

The Chronology of the Apostle Paul: In his footsteps

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CHAPTER ONE

“Chronology is a surly, churlish cur and hath bit many a man’s fingers”¹. Despite this warning, assembling a chronology of the life and works of Paul is to recognize the crucial nature of an accurate chronology. If one concurs with the statement “chronology is the backbone of history”², and then developing an underlying chronology to any historical data is essential. Thus it is with the life of the Apostle Paul.

For the New Testament, the life of Paul begins with Acts 8 and 9 when “Saul of Tarsus” is introduced to the readership. It is clear that he was born a Jew³, educated and trained at the feet of the renowned Rabbi Gamilel (Acts 22:3), and a Pharisee of remarkable ability (Philip 3:4-6). Other than very cursory details and reading between the lines of his letters, little else is known regarding the pre-Christian era of Paul’s life⁴.

His Pharisaic training led him to the understanding that this new cult group, known simply as the “Way” (Acts 9:2), was dangerous and needed to be extinguished as quickly as possible. This understanding led him to persecute the early Christian church to the fullest extent of his understanding of the law punishing many for their heresy and imprisoning many more (Acts 9:2, 13-14; 10:28). Thus, his transformation from Judaism to this “sect” would provide a stark contrast from his previous life.

However, to know the background of Paul only serves as a pre-cursor to the transformation to come. While en route to Damascus on a commissioned persecutory trip (Acts 9:2), a “light from Heaven flashed around him” (Acts 9:3). From his point forward, his life course was radically altered. Upon his arrival in Damascus, he was found by Ananias, was baptized and immediately began to proclaim the truth of what he had once sought to destroy (Acts 9:20ff.). To the amazement of all present, this paradox would serve as the first of many in the life of Luke’s “thirteenth witness”⁵.

In order to build a chronology of any sort, an anchor point date or event must be established. With this in mind, there are several events that can be verified through external evidences to provide a touchstone. These markers, such as the Famine of Agabus, the Edict of Claudius, the Gallio Inscription and the dates for the reign of Felix, can provide a chronological backdrop in which to frame the life of Paul. However, even with these, the evidence is still somewhat fuzzy, leading to attempts to construct Paul’s

¹ George Ogg, *The Chronology of Paul*, (London: Epworth Press, 1968), forward quote from Thomas Fuller.

² Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

³ A Jew of the highest quality according to his biographical remarks in Philippians 3:4-6.

⁴ For a full treatment of his early years, see Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1991).

⁵ Martin Hengel, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch*, (Louisville, KY.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

life based on these events. Some have sought to use the Book of Acts as a foundation and build Paul's chronology upon Luke's account⁶. Others have abandoned the Book of Acts, depending entirely on external evidence and theological development in his letters⁷. A third position, some have sought to build a synopsis based on both the Book of Acts and other evidences⁸. While none of these may be a completely satisfactory method, a proposed synopsis will be offered in an effort to harmonize the record of the external evidences with the chronology offered by Luke.

⁶ J.J. Gunther, *Paul: Messenger and Exile* (

⁷ Gustv Volkmar, *Paulus von Damaskus bis zum Galterbrief*, (: , 1887), 22-79.

⁸ C.H. Buck and G.R. Taylor, *Saint Paul: A Study in the Development of His Thoughts* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 46. Gerd Luedemann, *Paul: An Apostle to the Gentiles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

CHAPTER TWO

External Framework

In order to build a solid foundation for a chronology, an anchor point must be established. For the purposes of this examination, a combination of chronology will be forged with the Book of Acts to provide a composite whole.

The Famine of Agabus – Acts 11:27-30

One such touchstone of hard evidence could be found in the dating of the widespread famine foretold by Agabus in Acts 11:27-30. The historian Luke speaks of Agabus' prophecy that a widespread and devastating famine "would spread over the entire Roman world"(Acts 11:28). This took place "during the reign of Claudius"(Acts 11:28). If such a famine is recorded and dated in other historical sources, a beginning point of chronology for the life of Paul is established.

Famine was no stranger in first century life. It was, unfortunately, a well-known malady, as is attested in a number of histories, such as Seneca⁹ and Tacitus¹⁰. While there are a number of local famines attested to, there is no such kingdom wide famine known to non-Biblical writers. However, in the work of K. S. Gapp¹¹, the issue of famine, its causes and its effects, are dealt with in detail.

Gapp asserts that there were a number of local famines known to the regions around Judea. For example, In Egypt, the rise and fall of the Nile River caused famine. While the annual flood of the Nile was necessary for growth of crops, if the river rose too high or did not rise enough, a famine would result. If the Nile was too low, the lack of moisture meant early planting and thus a poor crop. If the Nile rose too high the flooded fields prevented a normal planting and growing season and thus caused a food shortage. There is no record of an unusually low Nile during the reign of Claudius. However, there is information of an unusually high Nile during his reign.

The ideal height for a Nile flood is sixteen cubits (280 feet). Pliny records one such flood as the highest ever, a full two cubits (35 feet)¹² above its normal flood stage to a height of eighteen cubits¹³. No doubt, a famine would have resulted¹⁴. This flood may

⁹ *De Brev. Vit.* 18.5.

¹⁰ *Annals* XII, 43.

¹¹ Kenneth S. Gapp, "The Universal Famine under Claudius" *Harvard Theological Review*, 28: 1939. Cf. Gapp, *Famine in the Roman World from the Founding of Rome to the Time of Trajan*. I was not able to locate a copy of this, but it would appear that the work in *HthR* is an abbreviation of this work or an extension of it.

¹² Cubit = approx. 17.5 inches.

¹³ *Nat. Hist.* V. 58.

¹⁴ *Nat. Hist.* XVIII, 168.

tentatively dated in the year 45 A.D.¹⁵. In favor of this date, in the fall of that year, the price of grain nearly doubled thus suggesting a shortage. But since the harvest for 45 would have set the price for the market of 46, it is unclear as to what year the impact of this famine was the most prevalent.

In other records, Josephus records a famine in Judea in either 46 or 47¹⁶. In *Antiquities*, Josephus speaks of a great famine that covered the land of Judea. The price of grain doubled¹⁷ at that time due to the high cost of transporting grain overland. While this was most likely a “class famine”¹⁸, meaning only those of the lower classes suffered from this since the more wealthy classes had reserves of both food and money, it was a famine of definite proportion¹⁹ and one with dramatic results.

When the famine in Judea was at its height, Helena, queen of Adiabene, visited the city of Jerusalem. She was moved with compassion at the plight of the poor in the city. So moved was she that she sent for her entourage to purchase food from Egypt. The speed of these goods arrival in Jerusalem is attested to in Josephus²⁰, thus the ready availability of the goods would attest that this famine transpired in spring, not the fall of that year. Furthermore, since the entourage was dispatched to Egypt, it would appear that the famine in Egypt preceded the famine in Judea. Therefore, the famine of Jerusalem itself might be dated in the spring of 46 or 47, but without much certainty as to exactly when it took place.

When one combines the famine of Egypt in the year 45 or 46 and the Juduean famine of 46 or 47, it becomes clear that grain in general was a scarce and rare commodity. To further compound the problem, Gapp suggests that there may have been a war in Africa, the other major grain producer, during this same time frame²¹. Therefore, it seems clear that the cost of living went up during this time period due to scarce supply of grain.

It seems unlikely that a famine would have swept the Roman empire *en masse*. Many times, when one region experienced a severe shortage, it was assumed that many other regions did as well²². However, in light of the twin famines of Egypt and Judea and the dates of Pliny and Josephus, the existence of such a plight cannot be overlooked. While

¹⁵ Gapp, 259.

¹⁶ *Antiquities*, XX, 51-53, 101; III, 320f.

¹⁷ Gapp, 261 “When the famine was most severe . . . the price of grain rose so high that an assaron (?) of wheat cost four drachmas.”

¹⁸ Gapp, 261.

¹⁹ Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 127. “In antiquity, periods of famine were characterized not so much by an absolute lack of foodstuffs as by the inability of individual locals or social groups to make use of the food resources available.”

²⁰ *Ant.* III, 320.

²¹ Gapp, 263. Cf. Riesner, 129. D. R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity*, (1992), 237 “Various literary and archaeological data from the Mediterranean basin testify to a general famine in the late forties, until as late as 51 C.E.”

²² *Ibid.* So Riesner, 131.

it may not have been as far-reaching as the “entire Roman world” it seems clear that it did indeed occur. Fixing a specific and hard date to the event is another matter. While the famine may be placed with the two year span of 45-47, there is no evidence to platform one date over another. However, we can with some confidence establish that Paul and Barnabus made their Famine relief visit, as described in Acts 11:29 at or near the year 46. This necessitates the dating of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabus shortly thereafter, suggesting a date of 46-47 A.D.²³ or perhaps 47-48 A.D.²⁴.

Sergius Paulus and His Conversion – Acts 13:4-12

On the First Missionary journey of Paul and Barnabus, they encountered a proconsul on the island of Cyprus. Sergius Paulus was apparently curious about this strange new faith and called for them to come and impart to him the word of God.

While the external evidence for Sergius is tentative at best, there exist several possibilities that mention him. For example, an obelisk “mentions as one of the five curators of the Tiber under Claudius a Lucius Sergius Paulus”²⁵. This obelisk is dated by some to be prior to 47 A.D.²⁶. A first century inscription containing an imperial decree contains what may be a reference to a “Quintius Sergius”²⁷. Finally, ancient historian T.B. Mitford dates the administration of a Lucius Sergius Paulus between the years of 46 and 48 A.D., which would remarkably reflect a similar chronology as the historian Luke²⁸!

Dating the Apostolic Council – Acts 15:1-35

If one accepts the plausibility that the famine of Agabus took place in 46, then the first missionary journey took place following that, according to Lukan chronology, and can thus be dated sometime at or near 46 through 48 A.D.. Given the distance traveled and the time spent at each location, a span of two years is indeed tight, but perhaps the best option.

²³ So G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, trans. D. Stalker, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), M. Hengel and Anna Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), B.M. Metzger, *The New Testament: It's Background, Growth and Content*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965) and Hugh Schonfield, *The Jew of Tarsus*, (New York: MacMillan, 1947).

²⁴ So R. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) and John Pollock, *The Apostle: A Life of Paul*, (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

²⁵ Riesner, 139.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *ANRW*, II, 7.2, (1980), 1301.

Upon the return of Paul and Barnabus from their journey, the Jerusalem apostles listened as the missionary pair told of the acts of God among the Gentiles. It is difficult for us to imagine the stretch of imagination it took for these Jews to hear of God's receiving Gentiles. Thus, it is no surprise that a stir was created by this action and thus necessitated a meeting to discern what role these new believers were to have in the life of the Christian church. Acts 15 speaks of this meeting and its findings. If this event can be dated, with certainty, a closing date for Paul's first missionary journey can then be ascertained as well as an opening date for Paul's second missionary journey.

What is clear is that this Council took place at the close of the first missionary journey, which we have already dated as 46-48 A.D.. It is also clear that this took place before the second missionary journey (which the Gallio Inscription aids in dating). Thus it must take place not later than 49 A.D. to allow Paul the time to begin his second journey and get to Corinth and spend the eighteen months (Acts 18:11) within the prescribed time frame. Thus, the date for the Jerusalem Council must be either 48 or 49 A.D., preferably 48²⁹.

Claudius' Edict – Acts 18:2

The expulsion of the Jews from the city of Rome is an event marked by the historian Luke in Acts 18:2. When Paul arrived in the city of Corinth, the reader is introduced to "a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla", who have come to Corinth as a result of the banishment edict of Claudius. Thus, the question of dating the second Missionary Journey of Paul may be addressed by answering the question regarding when this edict was handed down. However, the question as to when (or if!) this occurred is a matter of some debate, even among early historians.

Suetonius, in his biography of Claudius, records that "since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome"³⁰. Contra Dio Cassius, in reporting about the initial period of Claudius' reign "the Jews had once again increased so greatly that because of their great numbers it would have been difficult to bar them from the city without creating a tumult. So he did not drive them out, and even allowed them to continue their traditional manner of life, but forbade them to hold their meetings"³¹. How do these two seemingly contradictory accounts harmonize? Are there two separate edicts³²? Is one historian simply in error?

²⁹ So Metzger, Thomas D. Lea, *The New Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996) and D.A. Carson, Doug Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

³⁰ *Claudius* 25.4. cf. Josephus, *Antiq.* XVIII.81-84 dates the edict during the time Pilate was procurator, between 19-36 ; Tacitus, II.85.4 marks this edict as transpiring in 19 A.D., an exceptionally early date.

³¹ *Hist.* Lx.6.6

³² So F.F. Bruce, *Paul: the Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977);

Some scholars have opted for the possibility of two separate edicts issued by Claudius, one more stringent than the other. Perhaps Claudius began by restricting their activity and when that measure failed, he expelled them completely. However, another contemporary historian, Xiphilinus omits the edict entirely, thus making a dual edict seem unlikely³³. Further, dating these two would present a further dilemma.

Others, such as E. Schürer posit the possibility that there was but one edict recorded very differently by the two historians³⁴, with some suggesting a date as early as 41 A.D.! This does not seem the most plausible solution since other historians have accounts of this edict as well that shares features with the accounts of Dio and Suetonius. Further, it seems to assume that both historians draw from a single source, an argument from silence. Unfortunately this source does not exist (if it ever did). It seems that to put an enormous amount of faith into a document which is elusive at best.

One other historian addresses this issue of the edict: Paulus Orosius, later than either Suetonius or Dio Cassius. Orosius was a presbyter in 417/418 and a contemporary of Augustine. Orosius drew from a number of sources and because of his late date, had many sources available to him that were perhaps not available to the early historians, including the canonical Book of Acts. Riesner says with confidence, “judged against the standard of Ancient historians, he should be counted among those of higher quality”³⁵.

In his *Adversus Paganos* regarding the edict of Claudius, Orosius says:

“In the ninth year of the same reign, Josephus reports that the Jews were expelled from the city by Claudius. But Suetonius impresses me more who speaks in the following manner: ‘Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, who at the instigation of Christ were continually causing disturbances.’ But it is by no means discernable whether he ordered that [only] the Jews causing disturbances against Christ were to be checked and repressed, or whether he simultaneously wanted to expel the Christians as well, as adherents of a related religion”³⁶.

While the fact that Orosius calls Christianity a “related religion” has drawn much criticism and that the writings of Josephus do not contain the dating to which he refers, the dating he uses, whoever he drew it from, of the edict is crucial. Some have surmised that Orosius drew his date from the Book of Acts³⁷. However, while it is probable that

³³ Riesner, 176.

³⁴ E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes* II, So also G. Luedemann, *Paul: An Apostle to the Gentiles*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

³⁵ Riesner, 180. Cf. B. Lacroix, *Orose*, (1965), 51-69, *op cit.* from Riesner

³⁶ *Adv. Pag.* VII.6.15ff.

³⁷ So B. Rigaux, *The Letters of St. Paul*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 88. “Since he (Orosius) was a priest, he certainly knew Acts and he might have worked

Orosius was acquainted with Acts, it seems unlikely that he would have falsely used Josephus' name in his remarks if he were constructing his chronology based on Acts. Furthermore, how did a fifth century priest in Spain gain access to first century information from Achaia? Unfortunately, this crucial question goes unanswered.

One other question is at hand when examining this issue. Whom did the expulsion edict effect? Was this an expulsion of all Jews and those with Jewish ties, i.e. Christians? Or was this an expulsion carried out selectively? According to Suetonius³⁸, Tacitus³⁹, and Josephus⁴⁰, this expulsion was total. All those with Jewish ties or believe to have Jewish ties were forced from the city. However, Dio Cassius⁴¹ states that the emperor banned "most of them". There were, however, ways around being expelled, even if you were a Jew or a Christian. For example, being a member of certain groups could protect one from expulsion. If one could conceal his/her connection with the Jews, one could escape being forced out. Logically, it would seem that this measure did indeed call for the expulsion of most every Jew and Christian otherwise, why would it warrant mention in so many histories?

So what then? What date is attached to this "ninth year" of the reign of Claudius? If one accepts the "ninth year" as factual, the dating equates to approximately January 25, 49 to January 25, 50.⁴² Since Aquila and Priscila were directly affected by this edict, and that they were with Paul during his stay in Corinth, it would appear that the earlier date would be most favorable based on what is known of Paul's stay in Corinth. Thus, the edict is dated most probably in the year 49 A.D.

Gallio and the Gallio Inscription – Acts 18:12f.

When Paul had been in Corinth eighteen months (Acts 18:11), he was charged with various wrongdoings and brought before the proconsul Gallio. Gallio showed little concern or regard for the charges and dismissed summarily as superfluous and based on dislike or envy for Paul (Acts 18:14-16), thus giving rise to the possibility of Gallio harboring some anti-Semitism⁴³. While this may be true, the non-commendation of Paul by the Roman governor and his appearance in the Book of Acts combined with an Imperial inscription has given us our best alternative for dating the life of Paul.

out his date by simply subtracting 18 months (Acts 28:11) from the date of Gallio's term of office which may have been reflected in his Roman sources."

³⁸ *Tiberius*, 36.

³⁹ *Annals*, II.85.4

⁴⁰ *Ant.* XVIII.83.

⁴¹ *Hist.*, LVII.18.5a

⁴² Riesner, 187, So also, J. Murphy-O'Conner, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 9.

⁴³ Riesner, 210.

While little is known regarding the background of Gallio, it is clear from all sources that he was indeed the proconsul of the region of Achaia. Since Paul met this proconsul in the city of Corinth, dating his reign can provide a key like none other to unlocking the mystery of when Paul was in Corinth, thus providing a foundation to date the rest of his life, both forward and backward.

While it is not certain exactly when Gallio ascended to his post, it seems clear that he could not have ascended to his post until his brother, Seneca, was returned from exile in the year 49⁴⁴. Since Gallio was the proconsul for the citizens who brought Paul to him on charges, we can with confidence establish an early date for the first Corinthian visit, i.e. Paul's visit to Corinth must be dated after 49 A.D.⁴⁵. But is it possible to be even more precise?

In 1905, four fragments of what has come to known as the Gallio Inscription (also known as the Delphi Inscription) appeared in a work published by E. Bourguet⁴⁶. Up to their appearance, attempts at a chronology of Paul were based on assessments of the crucifixion of Jesus and the conversion/call of Paul on his way to Damascus. With the discovery and publication of this material, a major shift in scholarly opinion took place. In fact, some have referred to the discovery of the Gallio inscription the “most important evidence for establishing a chronology of Paul”⁴⁷.

The contents of the inscription were tenuous at best upon their first publication. However, with the recovery of three additional pieces of the fragment, published by A. Plassart in 1983, more reliability was established on the writing. Still many gaps remain, as is reflected in the multitude of parenthesis within this translation. At any rate, the writing on the Inscription reads as follows:

“Tiber[ius Cluadius Caes]ar Au[gus]tus Ge[rmanicus,
invested with tribunal po]wer for the 12th time, acclaimed
Imperator for t]he 26th time, f[ather of the fa]ther [land. . .
.sends greetings to . . .]. For a l[ong time I have been not
onl]y [well disposed toward t]he ci[ty] of Delph[i but also
solicitous for its pro]sperity and I have always guar[ded
th]e cul[t of t]he [Pythian] Apol[lo. But] now [since] it is
said to be desti[tu]te of [citi]zens, as [L. Jun]ius Gallio my
fri[end] an[d procon]sul, [recently reported to me and being
desirous that Delphi] should continue to retain [inta]ct its
for[mer rank, I] ord[er you (pl.) to in]vite [well born people
also from ot]her cities [to Delphi as new inhabitants and to
] all[ow] them [and their children to have all the]

⁴⁴ Ibid, 202.

⁴⁵ Contra Luedemann, 159. He suggests an early 40's date for Paul's Corinthian ministry.

⁴⁶ E. Bourguet, *De Rebus Delphicis imperatorias aetatis capita duo*, (1905), *op cit.* Riesner, 203.

⁴⁷ Lea, 351.

privi[ledges of Del]phi as being citi[zens on equal and like (basis)].⁴⁸

The actual recipient of the Inscription is a matter of some dispute, but what is not in dispute is whom the inscription is written from. From the hand of Claudius, upon his being proclaimed Caesar for the 26th time the readers, whoever they may be, are commissioned to repopulate the city with “well born people” to live as proud citizens of Delphi under the leadership of Gallio, the proconsul. The date for this proclamation can be approximated more closely than some since Frontius speaks of Claudius being acclaimed Caesar for the 27th time at the dedication of two aqueducts in the Spring of the year 52 A.D.⁴⁹. Since the proclamation cannot predate the proconsulship, it can be assumed that Gallio was in office prior to 52 A.D..

Since provincial office holders began their fiscal year on July 1⁵⁰, and since many of the proconsuls served only one year⁵¹, it may be deduced that Gallio’s procounselship is to be dated approximately July 1, 51 to July 1, 52 A.D.. If, however, one accepts the possibility of Gallio having served two terms, his reign may be dated at the latest from July 1, 50 to July 1, 52 A.D., assuming he completed his term of office, which is matter of some debate.

Several scholars have surmised that Gallio did not complete his term of office due to illness. Gallio’s brother, Seneca, reported “When, in Achaia, he began to feel feverish, he immediately took ship, claiming that it was not a malady of the body but of the place”⁵². Apparently, Gallio had grown weary of his place of service. But winter travel of any sort was a dangerous proposition⁵³, but winter sailing was especially precarious. Therefore, assuming his brother is correct, it can be assumed that this voyage must have taken place in the late spring, summer or early fall of his term as proconsul when travel was reasonably safe. Thus, October would be the latest possible date for his departure, else he would be forced to winter in Corinth. If it is true that Gallio served only one term and that the term was from July 1, 51 to June 30, 52, it would seem that the trial of Paul would fall near the end of his tenure at near the end of Paul’s eighteen month stay in Corinth. Since it would seem Paul was in Jerusalem by 51 A.D. (Gal 2:1), the trial before Gallio and Paul’s subsequent departure could not have transpired later than September 51.A.D.. While this date is still tentative⁵⁴, it provides a footing that will allow some measure of certainty in fixing an anchor date. Further, this seems to fit within the timeframe of Luke, citing Paul as having been in Corinth for 18 months prior to his trial (Acts 18:10). Therefore, Paul ended his stay in Corinth in the early fall of 52 A.D..

⁴⁸ Taken from Murphy-O’Conner, 15-16. Please also note the photocopy of the inscription in Appendix B.

⁴⁹ *De Aquaeductis*, I.13.

⁵⁰ Murphy-O’Conner, 18.

⁵¹ Although it is not impossible that Gallio served two terms. Murphy-O’Conner, 18; Riesner, 204.

⁵² *Epistulae morales*, 104.1, trans. taken from Murphy-O’Conner, 19.

⁵³ Murphy-O’Conner, 20; Riesner, 206.

⁵⁴ Based on the information regarding how many terms Gallio served.

With this single fixed point, it is possible to frame a proposed chronology of the life of Paul. Other information, found in his own letters, provides information regarding the specifics of his life, although most without time data connected to it. Thus, dating the Missionary journeys of Paul is left mainly to basing it around length of time in travel and distances covered. For instance, we know that Corinth is a stop on the Second Missionary Journey. If we accept the date of Paul's presence there for eighteen months, presumably ending at or near the trial before Gallio (Acts 18) and that he spent three months in Ephesus on this journey as well (Acts 19:1-20), the journey must last at least three years to allow for travel time and the change in seasons thus allowing travel. Since it seems clear that the famine relief visit was in 46 and the first missionary journey 46-48 A.D., then the dates preferred for the second journey, which must include Corinth, are following the Jerusalem Council and prior to the Gallio inscription, thus not earlier than 49 A.D. as a starting point. For the sake of discussion here, the dates 49-52 A.D.⁵⁵ will be used as the dates for the Second Missionary Journey.

Trial before Felix – Acts 24:1-27

In Acts 23, Paul, in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, is charged with various crimes by the Sanhedrin and taken before the tribunal of the Roman court. After a plot to murder Paul is discovered by his nephew, Paul is transferred to Caesarea in order to stand trial before Felix, the governor of the region.

Upon arrival in Caesarea, Paul is charged with the crimes of disturbing the peace and of leading a revolt. Tertullius, the prosecutor referred to him as the “ringleader of the Nazarene sect” (Acts 24:7). Although the trial of Paul before Felix is a one-sided farce of justice⁵⁶, but the marker of Felix as governor can be quite beneficial in establishing a date for this tribunal and thereby giving a ceiling date for the end of the Third Missionary Journey.

The beginning of the procuratorship of Felix is dated with some certainty in the year 52⁵⁷. Evidence of this date is found in Tacitus⁵⁸ and has found acceptance in many circles. The end of the rule of Felix is more difficult to pinpoint.

Eusebius indicates that there was a change of procurators when Claudius stepped down and Nero was installed as emperor, approximately 55 A.D.⁵⁹. While Nero may have taken power that year, it may have been as late as 57 A.D. before the change in

⁵⁵ So Metzger, Lea, and Carson and Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

⁵⁶ According to Acts 24:27, Paul is kept in prison as a favor to the Jews.

⁵⁷ E.M. Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule*, (1981); Riesner, 219.

⁵⁸ *Annals*, XII.54

⁵⁹ *Ecclesiastical Historie*, II.22

governors took place.⁶⁰ . Thus, the trial of Paul before Felix, is confined to the date between 52 and 57 A.D, The later date seems preferable since it was during this approximate time that Felix was succeeded and, upon his departure, left Paul in prison. If then , 57 A.D. is the accepted date for the change in procurators, it seems that Paul’s journey to Rome would have departed soon after his interview with Festus.

Conclusion

Of the aforementioned evidences, the Gallio Inscription and date has received the most adherents by far. In fact, a major swing in thought can be seen by looking at the proposed chronologies of Paul’s life before the Gallio and after. For example:

	Baronius	Ussher	Basange	Bengel	Wiesler
Paul In Corinth⁶¹	50	54	51	48	52

Each of these pre-Gallio scholars adopts a slightly different date according to his own studies! They lacked any concrete date upon which to build their chronology. Because of contradictions in some of the ancient histories, there was no touchstone upon which to anchor.

A look at a similar chart from scholars after the discovery and Publication of the Gallio Inscription shows that things have become much clearer as a result of being able to be confident in one date.

	<u>Plooj</u>	<u>Lake</u>	<u>Hahn</u>	<u>Ogg</u>	<u>Küm</u>	<u>Hae</u>	<u>Bruce</u>	<u>Hengel</u>
Paul in Corinth⁶²	50	49/50	51	50	49	49/50	50	49/50

The consensus has shrunk dramatically. Each of these scholars is within a year or two of each other. Thus, the discovery and publication of the Gallio Inscription has made formulating a Pauline chronology much easier. Therefore, the inscription will be utilized as foundational date for the construction of our chronology. All else will be counted backward or forward from this date.

⁶⁰ Riesner, 223. Numismatic evidence notes a possible change in procurator in the year 58/59.

⁶¹ Riesner, 3.

⁶² Ibid., 6.

CHAPTER THREE

Specific Dates regarding Paul's Journeys and Letters – Evidence from Acts and the Pauline Corpus

First Missionary Journey

We have already stated the preferred dates for the first missionary journey are 46-48 A.D.. The external framework and evidence support these dates, but what about the chronology of Luke? Were Saul and Barnabus really gone for two full years?

If one assumes that the travel season began with the late Spring (April or May) and ended with the beginning of the fall (late September / early October), then one may guess that Paul and Barnabus departed for their first journey in the spring of 46. After being commissioned by the church at Antioch, they departed and went to Cyprus. After staying there some days, they sailed on to Pisidian Antioch where they spent no less than two weeks (Acts 13:44).

From there, they traveled to Iconium, a short distance to the east. They spent “considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord” (Acts 14:3). It is unfortunate that there is not a more definite time marker there, but it seems clear that this was longer than their usual stop. It is possible that Paul and Barnabus wintered here, thus waiting till spring to travel further.

Paul and Barnabus left the city of Iconium under duress and fled into the countryside to continue their ministry. When they arrived Lystra, a tumult was created by rabble rousers from nearby Iconium. They were thought as gods at first and ultimately persecuted with Paul even being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). However, the “next day”, they departed for Derbe.

Upon turning for home, Paul and Barnabus repeated their order of cities in reverse order, visting all the places that they visited on their way. If the original visits took eighteen months, including travel time, then it is safe to assume that the trip back took at least that long, this accounting for the dates 46-48 A.D.

The Second Missionary Journey – Acts 15:39-18:22

The dates for the Second Missionary Journey are more certain than the other journeys, partly in thanks to the Gallio Inscription. We have attempted to establish the dates for this journey as 49-52 A.D..

It is clear⁶³ that the Second Journey cannot begin until after the Jerusalem Council, which we have dated as 48 A.D.. If one accepts the spring as the travel season, and that the Council would have taken place in the fall / winter of 48, (following the arrival of Paul and Barnabus from their first journey), then one can safely assume that the mission team waited until travel was safer, i.e., until the spring of 49 A.D.. Therefore, “some time later” (Acts 15:36), Paul and Barnabus decided to make a second trip to visit those places where they had ministered previously. The rift between the two occurred at that time and Paul took Silas as Barnabus went with Mark.

As for the journey itself, it was considerably longer in distance than the first. It seems Paul and Silas traveled by land from Antioch to Troas, a journey of some distance. From Troas, they took a boat, to Samothrace, from Samothrace to Neapolis and Philippi. It was in Philippi that they spent “several days” (Acts 16:12). They were harassed by a girl with a “spirit” for “several days” (Acts 16:18). The situation grew more tense and thus they were briefly imprisoned. Paul was shortly forced to leave the area to calm the tumult. He was sent to Athens (Acts 17:15), also a trip of some distance since to arrive there, one must sail around the bend of the peninsula and up the coast to Athens.

From Athens, Paul went to Corinth, where he stayed for a year and a half (Acts 18:10). It was here that Paul was brought before the proconsul Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), but to no avail of those who would charge him. After staying in Corinth for “some time” (Acts 18:18), he set sail from Corinth for the city of Ephesus (Acts 18:19). After a brief stay there, Paul returned to his base city of Antioch. Calculating the cumulative time of this trip is difficult without knowing more fully how many days, weeks or months “some time” implies. However, it seems somewhat clear that Paul did not stay in Antioch long after the Jerusalem Council thus placing his beginning point of travel in the spring of 49. As for a concluding point, if one assumes that Paul was indeed acquitted by Gallio in the fall of 51, then the “some time” probably refers to the winter months, placing Paul’s return to Antioch in the spring of 52. Therefore, the dates for the Second Missionary Journey are 49-52 A.D..

Third Missionary Journey – Acts 18:23-21:17

If one again takes the reference of “some time” to mean that Paul wintered in Antioch it may be assumed that Paul’s third journey is dated in the spring of 53. Upon leaving Antioch, Paul went by land to the city of Ephesus. There, he stayed “three months” (Acts 19:8). Furthermore, he changed preaching points, but taught there another “two years” (Acts 19:10).

After leaving Ephesus, Paul went to Macedonia (Acts 20:1) and ultimately into Greece “where he stayed for three months”. They traveled back overland through the Achaian and Macedonian cities they had visited. Upon arriving at Philippi (Acts 20:5), they waited until the Passover and then sailed for Troas where they stayed for seven days (Acts 20:6).

⁶³ Assuming the chronology of Luke is correct.

When the mission band prepared to leave Troas, they sailed to Mitylene (Acts 20:14) and then on to Kios (Acts 20:15). After some short stops, Paul arrived at Miletus and sent for the elders of Ephesus. Because of his desire to be in Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost, he did not wish to spend time in this province (Acts 20:16).

Following an emotional farewell to the Ephesians, Paul again set out for Jerusalem (Acts 21:1). After going through Kos, Patara and Phoenicia, (Acts 16:1b-2), Paul and his associates arrive in Syria where the disciples implored Paul to not return to Jerusalem at peril of his life (Acts 21:4-5). But Paul refused and soon arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17), thus concluding the third missionary journey.

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