22–23; cf. Hengel 1991; Haacker 2003, 20–24). Only the dating of his birth in Tarsus (Acts 22:3) is quite uncertain. According to Joachim Jeremias (1971, 14), Paul as an ordained rabbi would have been between

25 and 30 years old at the time of his call, but the value of the rabbinic evidence on which Jeremias draws is uncertain. The apostle's Roman citizenship (Acts 16:37–38, etc.)⁶ may carry us a little further, since his father was probably a freed slave. According to Jerome, Paul's parents came from Giscalis in Upper Gallilee to Tarsus as slaves following a rebellion (*On Illustrious Men* 5). Especially after the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC (Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.11–13) and the assumption of direct Roman rule of Judea in AD 6 (*Jewish War* 2.117–118), zealot uprisings broke out. Thus, the date of Paul's birth may have been around the turn of the era (Dunn 2009, 510). This corresponds well to the fact that Acts 7:58 refers to him as *neanias* (one under 40) at the stoning of Stephen, and he refers to himself as an older man (*presbytēs*) in Philemon 9.

Paul from the end of Acts to his martyrdom in Rome

The value of Acts is further illustrated by the way reconstructions of events following its conclusion (Acts 28) sharply diverge. (1) Against the assumption that the apostle was executed immediately thereafter is the unanimous tradition of a martyrdom in Rome during the persecutions under Nero that began in July 64. Because of the illegal execution of the Lord's brother James in 62, the high priest Annas II was removed (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.197–203). For this reason, the Sanhedrin may have abandoned its charges in Rome, so that the legal action against Paul ended without a verdict after two years (cf. Acts 28:30; Tajra 1994). (2) With this in mind, a number of scholars who believe that the letter to the Philippians was written from Rome assume that Paul made another journey to the east on the basis of this text and the Pastoral epistles (cf. Phil 2:24; 1 Tim 1:3; Tit 1:5, etc.). But if so, then Paul had abandoned his plan for Spain, which for him held eschatological significance (Riesner 2010). Eusebius possessed no tradition for a last journey to the east, but attempts his own reconstruction of events after Acts (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.22). The indications in 1 Timothy and Titus, whether or not these letters are genuine, can find a place within the framework of Acts 15–28 (Riesner 2006). (3) *First Clement* 5:5–7 attest to a tradition from the first century according to which Paul reached Spain, possibly as an exile (Gunther 1972, 139–150; Löhr 2001).

Proposed Chronological Synthesis

On the basis of the discussion above, the chronological reconstruction in table 1.1 is suggested for Paul:

Alternative chronological syntheses

For the sake of comparison, table 1.2 offers six other chronologies. In table 1.2, "Jerus. I–V" stand for the five journeys to Jerusalem mentioned in Acts, while "1 and 2 Miss." represent Paul's first and second missionary journeys.

Table 1.1 Proposed chronological synthesis for Paul

<i>Contemporary history</i>	<i>Paul and early Christianity</i>
26–36 Pilate prefect of Judea	30 Crucifixion of Jesus 31/32 Stephen’s martyrdom; call 33/34 Jerusalem 34–42 Syria and Cilicia
37 Death of Tiberius; 39/40 disturbances in Antioch	Around 37 term “Christians” used in Antioch
40 Death of Aretas IV of Nabatea	
41 Death of Caligula; Agrippa I king of Judea	41/42 Martyrdom of James, son of Zebedee 42/44 Antioch
44 Death of Agrippa I	44/45 Antioch collection, with Barnabas, for Jerusalem
44–49 Dearth and famine in Judea	Between 45 and 47 with Barnabas in Cyprus and southern Galatia
48 Jewish disturbances in Antioch	48 Conflict with Peter in Antioch (Galatians) Apostolic council in Jerusalem
49 Edict of Claudius on the Jews in Rome	49/50 Macedonia: Philippi, Thessalonica 50 Corinth (1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians [?])
51 Gallio proconsul of Achaia	51 Trial before Gallio; journey to Jerusalem
54 Death of Claudius	52–55 Ephesus (54: 1 Corinthians)
54/55 Murder of the proconsul Silanus of Asia Minor	54/55 Imprisonment in Ephesus (Philippians, Philemon, Colossians [?]) 55 Troas
55/56 Sabbath year in Palestine	55/56 Macedonia (2 Corinthians)
56 Uprising of “the Egyptian”	56/57 Corinth (57: Romans) 57 Arrest in Jerusalem
Until 59, Felix procurator in Judea	57–59 Imprisonment in Caesarea
59 Festus procurator in Judea	59 Sent to Rome 60–62 Imprisonment in Rome 62/63 Spain (exile?)
64 Fire in Rome, persecution under Nero	64 Martyrdom in Rome

Table 1.2 Alternative chronological syntheses for Paul

	<i>Knox</i>	<i>Lüdemann</i>	<i>Hjldahl</i>	<i>Jewett</i>	<i>Porter</i>	<i>Dunn</i>	<i>Riesner</i>
Crucifixion	30	27 (30)	–	33	30 (33)	30	30
Damascus	34	30 (33)	39/40	34	33/34	32	31/32
Jerus. I	37	33 (36)	41/42	37	37	34/35	33/34
Jerus. II	–	–	–	–	47	–	44/45
1 Miss.	From 40	34 (37)	–	43–45	47/48	Before 47/48	ca. 45–47
Jerus. III	51	47 (50)	52/53	49	49	47/48	48
2 Miss.	–	36 (39)	–	46–49	49–52	–	48–50
Corinth	53/54	51/52 (2nd time)	49–51	50–51	51/52	49/50–51/52	50–51
Jerus. IV	–	–	–	–	–	–	51/52
Ephesus	From 46	48–50 (51–53)	53/54	53–55	53–56	52/53–55	52–55
Macedonia	–	50 (53)	54/55	56	56	–	55/56
Jerus. V	54 (55)	52 (55)	55	57	57	57	57
Festus	–	–	–	59	59	59	59
Rome	–	–	–	60–62	60–62	60–62	60–62

It is striking how widely the three reconstructions that attempt to detach themselves entirely from the framework of Acts differ from each other. This is to be attributed to the risky emphasis each places on an uncertain date (Knox and Hyldahl: Aretas; Lüdemann: a Claudius edict in 41), which is used as foundational for the entire chronology. That this method cannot lead to a chronological consensus is apparent. By way of contrast, the three most recently proposed reconstructions are in striking agreement with each other, since each takes the framework of Acts as largely reliable. Robert Jewett has adopted an intermediate position. Because he gives a late date of 51 for the apostolic council and assumes too lengthy periods of travel for the second missionary journey (1979, 95–100), he runs into chronological difficulties and is obliged to set this trip before the council. From the Gallio incident on, however, he follows the framework of Acts and agrees with the three chronologies that take their orientation from it.

Chronology and theology

Chronological reconstructions can have implications for the understanding of Pauline theology. Gerd Lüdemann (1984) dates 1 Thessalonians to 41 and derives from it a Pauline theology that differs substantially from the later letters in its soteriology and eschatology. The reconstruction proposed here also has possible consequences. (1) Chronologically, it is not impossible that Paul encountered Jesus during Jesus's final activities in Jerusalem. (2) The proximity in time between 1 Corinthians and Philippians renders the assumption unnecessary that Paul abandoned a cosmic in favor of an individualistic eschatology. (3) If Galatians is dated prior to the apostolic council, it follows that Paul possessed a distinctive understanding of justification already at that time. (4) The sequence Galatians – 1 Corinthians suggests that there was no decisive break with Peter and the Lord's brother James. (5) After the Jewish persecutions (1 Thessalonians) and the conflict in Galatia (Galatians) in the 40s, Paul could later acknowledge Israel's abiding salvation-historic significance (Rom 9–11) and argue for the rights of Jewish Christians to live according to Torah (Rom 14–15).

Notes

- 1 Biblical quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.
- 2 What Tertullian referred to as "the year of the Gemini" was AD 29. But because the calculation probably originated in Egypt, where the year began in August, here too the year 30 should be used as a starting-point.
- 3 *Corinth: Results of Excavations Conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, Volume 8, Part 3: *The Inscriptions 1926–1950* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1966), inscription 232.
- 4 If 2 Thessalonians is genuine, then it was most likely written shortly after 1 Thessalonians in order to clear up misunderstandings created by eschatological statements in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11 (Bruce 1982, xxxix–xliv; Röcker 2009).

- 5 For the composition of Colossians during an Ephesian imprisonment, see Wright (1986, 21–39).
- 6 That Paul was brought to Rome for trial speaks against an invention of Paul's Roman citizenship by Luke (Rapske 1994).

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