

Saint Paul

The Least of the Apostles

A source-first historical biography

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1 The Least of the Apostles

No figure of the first Christian generation can be reconstructed from so much of his own writing as Paul of Tarsus. Seven letters whose direct authorship is not seriously contested—Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon—preserve his arguments, his travel plans, his angers and affections, his account of his own past, and even a glimpse of his handwriting: “See what a letter I have written to you with my own hand” (Gal 6:11). No other person of his century, pagan or Christian, of his social rank, is documented this way. And yet the same man called himself “the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9), and the record of his life is full of holes exactly where a biographer most wants solid ground. His birth is undated. His appearance is unrecorded before a second-century romance. His death is narrated by no text earlier than that same romance, roughly a century after the event. Between the letters and the Acts of the Apostles—a second witness, later, admiring, and writing with its own theological design—there are tensions of sequence and detail that no honest account may silently harmonize. One event only in his whole life can be tied to an absolute date, and that by a broken inscription from Delphi naming the proconsul before whom, Acts says, he once stood.

This biography therefore asks three questions. First, what do Paul’s own letters establish about his life—his Pharisaic formation, his persecution of the church, the revelation near Damascus, the missions, the collection, the plans for Spain—when they are read as what they are: occasional, rhetorical, one-sided survivals of live arguments, not a memoir? Second, what does Acts add, and at what points must its narrative be held apart from, rather than blended with, the man’s own testimony? Third, what can responsibly be said about the end—the martyrdom under Nero attested from 1 Clement onward, the burial on the Ostian Way, the basilica and the sarcophagus probed in 2009—and about the legends, feasts, and doctrines that Christian memory built upon him? The method is that of the whole series: earliest controlled evidence first; witnesses separated by decades or centuries never silently merged; legends preserved and labeled rather than suppressed or believed; official and liturgical reception reported as reception. The terminal appendix states the conventions, the detailed chronology, and the limits that govern every page.

2 The Sources and Their Weighing

Everything in this study depends on being clear, before the life begins, about what each class of evidence is and what it can carry.

2.1 The seven undisputed letters

The bedrock is the set of seven letters whose direct Pauline authorship commands effectively universal assent, ancient and modern: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. They were written within roughly a decade—on the chronology defended below, from about 50 to the late 50s or early 60s—to living communities and one householder, in the middle of disputes whose other side survives only as Paul reports it. They are class-A evidence in this series’ scheme: subject-authored, and therefore uniquely direct; but “authored” is not “neutral.” Each letter is occasional (it answers a situation, not a biographer’s questionnaire), rhetorical (it argues, pleads, shames, and defends), and selective (Paul tells the Galatians about his past precisely because his independence from Jerusalem is under attack, Gal 1:11–12). The autobiographical passages—Galatians 1–2, Philippians 3:4–6, 1 Corinthians 15:8–10, 2 Corinthians 11–12—are the most precious paragraphs in the record, and every one of them is fighting for something. That does not make them false; it makes them testimony, to be cross-examined like any testimony.

2.2 The disputed letters

Six further letters bear Paul’s name in the canon: 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, Ephesians, and the three Pastorals (1–2 Timothy, Titus). Their canonical standing is not in question here; their usefulness as direct autobiography is. Modern criticism disputes their direct authorship in sharply different degrees—least for 2 Thessalonians and Colossians, where substantial scholarly minorities (in some quarters majorities) still defend Pauline composition; more for Ephesians; most for the Pastorals. The scale of the discussion can be stated from a checked witness: teaching on the Pastorals during the Pauline Year, Benedict XVI said plainly that “most exegetes today are of the opinion that

these Letters would not have been written by Paul himself, but would have come from the ‘Pauline School’,” while noting that parts of 2 Timothy “appear so authentic that they could have come only from the heart and mouth of the Apostle” (General Audience, 28 January 2009). This study therefore uses the six in a bounded way: as first-rank evidence for how Paul was remembered, extended, and institutionalized within a generation or two of his death; as possible but not certain evidence for events after Acts ends (2 Timothy’s Roman imprisonment, Titus’s Crete and Nicopolis); and never as the sole support for a biographical claim. Hebrews, anonymous and stylistically remote, was attached to Paul’s name in parts of the ancient church but makes no autobiographical claim and is used here only in the history of his reception.

Ancient authorship judgments are also part of the record: the Muratorian fragment (Rome?, conventionally c. 170–200) already counts thirteen letters, “to no more than seven churches by name” plus Philemon, Titus, and two to Timothy, and already knows of forgeries—letters “to the Laodiceans, and another to the Alexandrians, forged under the name of Paul.” Letters in Paul’s name that Paul did not write were a live first–second-century phenomenon; 2 Thessalonians itself warns against being shaken “by epistle, as sent from us” (2 Thess 2:2) and closes with an authenticating signature, “the salutation of Paul with my own hand; which is the sign in every epistle” (2 Thess 3:17).

2.3 Acts as a second witness

The Acts of the Apostles devotes more than half its length to Paul (chiefly Acts 7:58–8:3; 9; 11:25–30; 13–28). It is a first-century canonical narrative, ancient tradition’s “Luke, the most dear physician” (Col 4:14) writing a generation after the events, and from Acts 16 onward it intermittently narrates in the first person plural (“immediately we sought to go into Macedonia,” Acts 16:10)—passages read since Irenaeus as the diary of a companion: Luke was “inseparable from Paul, and his fellow-labourer in the Gospel” (*Against Heresies* 3.14.1). Whatever the “we”-source is, Acts as a whole is a designed theological history: its speeches are compositions in character, not transcripts; its journeys are shaped into three great circuits; its Paul works miracles, keeps the law, and converses urbanely with proconsuls and kings. Strikingly, Acts never once mentions that Paul wrote letters—the surest sign that it is an independent witness, not a narrative spun from the epistles. This study treats Acts as class-N evidence: near-contemporary, external, indispensable for the itinerary and for data the letters never state (Tarsus, Gamaliel, Roman citizenship, the name Saul), and always to be checked against the letters where they overlap.

2.4 Where Acts and the letters pull apart

Four tensions matter enough to govern the whole reconstruction, and each is examined in place below. (1) **The Jerusalem visits.** Paul swears — “before God, I lie not” (Gal 1:20)—that after the revelation he did not go up to Jerusalem for three years, then saw only Cephas and James, and came again only “after fourteen years” (Gal 1:18–19; 2:1). Acts has the new convert brought to “the apostles” by Barnabas soon after Damascus (9:27), then a famine-relief visit (11:29–30), then the council visit (15). Whether Galatians 2 corresponds to Acts 15 or to Acts 11, and what becomes of the extra visit, is a genuine, unresolved critical problem, not a detail. (2) **The Damascus escape.** Paul: “At Damascus, the governor of the nation under Aretas the king, guarded the city... and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall” (2 Cor 11:32–33). Acts: “the Jews consulted together to kill him” and watched the gates (9:23–24). Same basket, same wall, different pursuers—a textbook case of two tellings of one memory, each shaped by its teller’s frame. (3) **Emphasis and omission.** Acts’ Paul is a triumphant wonder-worker; the letters’ Paul catalogues beatings, shipwrecks, and “a sting of my flesh” (2 Cor 11:24–27; 12:7), and his opponents said “his bodily presence is weak” (2 Cor 10:10). Acts omits the collection’s delivery, the crisis with Corinth, the conflict at Antioch, and the letters themselves. (4) **Title and status.** The letters open with, argue from, and die on the title *apostle*—“Am not I an apostle?” (1 Cor 9:1)—which Paul grounds directly in having seen the risen Lord; Acts, which reserves the word almost entirely for the Twelve, applies it to Paul only twice in passing (“the apostles Barnabas and Paul,” Acts 14:4, 13 DR numbering), while conversely the Roman citizenship on which Acts’ whole legal drama turns is never once mentioned in the letters. Each witness, that is, has its own theory of who Paul was. Where the two witnesses conflict, the participant outranks the narrator; where they merely differ in selection, both are kept, severally.

2.5 The rest of the record

After the New Testament the witnesses stratify cleanly, and the strata are used strictly by date and genre. Early received tradition (class E): 1 Clement, written from Rome conventionally c. 95–96, within one generation of the death; Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107–110 traditional) and Polycarp of Smyrna (c. 110–130s), who both invoke Paul by name; the second-century reports preserved at exact loci in Eusebius—Dionysius of Corinth (c. 170), the Roman presbyter Gaius (c. 200) on the “trophies” of the apostles, Origen (c. 230) on the manner of death; Irenaeus and Tertullian around 200. Later hagiography and legend (class L): the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (c. 160 by Tertullian’s notice), source of Thecla, of the famous physical description, and of the earliest martyrdom narrative; the fourth–fifth-century martyrdom romances that supplied Lucina’s estate and the three fountains; the forged Paul–Seneca correspondence that Jerome read. Official and archaeological reception (classes M and K): the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls and its documented tomb presentation; the 2002–2006 excavation of the sarcophagus and Benedict XVI’s announcement of its scientific probing (28 June 2009); the liturgical calendar. Modern critical reconstruction (class K) is cited as named positions—above all for the chronology, where a single epigraphic control, the Gallio inscription from Delphi, published in the modern era and studied classically by Adolf Deissmann, supplies the one absolute date in Paul’s life. Project synthesis (class S) is the responsibility of this study alone and is never attributed to a source.

3 A Pharisee of the Dispersion

3.1 What Paul says of himself

When Paul states his own credentials, he reaches not for a city or a school but for Israel: “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to the law, a Pharisee: according to zeal, persecuting the church of God; according to the justice that is in the law, conversing without blame” (Phil 3:5–6); “I also am an Israelite of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1); “I made progress in the Jews’ religion above many of my equals in my own nation, being more abundantly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Gal 1:14). These sentences, written to Gentile churches decades after the events, are the whole of the directly attested childhood and youth. They establish a family that kept the law from his infancy, a tribal memory (Benjamin—the tribe of the first king, whose name he bore), Hebrew (probably Aramaic-speaking) domestic culture, and formal adherence to the Pharisaic movement, the party of exact legal observance and of the resurrection of the dead. Even as a prisoner, Acts has him say in the present tense: “I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees: concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” (Acts 23:6). Nothing in the letters ever renounces this identity; what changed at Damascus was its center, not its existence.

3.2 Tarsus, and what only Acts supplies

Everything topographical and civic comes from Acts alone, mostly from Paul’s reported speeches: “I am a Jew, born at Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the truth of the law of the fathers, zealous for the law” (Acts 22:3). Acts also supplies his Jewish name Saul, first heard at Stephen’s stoning where “the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:57), his trade—with Aquila and Priscilla at Corinth “because he was of the same trade, he remained with them, and wrought; (now they were tentmakers by trade)” (Acts 18:3)—and his Roman citizenship by birth: when the tribune boasts, “I obtained the being free of this city with a great sum,” Paul answers, “But I was born so” (Acts 22:28; cf. 16:37). The letters neither confirm nor contradict any of this. They do corroborate the manual labor that the trade notice implies (“working night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you,” 1 Thess 2:9), and Paul’s fluent literary Greek and constant use of the Greek Scriptures fit a diaspora upbringing. Tarsus itself, capital of Cilicia and a noted university town, has tempted biographers to give the boy a Greek philosophical education; the evidence does not reach that far, and Jerome even preserves a rival tradition that the family came from Gischala in Galilee and reached Tarsus as Roman captives (*De viris illustribus* 5)—late, unverifiable, and a useful reminder that antiquity itself had more than one story.

His languages, at least, are directly observable. The letters are vigorous Koine Greek, dictated at speed, quoting Israel’s Scriptures constantly and almost always in their Greek (Septuagint) form—the working equipment of a diaspora synagogue education. “An Hebrew of the Hebrews” claims the ancestral tongue as well as the ancestry, and Acts twice makes the point dramatically: on the fortress stairs Paul quiets the Jerusalem crowd when “he spoke

unto them in the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 21:40), and the voice near Damascus addresses him “in the Hebrew tongue” (26:14). A bilingual man with two names, at home in the synagogue and intelligible to a proconsul, is exactly the profile the mission would require.

Tarsus, Gamaliel, the name Saul, the trade, and the citizenship are Acts-only data (class N, Lukan narrative, partly in speeches). None is implausible; the citizenship in particular is presupposed by Acts’ whole legal endgame—the appeal to Caesar—and coheres with a Roman execution tradition of beheading rather than the cross. But no letter mentions citizenship, and honesty requires the single-witness label. “Saul, otherwise Paul” (Acts 13:9) are two coexisting names, Semitic and Greco-Roman, of one diaspora Jew; no text says Jesus renamed him, and “Saul” simply stops being used once the mission moves west.

3.3 Birth date and appearance

No source dates Paul’s birth. The only handles are two generic words: Acts’ *neanias*, “a young man,” at Stephen’s death, and Paul’s self-description as *presbyteres*, “Paul an old man” (Phlm 9), written from an imprisonment in the 50s or early 60s. Reckoning ancient usage of those terms, the Pauline Year of 2008–2009 was proclaimed on the working assumption of a birth “in approximately the year 8” (Benedict XVI, General Audience, 27 August 2008)—a defensible convention, and nothing more. Of his appearance no early source says anything; the famous portrait—small, bald, bow-legged, hook-nosed—is a second-century literary creation, examined with the legends below.

3.4 The persecutor

That Paul violently persecuted the earliest church is quadruple-attested in his own letters—“beyond measure, I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it” (Gal 1:13); “I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9); “according to zeal, persecuting the church” (Phil 3:6); the Judean churches knew him only by report as “he, who persecuted us in times past” (Gal 1:23)—and is the one fact about his pre-Christian life that Acts and the letters state identically. Acts dramatizes it: consent to Stephen’s killing (“And Saul was consenting to his death,” Acts 7:59 DR numbering), house-to-house arrests in Jerusalem (8:3), and letters from the high priest “to Damascus, to the synagogues: that if he found any men and women of this way, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (9:2). In his own reported speech the violence reaches “even unto foreign cities” (26:11). What the letters do not do is locate the persecution in Jerusalem—Galatians insists he was “unknown by face to the churches of Judea” (1:22)—and this study accordingly treats the theater of his campaign (Jerusalem? Damascus and the diaspora synagogues?) as unresolved, while the fact of it, and its motive in Pharisaic zeal against a movement proclaiming a crucified man as Messiah, stands on his own oath. Why a law-observant zealot found the sect intolerable he never spells out; his later theology of the cross—“we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumblingblock” (1 Cor 1:23)—is likely the mirror of the very offense that once armed him.

4 The Damascus Event

4.1 Paul’s own words

Paul never narrates what happened near Damascus. He names it, always briefly, always in argument. To the Galatians, defending his gospel’s independence: “when it pleased him, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles, immediately I condescended not to flesh and blood” (Gal 1:15–16). To the Corinthians, defending his apostleship: “Am not I an apostle? Have not I seen Christ Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1); and, closing the list of Resurrection witnesses: “And last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8). His vocabulary is exact and demands attention: a *revelation* (Gal 1:12), a divine *call* in prophetic idiom—“from my mother’s womb” echoes the calls of Jeremiah and the Servant of Isaiah—and a *seeing* of the risen Lord of the same order as the appearances to Cephas and the Twelve, not of a different or lesser kind. What Paul describes is not, in his own terms, a change of religion. It is the God of Israel revealing the crucified Jesus as his Son and commissioning the persecutor as apostle to the nations. “Conversion” remains the traditional and liturgical word, and it is true to the total reversal of his life—“the things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ” (Phil 3:7)—but the category Paul himself supplies is call and sending.

4.2 The three tellings in Acts

Acts values the event so highly that it narrates it three times: once by the narrator (9:1–19), twice in Paul’s reported speeches, to the Jerusalem crowd (22:3–21) and before King Agrippa (26:9–18). The core is identical each time—the journey with letters of arrest, the light from heaven, the fall to the ground, the double vocative and question, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?,” the answer “I am Jesus,” the commission—and the variations around that core are the clearest window in the New Testament onto how one tradition could be told three ways by one author for three audiences.

Feature	Acts 9	Acts 22	Acts 26
Companions	stand amazed, “hearing indeed a voice, but seeing no man” (9:7)	“saw indeed the light. . . but they heard not the voice” (22:9, with the Douay note: they heard sound, not words)	“we were all fallen down on the ground” (26:14)
The voice	Greek text: the question only; the Vulgate (and Douay) already add the goad	question only	adds, “in the Hebrew tongue,” the proverb “It is hard for thee to kick against the goad” (26:14)
Ananias	restores sight, baptizes (9:17–18)	“a man according to the law,” delivers the commission (22:12–16)	absent; the commission is given directly by the Lord (26:16–18)
Commission	spoken to Ananias: “a vessel of election, to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings” (9:15)	deferred to a later trance in the temple: “unto the Gentiles afar off, will I send thee” (22:21)	immediate and full, in the language of the prophets (26:16–18)

The differences are selection and staging, not contradiction of the event’s substance; but they forbid the flattening of the three accounts into one composite scene, and they caution against treating any single detail—the companions’ posture, the exact words—as fixed data. No account, it should be said, contains a horse; the falling rider is an artistic convention, not a text.

4.3 Date and aftermath: Arabia, Damascus, the escape

The event is datable only relatively: from the crucifixion of Jesus (30 or 33) to Paul’s arrival in Corinth (c. 50, anchored below), the letters’ own arithmetic—three years to the first Jerusalem visit, then “after fourteen years” to the second (Gal 1:18; 2:1, the two figures possibly concurrent rather than consecutive)—pushes the revelation to roughly 31–36; “c. 33–36” is this study’s working range. What followed is stated by Paul against the assumption his opponents evidently made: “Neither went I to Jerusalem, to the apostles who were before me: but I went into Arabia, and again I returned to Damascus” (Gal 1:17). Arabia here is the Nabataean kingdom south and east of Damascus, not desert solitude necessarily; that the Nabataean authorities later wanted him arrested suggests his stay was active enough to be noticed. Of this period—up to three years—nothing else is known, and the silence should be left intact: the sources permit neither a mystical retreat nor a first mission to be asserted.

The Damascus years ended in flight, attested twice. Paul, listing his humiliations: “At Damascus, the governor of the nation under Aretas the king, guarded the city of the Damascenes, to apprehend me. And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and so escaped his hands” (2 Cor 11:32–33). Acts: “the Jews consulted together to kill him. . . And they watched the gates also day and night” until “the disciples taking him in the night, conveyed him away by the wall, letting him down in a basket” (9:23–25). The two tellings share wall, basket, and night-flight and disagree about the pursuers; Paul’s first-person version, naming the ethnarch of Aretas IV of Nabataea (died c. 39/40), is the controlling one, and it incidentally supplies a soft chronological ceiling: the escape belongs before Aretas’s death.

4.4 First contacts with Jerusalem

“Then, after three years, I went to Jerusalem, to see Peter, and I tarried with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles I saw none, saving James the brother of the Lord” (Gal 1:18–19). Fifteen days with Cephas, c. 35–38: the

only direct, first-person record of contact between Paul and the first witnesses in the founding decade, and the natural channel for the tradition he says he “received” and handed on—the creed of 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 with its list of appearances, and the supper tradition of 1 Corinthians 11:23–25. Acts tells it differently and more publicly: the disciples’ fear of the former persecutor, Barnabas sponsoring him to “the apostles,” open preaching and disputation in Jerusalem, a plot, and a bundling-off “down to Caesarea” and “away to Tarsus” (9:26–30). Galatians’ restricted, oath-backed version governs; the years that followed it Paul compresses into one clause, “Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Gal 1:21)—roughly a decade, the so-called silent years, presumably spent doing in Tarsus’s orbit what he did everywhere else, but the record says only what has just been quoted. The silence breaks when Barnabas “went to Tarsus to seek Saul: whom, when he had found, he brought to Antioch,” where disciples were first called Christians and the two taught together “a whole year” (Acts 11:25–26).

5 The Frame of the Life: Chronology and the Gallio Anchor

5.1 What the letters and Acts yield by themselves

Read alone, the sources yield only relative time. The letters give three numbers—“after three years,” “after fourteen years” (Gal 1:18; 2:1), and “above fourteen years ago” for the ecstasy of 2 Corinthians 12:2—plus one datable name, the Nabataean king Aretas (2 Cor 11:32). Acts gives sequence and seasons, two-year blocks at Caesarea and Rome (24:27; 28:30), a stay of “a year and six months” at Corinth (18:11), and a handful of datable officials and events: the edict by which “Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome” (18:2; Suetonius confirms the expulsion of Jews making disturbances “at the instigation of Chrestus,” *Claudius* 25, but gives no year—the conventional 49 rests on the fifth-century Orosius, not verified here), the procuratorial succession “Felix had for successor Portius Festus” (24:27, datable only within a debated range, c. 55–60), and one proconsul of Achaia: “But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat” (Acts 18:12). Without external control, none of this attaches to a calendar.

5.2 The Delphi inscription

The control exists for Gallio alone. Lucius Junius Gallio—brother of the philosopher Seneca—is named in a fragmentary Greek inscription found at Delphi and published early in the twentieth century: a letter of the emperor Claudius to the city, in which Claudius bears the title “acclaimed imperator the 26th time.” The classic epigraphic study is Adolf Deissmann’s appendix “The Proconsulate of L. Junius Gallio” (*St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, English translation 1912, pp. 235–260, with a facsimile of the stone), which this study read in full in the public scan identified in the References. Deissmann’s argument, resting on Hermann Dessau’s collation of Claudius’s titulature, runs: the 26th imperatorial acclamation belongs between (at earliest, the end of 51) 25 January 52 and 1 August 52, when the 27th is already attested; the letter names Gallio as proconsul of Achaia in office; proconsuls served one year, entering office in early summer; therefore Gallio’s proconsulship ran from the summer of 51 to the summer of 52 (Deissmann: he “entered on his proconsulship in the summer (nominally 1 July) of 51 A.D.”), with 52–53 the only alternative the evidence tolerates. Since Acts places the hearing before Gallio at the end of Paul’s eighteen-month Corinthian ministry, Paul’s arrival in Corinth falls c. 49–50 and his departure c. 51–52. This is the one absolute date in Paul’s life, and the whole modern chronology hangs from it. The Church’s own teaching office has used the same anchor: “It is the most reliable date in the whole of his biography. . . . It says that Gallio was Proconsul in Corinth between the years 51 and 53. Thus we have one absolutely certain date” (Benedict XVI, General Audience, 27 August 2008).

Ceilings, stated plainly: this study verified Deissmann’s 1912 edition and argument at first hand in a public-domain scan, and the anchor as reported by a modern official witness; it did not collate the stone, later-joined fragments, or the current critical edition of the inscription. The inscription dates Gallio’s tenure, not Paul’s hearing within it; “summer 51–summer 52” for the proconsulship and “50–52” for Paul’s Corinth are the responsibly stated ranges, and the year-wide uncertainty propagates through every derived date below.

5.3 From the anchor to a life

Counting backward from Corinth c. 50: the Macedonian mission (Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Athens) fills the immediately preceding year or two; the Jerusalem council, which the sequence of both Acts and Galatians puts before the Aegean mission, lands c. 48–49; the “fourteen years” of Galatians 2:1 then reach back from it to a revelation c. 33–36, and the “three years” of the Arabia–Damascus period nest inside that span. Counting forward: Corinth to c. 52; Ephesus “until Pentecost” seasons and a roughly three-year residence (Acts 19:8–10; 20:31) to c. 52–55/57; the last journey to Jerusalem with the collection c. 57 (Pentecost, Acts 20:16); two years’ custody at Caesarea under Felix to c. 57–59; the voyage, wintering at Malta, and arrival in Rome c. 60; “two whole years” of open custody to c. 62 (Acts 28:30); death under Nero between 64 and 68. Every one of these figures except the anchor is a reconstruction (class K/S), and honest rivals exist at nearly every joint: the crucifixion in 30 or 33; the council as early as 47 or as late as 51; Festus’s accession anywhere from 55 to 60, dragging the Caesarea–Rome block with it; and a minority of modern reconstructions redistributes the Acts journeys around the letters’ own hints far more radically. The detailed table in the terminal appendix states each event with its basis and its status; the narrative that follows uses the conventional frame just derived, always as a frame and never as data.

Joint	Conventional	Alternatives	What moves it
Crucifixion of Jesus	30 or 33	both defended	astronomy of Nisan 14; every early Pauline date shifts with it
Revelation near Damascus	c. 33–36	as early as 31	whether Gal 1–2’s 3 + 14 years are consecutive or concurrent
Jerusalem council	c. 48–49	c. 47 to 51	identification of Gal 2 with Acts 15 or Acts 11; length of the first journey
Corinth (first stay)	c. 50–52	49–51 or 51–53	Gallio’s year (51–52 vs. 52–53); where the hearing fell within it
Festus succeeds Felix	c. 59	55–60	thin Roman evidence; drags Caesarea, the voyage, and the Roman custody with it
Death	67–68 (chronicle tradition)	64 (persecution’s first wave)	substance of the release/second-arrest tradition

6 The Missionary Journeys

Acts organizes Paul’s Aegean-and-Anatolian career into three great circuits radiating from Antioch. The letters know nothing of this tidy scheme—they reveal a man in nearly constant motion, with plans that changed under pressure (2 Cor 1:15–17)—and Acts’ three journeys should be held as Luke’s true-to-life but authorial arrangement, not as Paul’s own itinerary-book. Within that caution, the outline the two witnesses share is firm: from Antioch through Cyprus and south-central Asia Minor; then across to Macedonia and Achaia; then a long residence at Ephesus; with Jerusalem at the hinge points.

6.1 Antioch, the sending church

Antioch on the Orontes, third city of the empire, is where the mixed mission first became institutional: refugees of the Stephen persecution preached there to Greeks as well as Jews, Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to inspect, fetched Saul from Tarsus, and for “a whole year” they taught “a great multitude, so that at Antioch the disciples were first named Christians” (Acts 11:26). It was the Antiochene assembly, Acts says, that heard the call—“the Holy Ghost said to them: Separate me Saul and Barnabas, for the work whereunto I have taken them” (13:2)—and released the two with fasting and imposition of hands. Paul’s letters confirm Antioch’s centrality from the other direction: it is the scene of his confrontation with Cephas (Gal 2:11), which presupposes that it was his own base and that its table-practice mattered to everyone.

6.2 The first journey: Cyprus and Galatia (c. 46–48)

The first circuit (Acts 13–14) runs Seleucia–Cyprus (Salamis to Paphos, where the proconsul Sergius Paulus believes and the narrative quietly switches from “Saul” to “Paul,” 13:9–12)—Perga—Antioch of Pisidia—Iconium—Lystra—Derbe, and back through the same cities to the Syrian Antioch. Two scenes carry the theology. At Pisidian Antioch, after the synagogue sermon and its rejection: “To you it behoved us first to speak the word of God: but because you reject it... behold we turn to the Gentiles” (13:46)—the pattern, synagogue first, then the nations, that Acts will repeat in city after city and that Paul states as principle: “to the Jew first, and to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). At Lystra, after a healing, the crowds cry “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men,” calling Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury “because he was chief speaker” (14:10–11)—and then, swayed by rivals, stone Paul and drag him out “thinking him to be dead” (14:18). The letters supply the flat corroboration: “once I was stoned” (2 Cor 11:25); “I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body” (Gal 6:17). Whether the churches of this circuit (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, in the Roman province Galatia) are the addressees of the letter to the Galatians—the “South Galatian” hypothesis—or whether that letter went to ethnic Galatia further north, visited later (Acts 16:6; 18:23), is a standing critical question that this study leaves open; it affects the letter’s date by several years but not the shape of the life.

6.3 The pattern of the mission

Before the second circuit, the pattern deserves statement, because it, and not any single journey, is the historical achievement. Paul worked cities, not countryside—provincial capitals and ports on the Roman roads and sea lanes. He arrived at the synagogue, where there were Scriptures, Gentile sympathizers, and a hearing; he stayed with, and worked alongside, tradespeople like Aquila and Priscilla, “working night and day, lest we should be chargeable to any of you” (1 Thess 2:9); assemblies met in households; and when he moved on he left behind co-workers and wrote letters. The mission was corporate throughout: Barnabas, Silvanus/Silas, Timothy, Titus, Luke and the “we”-narrator, Apollos; the deacon Phoebe, “our sister, who is in the ministry of the church, that is in Cenchrae” (Rom 16:1); Prisca ranked with her husband; Lydia the purple-dealer at Philippi (Acts 16:14–15); Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Aristarchus, Mark, “I Tertius, who wrote this epistle” (Rom 16:22). Romans 16 alone greets some two dozen named persons, a third of them women. Paul defended the whole apparatus as apostolic right freely waived—“Have we not power to carry about a woman, a sister, as well as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5)—and stated its governing flexibility as principle: “I became to the Jews, a Jew, that I might gain the Jews... I became all things to all men, that I might save all” (1 Cor 9:20, 22). The signs and sufferings were equally structural: “Of the Jews five times did I receive forty stripes, save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck... in perils of robbers... in perils from false brethren” (2 Cor 11:24–26)—a catalogue, written before Acts, that guarantees how much traveling and how much violence the tidy circuits compress.

6.4 The second journey: into Macedonia and Achaia (c. 49–52)

After the council and a falling-out with Barnabas over Mark (Acts 15:37–40), Paul took Silas overland through Syria, Cilicia, and the first-journey churches, adding Timothy at Lystra. Acts then narrates the turn of the mission into Europe with a vision at Troas: “a man of Macedonia standing and beseeching him... Pass over into Macedonia, and help us” (16:9)—and the narrative shifts into “we.” At Philippi, a Roman colony, the first named European converts: Lydia and her household, a slave-girl freed of a divining spirit, the jailer; also flogging and the stocks, answered the next morning with citizenship: “They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men that are Romans” (16:37). At Thessalonica, weeks of synagogue argument, a riot, and a night evacuation; 1 Thessalonians, written months later from Corinth, remembers the sequel from inside: “you turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:9). Beroea received the word eagerly; Athens heard the Areopagus speech, Luke’s masterpiece of gospel-to-Greeks—“I found an altar also, on which was written: To the unknown God. What therefore you worship, without knowing it, that I preach to you” (17:23)—and answered mostly with irony (“some indeed mocked,” 17:32), though “Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris” believed (17:34). Benedict XVI’s chronology catechesis rightly treats the scene as programmatic: “the discourse of the Areopagus... is the model of how to translate the Gospel into Greek culture, of how to make Greeks understand that this God of the Christians and Jews was not a God foreign to their culture but the unknown God they were awaiting” (27 August 2008). Then Corinth: eighteen months (18:11), the trade with Aquila and Priscilla, the household baptisms, the hearing before Gallio that anchors the chronology, and departure by Cenchrae “into Syria” (18:18). The Thessalonian correspondence belongs in

this window; its burning question—the fate of believers who die before the Lord’s coming—received the answer that “the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first” (1 Thess 4:15, DR numbering).

6.5 The third journey: Ephesus and the crisis years (c. 52–57)

The last circuit is really a residence: Ephesus, metropolis of Asia, for “three months” in the synagogue, then two years in the hall of Tyrannus, “so that all they who dwelt in Asia, heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:8–10); Paul himself: “I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and evident is opened unto me: and many adversaries” (1 Cor 16:8–9). From Ephesus he governed his Aegean churches by courier and letter: the Corinthian correspondence (at least four letters, of which two survive whole), the fight with Corinth that included a “painful visit” and a letter written “with many tears” (2 Cor 2:1–4), and, on the most common judgments, Galatians and perhaps the captivity notes that some scholars assign to an unrecorded Ephesian imprisonment—Paul does say “I die daily” and that he “fought with beasts at Ephesus” (1 Cor 15:31–32, almost certainly figurative), and 2 Corinthians 1:8–10 recalls a mortal danger in Asia that Acts does not narrate. Acts instead gives the silversmiths’ riot—“Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (19:28)—as the climax and departure-spring. Then Macedonia, three months in Greece (Corinth, where Romans was written commending Phoebe of Cenchrae, Rom 16:1), and the deliberate last journey: back through Macedonia and Troas, the farewell at Miletus to the Ephesian elders with its unique unwritten saying of Jesus, “It is a more blessed thing to give, rather than to receive” (Acts 20:35), and on toward Jerusalem for Pentecost with the collection—against every warning: “I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13).

The itineraries in brief (Acts’ framework; DR spellings, modern names where they differ)

First journey (Acts 13–14, c. 46–48): Antioch — Seleucia — Cyprus (Salamis, Paphos) — Perga — Antioch of Pisidia — Iconium — Lystra — Derbe — back through the same cities — Attalia — Antioch.

Second journey (Acts 15:40–18:22, c. 49–52): Antioch — Syria and Cilicia — Derbe, Lystra — Phrygia and Galatia — Troas — Neapolis — Philippi — Thessalonica — Beroea — Athens — Corinth (eighteen months) — Cenchrae — Ephesus (in passing) — Caesarea — [Jerusalem] — Antioch.

Third journey (Acts 18:23–21:16, c. 52–57): Antioch — Galatia and Phrygia — Ephesus (about three years) — Macedonia — Greece/Corinth (three months) — Philippi — Troas — Assos — Mitylene — Miletus — Coos, Rhodes, Patara — Tyre — Ptolemais — Caesarea — Jerusalem.

Voyage in custody (Acts 27–28, c. 59–60): Caesarea — Sidon — the Lycian coast (Myra; DR “Lystra”) — Good-havens, Crete — storm — Malta (three months) — Syracuse (Syracuse) — Rhegium — Puteoli — Appii Forum and the Three Taverns — Rome.

7 Jerusalem, Antioch, and the Collection

7.1 The question

The success of the Gentile mission forced the first structural decision of Christian history: must Gentile believers be circumcised and take on the law of Moses? Two first-rank witnesses describe the resolution, one a participant writing within a decade, one a narrator writing a generation later, and they must be heard separately before being related.

7.2 Paul’s account (Galatians 2:1–10)

“Then, after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. And I went up according to revelation” (Gal 2:1–2). He laid “the gospel, which I preach among the Gentiles” privately before “them who seemed to be some thing”; the uncircumcised Titus was not compelled; “false brethren” who pressed for it were resisted “that the truth of the gospel might continue with you”; and the outcome was a division of labor sealed in fellowship: “James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision: only that we should be mindful of the poor: which same thing also I was careful to do” (Gal 2:9–10). Nothing about a public assembly; nothing about a decree; one condition only, the poor.

7.3 Luke's account (Acts 15)

Acts stages a public council at Jerusalem, c. 48–49. Peter appeals to the Cornelius precedent—God “put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith,” so why “put a yoke upon the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?” (15:9–10); Paul and Barnabas report their signs; James rules, and a letter goes out with the famous formula “For it hath seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay no further burden upon you than these necessary things”: abstention from idol-meat, blood, things strangled, and fornication (15:28–29). Whether Galatians 2 and Acts 15 describe the same meeting is the classic problem already flagged: the sequence-count of Jerusalem visits differs (Acts’ famine visit, 11:29–30, has no clear place in Galatians’ sworn list), and Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 8–10 adjudicates idol-meat at length, never cites the decree there or anywhere. The majority identification (Gal 2 = Acts 15, with the decree either a later development or a Lukan consolidation) and the minority one (Gal 2 = Acts 11, Galatians written before the council) are both live; this study reports the substance both witnesses share—circumcision was not imposed on Gentile converts, and the mission was formally acknowledged—and leaves the correspondence of the meetings unresolved.

7.4 The Antioch incident

The agreement did not settle table-fellowship, and the sequel is preserved only because Paul told the Galatians: “But when Cephas was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that some came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision. And to his dissimulation the rest of the Jews consented, so that Barnabas also was led by them into that dissimulation” (Gal 2:11–13). Paul’s public rebuke—“If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles. . . how dost thou compel the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” (2:14)—is the last thing the record says about him and Peter face to face. Whether Paul carried the room, he does not say—an eloquent silence, given that he is citing the scene as precedent; and the observable facts that Acts omits the clash entirely, that Paul soon traveled without Barnabas (Acts 15:39 gives the different, Mark quarrel), and that Antioch fades from his letters, suggest a costly breach. Later tradition remembered the two apostles jointly and liturgically at Rome; the historical record of their relationship honestly ends in an unresolved argument about lunch—which was, of course, an argument about whether the one church would remain one.

7.5 The collection for the poor

The single condition of Galatians 2:10 became one of the great logistical projects of Paul’s life: a collection among the Gentile churches for the Jerusalem poor, pursued across the third-journey letters—“Now concerning the collections that are made for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, so do ye also. On the first day of the week let every one of you put apart with himself” (1 Cor 16:1–2); two whole chapters of fundraising theology in 2 Corinthians 8–9, grounded in Christ, “that being rich he became poor, for your sakes” (8:9); and the plan stated to Rome: “But now I shall go to Jerusalem, to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a contribution for the poor of the saints that are in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:25–26). For Paul the money was communion made visible: the nations repaying a spiritual debt to Israel (Rom 15:27), and proof, laid at the mother church’s feet, that the uncircumcised churches were churches. Whether it was accepted, no source says: Acts, which knows delegates and alms (24:17), never narrates the delivery, and the letters stop. The last certain act of Paul’s free life was carrying Gentile money to Jerusalem; its reception is unknown, and the arrest followed within days.

8 The Letters and Their Occasions

Paul’s letters were working instruments—a missionary’s remote voice, “the salutation of Paul with my own hand” (2 Thess 3:17) closing text normally dictated to a secretary (“I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you,” Rom 16:22). Each of the seven undisputed letters has a recoverable occasion, and sketching them in probable order is the nearest thing the sources allow to a diary of the 50s. Dates below use the Gallio frame and are approximate throughout.

8.1 The seven, in probable order

1 Thessalonians (Corinth, c. 50–51): the earliest surviving Christian document. Torn from a weeks-old church by riot, Paul had sent Timothy back and writes on his return: relief, affection (“as if a nurse should cherish her children,” 1 Thess 2:7), and answers to the crisis of members who had died before the Lord’s return—“the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first” (4:15, DR numbering).

Galatians (Ephesus or earlier; c. 48–55 depending on the destination question): white-hot polemic against missionaries persuading his Gentile converts to accept circumcision. It contains no thanksgiving, one anathema (1:8–9), the autobiography of chapters 1–2 on which all Pauline chronology rests, and the thesis that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ (2:16).

1 Corinthians (Ephesus, c. 53–55): answers to a delegation’s report and a letter from a church splintering over teachers (“I am of Cephas,” 1:12), sexual scandal, lawsuits, idol-meat, worship, and resurrection; it preserves the eucharistic tradition “received of the Lord” (11:23–25) and the appearance-creed (15:3–8), the two oldest fixed formulas of Christian faith.

2 Corinthians (Macedonia, c. 55–56): the aftermath of a failed visit and a tearful letter (2:1–4), part reconciliation, part fund-raising (chs. 8–9), part savage self-defense against “false apostles”—the fool’s speech with its catalogue of sufferings (11:21–33) and the thorn: “there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me” (12:7). Its abrupt seams (chs. 10–13) convince many scholars it splices two or more letters; the question is noted and left open.

Romans (Corinth, c. 57): the longest and most systematic letter, written to a church he had never visited, to prepare his Spanish mission (“When I shall begin to take my journey into Spain, I hope that as I pass, I shall see you,” 15:24) and to set out his gospel—“the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and to the Greek” (1:16)—with its anguished center on Israel: “I also am an Israelite” (11:1).

Philippians (from prison—Rome, Caesarea, or an Ephesian custody; c. 55–62): thanks to his first European church for a gift carried by Epaphroditus, written in chains that “are made manifest in Christ, in all the court” (1:13), with its hymn of the self-emptying Christ (2:6–11) and its serenity: “For to me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain” (1:21).

Philemon (same custody as Philippians): a personal note to a householder of the Colossae circle about his slave Onesimus, now converted (“my son, whom I have begotten in my bands,” v. 10), sent back with the request to receive him “not now as a servant, but instead of a servant, a most dear brother” (v. 16). Paul works by entreaty—“as Paul an old man, and now a prisoner” (v. 9)—not decree; the letter neither attacks nor blesses the institution of slavery, and its afterlife in both abolitionist and pro-slavery argument belongs to reception history, not to the first century.

8.2 What the letters preach: the gospel in Paul’s own summaries

A biography owes at least the letters’ own summaries of their message, because the message is what the life was spent on. Paul himself reduces it to received formula: “For I delivered unto you first of all, which I also received: how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures: and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures” and was seen—by Cephas, the eleven, five hundred at once, James, all the apostles, “and last of all . . . by me” (1 Cor 15:3–8). Its scandal he owns: “we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumblingblock, and unto the Gentiles foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23). Its consequence for the nations is the thesis of Galatians and Romans: “man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16); the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Its community is a body with many members and one Spirit (1 Cor 12), sustained by the supper tradition “received of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:23–25); its horizon is resurrection and the coming of the Lord, before which “the dead who are in Christ, shall rise first” (1 Thess 4:15); its ethic is love, without which tongues, prophecy, and knowledge are nothing (1 Cor 13). Its personal form is the exchange he never tires of stating—“being rich he became poor, for your sakes” (2 Cor 8:9)—and its cost is written on him: “I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in my body” (Gal 6:17). Systematizing this into a Pauline theology, and adjudicating its confessional readings, lies beyond a biography; the sentences above are the man’s own.

8.3 The disputed six, in brief

2 **Thessalonians** corrects end-time panic (“as if the day of the Lord were at hand,” 2:2); its heavy verbal dependence on 1 Thessalonians divides critics between early authenticity and later imitation. **Colossians** and **Ephesians** are the twin cosmic letters— more than a third of Colossians’ vocabulary recurs in Ephesians, as Benedict XVI noted in catechesis (14 January 2009)—with a developed Christology of the Church as body and the distinctive household codes; Colossians presents as from prison with Ephesian-circle names shared with Philemon, Ephesians as the encyclical of “Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for you Gentiles” (3:1). The **Pastorals** (1–2 Timothy, Titus) organize churches through delegates—“I desired thee to remain at Ephesus” (1 Tim 1:3), Titus in Crete, winter at Nicopolis (Ti 3:12)—and 2 Timothy gives the testament: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (4:7). On the modern critical balance reported in the sources section, this study cites the Pastorals’ travel data only under the second-imprisonment question below, never as independent chronology. **Hebrews**, anonymous, was received as Pauline in much of the East long before the West agreed; it is evidence for the gravitational pull of Paul’s name, not for his life.

8.4 The corpus at a glance

Letter	Date and place (approx.)	Occasion	Authorship status
1 Thess	c. 50–51, Corinth	after the flight from Thessalonica; the dead in Christ	undisputed
Gal	c. 48–55, place open	circumcision crisis; defense of gospel and call	undisputed
1 Cor	c. 53–55, Ephesus	factions, scandals, worship, resurrection	undisputed
2 Cor	c. 55–56, Macedonia	reconciliation after crisis; collection; “false apostles”	undisputed; unity debated
Rom	c. 57, Corinth	self-introduction to Rome; Spain; Israel	undisputed
Phil	c. 55–62, prison (Ephesus? Caesarea? Rome?)	thanks for a gift; joy in chains	undisputed
Phlm	with Phil	Onesimus returned as brother	undisputed
2 Thess	c. 51 or later	eschatological panic	disputed (least)
Col	c. 60s or later	cosmic Christ; household code	disputed
Eph	c. 60s–80s	circular summa of the Pauline gospel	disputed (more)
1–2 Tim, Ti	c. 60s or c. 80–100	church order through delegates; testament	disputed (most; “Pauline School” majority view)
Heb	before 96 (used by 1 Clem.)	anonymous homily	non-Pauline by ancient and modern consent; canonical

9 Arrest, Caesarea, and the Voyage to Rome

9.1 The arrest in the temple (c. 57)

From the arrival in Jerusalem to the arrival in Rome the letters fall silent (unless Philippians and Philemon belong here), and Acts 21–28 becomes the only narrative—told largely in the “we”-voice at its beginning and end, detailed, legally literate, and openly designed to show Paul innocent before every tribunal that heard him. On its account: Paul, received by James and the elders, undertook a temple purification to demonstrate his own observance; Jews from Asia raised the cry that he had profaned the temple; a lynching was interrupted by the tribune of the Antonia garrison, and the prisoner—mistaken for an Egyptian insurgent—was allowed a speech to the crowd (Acts 22, the second Damascus telling), claimed his citizenship to avoid the scourge (“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a

Roman, and uncondemned?,” 22:25), divided the Sanhedrin with the resurrection claim (“I am a Pharisee, the son of Pharisees,” 23:6), and, after a murder plot, was transferred by night under heavy escort to the governor at Caesarea.

9.2 Caesarea: Felix, Festus, Agrippa (c. 57–59)

Before Felix, the prosecution’s advocate framed the charge in imperial terms—sedition, sect-leadership, temple profanation (24:5–6). Paul’s defense included the one autobiographical note Acts gives of the collection: “Now after many years, I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings, and vows” (24:17). Felix, “hoping also withal, that money should be given him” (24:26), simply left the case open: “But when two years were ended, Felix had for successor Portius Festus. And Felix being willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound” (24:27). Festus, pressed to move the trial to Jerusalem, received instead the appeal that decided everything: “I appeal to Caesar. . . Hast thou appealed to Caesar? To Caesar shalt thou go” (25:11–12). Before Festus and the visiting Herod Agrippa II Paul gave the third Damascus telling; Agrippa’s reply—“In a little thou persuadest me to become a Christian” (26:28)—and verdict—“This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed to Caesar” (26:32)—close the Judean file with Luke’s double point: the case was empty, and the road to Rome was legally Paul’s own choice.

9.3 The voyage and shipwreck (c. 59–60)

The sea narrative of Acts 27–28 is the most detailed voyage account surviving from antiquity: the coasting ship from Caesarea, the transfer on the Lycian coast (Myra in the Greek text; the Vulgate and Douay read “Lystra, which is in Lycia,” 27:5) to an Alexandrian grain ship, the slow beat to Crete, the decision against wintering advice, the fourteen-day drift in the northeaster, soundings, the angel in the night—“Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar” (27:24)—the run ashore on Malta, the viper, the three months’ wintering, and the last leg by way of Syracuse and Puteoli, where “finding brethren, we were desired to tarry with them” (28:14): Christians already in Italy before Paul. Roman believers walked out to meet the prisoner “as far as Appii Forum, and the Three Taverns: whom when Paul saw, he gave thanks to God, and took courage” (28:15).

9.4 Rome: two whole years, and an open ending

“And when we were come to Rome, Paul was suffered to dwell by himself, with a soldier that kept him” (28:16). Acts ends its whole two-volume work on this held breath: “And he remained two whole years in his own hired lodging; and he received all that came in to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, without prohibition” (28:30–31). No verdict, no release, no death. Why Luke stops there—ignorance, a date of writing before the outcome, or design (the gospel has reached the capital “without prohibition”; the biography of Paul was never his subject)—is unresolved. Everything after Acts 28:31 rests on the letters’ hints and on tradition, and is weighed in the next section.

10 The End: Death at Rome

10.1 What the first witnesses say

No New Testament text narrates Paul’s death. The earliest statement of it comes from the church of Rome itself, in the letter to Corinth known as 1 Clement, conventionally dated c. 95–96—one generation after the event, from the city where it happened. Among the “most recent spiritual heroes” persecuted “through envy”:

“Owing to envy, Paul also obtained the reward of patient endurance, after being seven times thrown into captivity, compelled to flee, and stoned. After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world, and come to the extreme limit of the west, and suffered martyrdom under the prefects. Thus was he removed from the world, and went into the holy place, having proved himself a striking example of patience” (1 Clem. 5).

Every clause matters. “Seven times thrown into captivity” exceeds anything Acts narrates—independent memory, or rhetoric, of a much-arrested man. “Suffered martyrdom under the prefects” places the death under Roman authority;

paired, in the same breath, with Peter and with “a great multitude of the elect” who suffered with them, the natural referent is Nero’s Roman persecution after the fire of 64, when, as Tacitus records, “an immense multitude was convicted” and mocked, burned, and crucified (*Annals* 15.44). Within another generation the pairing is assumed: Ignatius of Antioch, en route to his own death, tells the Romans, “I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you” (*Romans* 4), and tells the Ephesians they are “initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred, the deservedly most happy” (*Ephesians* 12). Polycarp holds up “the blessed and glorified Paul,” with Ignatius and others, among those now “in their due place in the presence of the Lord, with whom also they suffered” (*Philippians* 3; 9). By c. 170 Dionysius of Corinth says Peter and Paul “taught together in like manner in Italy, and suffered martyrdom at the same time”; c. 200 the Roman presbyter Gaius points to the monuments themselves—“if you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian way, you will find the trophies of those who laid the foundations of this church”—and Eusebius, who preserves both, states the received sum: “It is, therefore, recorded that Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified under Nero” (*Church History* 2.25.5–8; cf. 3.1.1, from Origen). The chain is unbroken, geographically Roman, and unrivaled: no other city ever claimed Paul’s death or grave. Martyrdom at Rome under Nero is as close to certain as an unnarrated first-century event can be. The mode—the sword—is stated by Tertullian c. 200 (Rome, “where Paul wins his crown in a death like John’s,” i.e. the Baptist’s, *Prescription* 36) and by the roughly contemporary *Acts of Paul*; it fits the citizen of Acts, and no ancient source contradicts it.

10.2 “The extreme limit of the west” and the Spanish question

Did Paul reach Spain? He intended to: “When I shall begin to take my journey into Spain, I hope that as I pass, I shall see you. . . I will come by you into Spain” (Rom 15:24, 28). Two early texts can be read as saying he did. 1 Clement’s “extreme limit of the west” would most naturally mean Spain to a Roman writer—unless it is generous rhetoric for Rome itself, written as it is in Rome, in a sentence built of superlatives; the phrase is genuinely ambiguous, and Benedict XVI’s catechesis states the case exactly: “Whether this is a reference to a voyage in Spain undertaken by Paul is open to discussion. There is no certainty on it” (General Audience, 4 February 2009). The Muratorian fragment, listing what Luke omitted, names “the passion of Peter, and also of the journey of Paul, when he went from the city—Rome—to Spain”: a Roman document of (conventionally) c. 170–200 that assumes the journey—or assumes Romans 15 fulfilled. Later tradition kept the trip alive because it needed it: Eusebius reports—as report (“it is said”)—that after the two years of Acts “the apostle was sent again upon the ministry of preaching, and that upon coming to the same city a second time he suffered martyrdom” (*Church History* 2.22), reading 2 Timothy’s “At my first answer no man stood with me. . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim 4:16–17) as the record of a first, survived trial; Jerome hardens report into fact: “Paul was dismissed by Nero, that the gospel of Christ might be preached also in the West” (*De viris illustribus* 5). The sober balance: intention certain; execution unproven; a release c. 62, a western (and/or renewed eastern, so the Pastorals’ itineraries) ministry, and a second Roman arrest form a coherent, early-attested, and unverifiable reconstruction. The rival reading—one continuous imprisonment from Acts 28 to death, with 1 Clement’s “limit of the west” as Rome—is equally coherent. This study asserts neither.

10.3 The year and the day

The persecution gives the floor date of 64. The ceiling is Nero’s death in June 68. Within that window the ancient chronographic tradition placed Paul late: Jerome, “in the fourteenth year of Nero on the same day with Peter, he was beheaded at Rome for Christ’s sake and was buried in the Ostian way” (*De viris illustribus* 5)—i.e. 67/68; the 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia collects the variants (Epiphanius Nero’s twelfth year, Euthalius the thirteenth, Jerome the fourteenth). “On the same day with Peter” is calendar piety more than chronology: the oldest witness to the pairing, Dionysius, says only “at the same time” (Greek *kata ton auton kairon*, which need mean no more than “about the same time”), and 29 June, the joint feast, is first attested as a Roman cult date in the mid-third century, not as anyone’s death date. “Between 64 and 68, probably toward the later years if the two-imprisonment tradition has substance,” is all the evidence yields; Benedict XVI’s martyrdom catechesis states the same range on the same grounds. The scene of the beheading—at the Aquae Salviae, south of the Ostian road—enters the record only in late martyrdom romances, and belongs with the legends below.

11 The Tomb: Ostian Way, Basilica, Sarcophagus

11.1 Gaius's trophy and the burial tradition

The burial tradition is as old, and as Roman, as the death tradition, and it has never moved. Gaius, c. 200: the “trophies of the apostles” stand “at the Vatican” and “on the Ostian way” (via Eusebius, *Church History* 2.25.7)—a monument one could walk out and see, in a suburban cemetery zone along the road to Ostia, within about 130 years of the death. Jerome, 392: “buried in the Ostian way” (*De viris illustribus* 5). The later romances add the landowner: burial “on the estate of Lucina,” a Christian matron (so the *Passion of Paul* of Pseudo-Abdias, fourth century, as summarized in Benedict XVI’s catechesis of 4 February 2009). The current official presentation of the basilica makes the same claims in the same order, adding the archaeological observation that the site lay in a genuine pagan-and-Christian necropolis, and that a citizen’s body could lawfully receive such a burial (“The Tomb of the Apostle,” basilica website via vatican.va, cited in the References).

11.2 From memorial to basilica

Constantine enclosed the memorial in a first church—consecrated, by the official account, on 18 November 324 by Pope Sylvester I; because the site was cramped between road and river, the emperors Valentinian II, Theodosius, and Arcadius replaced it from 386 with the immense five-aisled “basilica of the three emperors” (consecrated 395), which, uniquely among Rome’s great churches, preserved its ancient form until modern times. On the night of 15–16 July 1823 fire destroyed it almost entirely; the rebuilt basilica, consecrated by Pius IX on 10 December 1854, reproduces the old plan, and the destruction-and-rebuilding is the reason the shrine’s continuity had to be re-demonstrated archaeologically rather than simply seen. Under the papal altar a marble slab of the fourth–fifth century, found bearing the inscription PAULO APOSTOLO MART (“to Paul, apostle and martyr”), lies 1.37 m below the present altar table, pierced by holes—one of them connected by a small pipe to the tomb below, the ancient arrangement for lowering cloths and pouring perfumes to touch the grave (basilica presentation, as above).

11.3 The sarcophagus examined, 2002–2009

Beneath the slab stands a massive stone sarcophagus (2.55 m long by 1.25 by 0.97, per the official presentation), brought back to light in excavations conducted by Vatican archaeologists between 2002 and 2006, when a window was opened below the altar so that pilgrims can now see the tomb. During the Pauline Year the Holy See authorized a minimally invasive scientific examination, and Benedict XVI announced its results in the closing homily, at the tomb, on 28 June 2009:

“A tiny hole was drilled in the sarcophagus, which in so many centuries had never been opened, in order to insert a special probe which revealed traces of a precious purple-coloured linen fabric, with a design in gold leaf, and a blue fabric with linen threads. Grains of red incense and protein and chalk substances were also found. In addition, minute fragments of bone were sent for carbon-14 testing by experts unaware of their provenance. The fragments proved to belong to someone who had lived between the first and second centuries. This would seem to confirm the unanimous and undisputed tradition which claims that these are the mortal remains of the Apostle Paul” (Homily, Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, 28 June 2009).

The evidential ceiling must be stated with the announcement. What the 2009 report establishes, at the reported level, is that the venerated sarcophagus contains ancient burial furnishings and human remains radiocarbon-consistent with a first–second-century death —i.e., that the tomb is not a medieval confection. Radiocarbon cannot identify a person; no full laboratory publication, calibration data, or osteological study was located by this research; and the pope’s own verb is “would seem to confirm.” The identification of the remains as Paul’s rests, exactly as before 2009, on the continuity of the site tradition from Gaius backward toward the burial—early, unrivaled, and unprovable. This study affirms the tradition at that ceiling and no higher.

12 Legends and Later Images

The historical Paul ends at the Ostian grave; the remembered Paul was just beginning. The legends deserve a chapter of their own—not to be believed, but because they carried his image for centuries and still supply, unlabeled, much of what people think they know about him.

12.1 The *Acts of Paul* and Thecla

The great source is the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, a novelistic cycle that Tertullian says was “composed shortly before his time in honour of Paul by a presbyter of Asia, who was convicted of the imposture and degraded from his office”—hence datable c. 160, an “orthodox Christian” author by M. R. James’s judgment, whose 1924 translation is used here. Its most famous episode is Thecla of Iconium: a betrothed virgin who “sat at the window hard by, and hearkened night and day unto the word concerning chastity which was spoken by Paul,” broke her engagement, was condemned to the fire and then to the beasts, baptized herself in the arena tank—“In the name of Jesus Christ do I baptize myself on the last day”—was spared, and was sent out by Paul with the commission “Go, and teach the word of God.” The text closes her life where her later cult flourished: “she departed unto Seleucia, and after she had enlightened many with the word of God, she slept a good sleep.” Thecla became one of the most beloved saints of the early church; her story is second-century romance, not first-century record, and its picture of Paul as preacher of radical celibacy is the author’s ascetic program wearing the apostle’s cloak—but it is also the earliest surviving evidence of how powerfully Paul’s memory could authorize a woman’s ministry in some second-century circles.

12.2 The face of Paul

The same Thecla narrative opens with the only ancient physical description of the apostle, given to Onesiphorus, who waits by the highway for a man he has never seen: “And he saw Paul coming, a man little of stature, thin-haired upon the head, crooked in the legs, of good state of body, with eyebrows joining, and nose somewhat hooked, full of grace: for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel.” This is literature, not portraiture—a century removed from its subject, and possibly a rhetorical ideal (the description is not unflattering by ancient physiognomic conventions). But it is the ancestor of the entire iconographic type—the small, bald, bearded, beetle-browed Paul of the catacomb frescoes, mosaics, and icons, with the sword of his martyrdom as attribute—and it may embroider a genuine memory; Paul’s opponents at Corinth, after all, said “his bodily presence is weak” (2 Cor 10:10). Portraits were in circulation early: Eusebius, writing before 340, attests that “the likenesses of his apostles Paul and Peter, and of Christ himself, are preserved in paintings,” a practice he attributes to converted Gentile habits of honoring benefactors (*Church History* 7.18). Iconography records reception, not appearance. Status of the description: L, early legend possibly preserving a physical reminiscence, unverifiable.

12.3 The martyrdom legend: milk, and the preaching corpse

The *Acts of Paul* also supplies the earliest martyrdom narrative, and its flavor should be tasted. Nero, alarmed by the Christians in his own household, “commanded all the prisoners to be burned with fire, but Paul to be beheaded after the law of the Romans.” At the block, “Paul stood with his face to the east and lifted up his hands unto heaven and prayed a long time. . . and then stretched forth his neck without speaking. And when the executioner (speculator) struck off his head, milk spurted upon the cloak of the soldier.” The dead apostle then appears to Nero—“Caesar, behold, I, Paul, the soldier of God, am not dead, but live in my God”—and to the believing officers at his grave. The milk (purity, or the nurse-image Paul used of himself) is symbol, not coroner’s report; the narrative’s value is double: it fixes beheading as the received mode by c. 160, and it shows the legend already outrunning the history. The fifth-century *Acts of Peter and Paul* of Pseudo-Marcellus added the local etiology: the severed head bounded three times, and at each touch a spring broke out—the *Tre Fontane*, “three fountains,” at the *Aquae Salviae*, where a monastery and church stand to this day. Benedict XVI’s catechesis labels this element frankly “the most legendary” of the traditions (4 February 2009); the site itself, as the traditional scene of the execution, is venerable but unverifiable.

12.4 Paul and Seneca

By the fourth century cultured Christians could read a correspondence between Paul and his exact contemporary Seneca—brother of the very Gallio of Acts 18. Jerome, who wanted the Stoic on his shelf, admits the letters got Seneca into his catalogue of Christian writers: “I should not place him in the category of saints were it not that those Epistles of Paul to Seneca and Seneca to Paul, which are read by many, provoke me” (*De viris illustribus* 12). The fourteen Latin letters are a late, artless forgery, doubted since the Renaissance and defended by no one; their interest is what they witness: the hunger, already ancient, to seat the tent-maker among the philosophers.

12.5 Grading the strata

The pattern across all these traditions is regular and worth stating as method: the closer to the man, the sparer the record; the further away, the richer. First-century sources give no portrait, no execution scene, no springs, no philosophical correspondence; the second century supplies face and martyrdom narrative; the fourth and fifth supply topography and famous friends. Each layer is evidence—for its own age’s devotion, for the cult’s geography, for iconography—and none of it may be passed backward as biography. The principal items, graded:

Tradition	Earliest located witness	Later reception	Status
Martyrdom at Rome under Nero	1 Clem. 5 (c. 95–96)	universal; no rival claim	early, convergent; morally certain (E/S)
Death by beheading	<i>Acts of Paul</i> (c. 160); Tertullian, <i>Praescr.</i> 36 (c. 200)	universal; the sword as attribute	early tradition, not contemporary; coheres with citizenship (E/L)
Same day as Peter	Jerome, <i>De viris</i> 5 (392); Dionysius c. 170 says only “at the same time”	joint feast, 29 June	calendar piety; not chronology (E/L)
Journey to Spain	Rom 15:24 (intention); Muratorian fragment (assumes it); 1 Clem. 5 (ambiguous “limit of the west”)	release tradition via Eusebius, Jerome	intention certain; execution unproven (A/E)
Ostian burial; Lucina’s estate	Gaius c. 200 (the trophy); Pseudo-Abdias (4th c.) for Lucina	basilica; continuous shrine	site tradition early and unrivaled; detail legendary (E/L/M)
Aquae Salviae / Tre Fontane; three springs	Pseudo-Marcellus (5th c.)	monastery and church at the site	“most legendary” (Benedict XVI); etiological (L)
The physical description	<i>Acts of Paul</i> (c. 160)	whole iconographic type; paintings attested by Eusebius, HE 7.18	literary; possibly reminiscent; unverifiable (L)
Thecla	<i>Acts of Paul</i> (c. 160)	major early cult (Seleucia)	romance; evidence of reception, not of Paul (L)
Milk at the beheading; apparition to Nero	<i>Acts of Paul</i> martyrdom	devotional retellings	symbolic legend (L)
Seneca correspondence	the forged letters; Jerome, <i>De viris</i> 12 (392) attests their circulation	medieval popularity	forgery by common consent (L)
Sarcophagus remains are Paul’s	site tradition from Gaius; probe results announced 28 June 2009	official shrine claim	consistent, not probative; “would seem to confirm” (M/K)

13 Reception: Canon, Praise, and Cult

13.1 The letters become Scripture

Paul's afterlife began as a book. Within his own century the letters were being collected, copied, and read across the churches: 1 Clement tells Corinth, "Take up the epistle of the blessed Apostle Paul," recalling what "he wrote to you. . . concerning himself, and Cephas, and Apollos" (1 Clem. 47), and itself echoes Hebrews; Ignatius tells the Ephesians that Paul "in all his Epistles makes mention of you" (*Ephesians* 12); Polycarp reminds the Philippians that "when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up" (*Philippians* 3). Most remarkably, 2 Peter already ranks the collection with Scripture itself: "our most dear brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, hath written to you: as also in all his epistles. . . in which are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:15–16)—at once the first canonization of Paul and the first complaint about his interpreters. By c. 170–200 the Muratorian fragment counts thirteen letters and theologizes the number of his churches ("to no more than seven churches by name. . . one Church spread abroad through the whole world"), while rejecting forgeries in his name. The canon's shape is itself a monument of Pauline reception: half the New Testament's books bear his name or narrate his mission—and the second-century crisis over Marcion, who built a canon of Paul alone severed from Israel's Scriptures, forced the church to define that Paul belongs *with* the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospels, not against them.

13.2 The praise of the Fathers

Patristic estimate can be represented by its summit. John Chrysostom, the fourth century's greatest expositor of Paul, ended his homilies on Romans at the apostle's grave in imagination: "Would that it were now given me to throw myself round the body of Paul, and be riveted to the tomb, and to see the dust of that body that filled up that which was lacking after Christ. . . the dust of that body through which Christ spoke, and the Light shone forth more brilliant than any lightning"; Rome has "as two glistening eyes the bodies of these Saints," Peter and Paul, and "I love Rome even for this. . . these pillars of the Church" (*Homilies on Romans* 32). The medieval and modern church distilled the estimate into titles: *Apostolus*—in the Latin Middle Ages "the Apostle," unqualified, means Paul—*Doctor gentium*, teacher of the nations, "Apostle of the Nations."

13.3 Feasts and the calendar

The Roman cult is ancient, paired, and topographical. The joint solemnity of Peter and Paul on 29 June is attested as a Roman celebration from the mid-third century (a cult date—"the anniversary either of their death or of the translation of their relics," as the 1911 Catholic Encyclopedia already put it—not a documented death day); in the traditional Roman calendar the crowding of the double station bred a separate Commemoration of St. Paul on 30 June, and the general calendar keeps 29 June as a solemnity of both apostles. The Conversion of St. Paul, 25 January, is Western and comparatively late, possibly in origin a relic-translation feast (CE 1911). The dedication of the basilicas of Peter and Paul, 18 November, remembers the shrine itself. Current observance is stated as of this study's cutoff and per the General Roman Calendar identified in the References.

13.4 The Pauline Year, 2008–2009

The bimillennium of the conventional birth date produced the most concentrated official reception of Paul in modern times: Benedict XVI proclaimed a Pauline Year from 28 June 2008 to 29 June 2009—"We have gathered near the tomb of St Paul, who was born 2,000 years ago at Tarsus in Cilicia," the opening homily began—kept its weekly general-audience catechesis on Paul's life, letters, and theology (twenty audiences, cited throughout this study as checked witnesses), and closed it at the Ostian tomb with the sarcophagus announcement of 28 June 2009. The Year is itself evidence: of the anchoring of Pauline memory to the Roman grave, and of the modern Magisterium's willingness to expose the tradition to scientific test and report the result with a careful "would seem to confirm."

13.5 The theological legacy, bounded

A biography owes a statement of what the man set moving, not a treatise. Three legacies are beyond dispute. First, the Gentile church itself: the decision, argued at Jerusalem and Antioch and theologized in Galatians and Romans, that the nations enter Israel's hope through faith and baptism without the yoke of the law—"to the Jew first, and to the Greek" (Rom 1:16)—is the reason Christianity is a world religion and not a party within one nation. Second, the vocabulary of grace: sin, faith, justification, grace, flesh and spirit, body of Christ—the load-bearing words of all later Western theology, Augustine's and Aquinas's and the Reformation debate's alike, are Paul's coinage or Paul's stamp; the modern ecumenical convergence on justification (reflected, as Benedict XVI noted in closing the catechesis, in "a notable consensus precisely on the point that was the origin of the greatest historical dissent") is a chapter of his reception still open. Third, the pattern of mission: the urban, itinerant, letter-writing, community-founding apostolate became the template for every later missionary age. Where his texts have borne oppressive readings—on Israel, on slavery, on women—the historical record assembled above supplies the controls: the man who wrote "I also am an Israelite," who sent back Onesimus "a most dear brother," and whose mission ran on the labor of Phoebe, Prisca, Lydia, and the women of Romans 16, is not honestly summarized by any of the later uses; adjudicating that reception history lies beyond this study's scope and is marked as such.

14 Conclusion: The Man in the Evidence

Strip away everything this study has had to label—the three-fold narrative art of Acts, the second-century portrait, the milk and the fountains, the Seneca letters, even the reverent reconstructions of release and Spain—and what remains is still the best-evidenced life of the apostolic age, and one of the most consequential of antiquity. A diaspora Pharisee, trained in zeal, persecuted the infant church on his own oath; near Damascus, on his own oath, he saw Jesus risen and heard himself called, like a prophet, to the nations; he spent perhaps twenty-five years crossing the eastern Mediterranean on foot and by freighter, working leather, founding assemblies in a dozen cities, absorbing five synagogue floggings, three beatings, a stoning, and shipwrecks; he fought his own converts' drift, his rivals, and once Cephas himself, face to face; he carried Gentile money to Jerusalem as a sacrament of unity and was arrested for his trouble; he appealed to Caesar, reached Rome in chains, and after the canonical record falls silent, died there under Nero by the sword, within the years 64–68, as the Roman church remembered within one generation and no ancient voice ever denied. His grave on the Ostian road was marked by 200, enclosed by emperors, and probed in 2009 without embarrassment to the tradition.

Two closing judgments, one historical and one of significance. The historical: the sources for Paul succeed and fail in opposite ways—the letters give unmatched interior access and almost no narrative; Acts gives narrative and access to no interior; tradition gives the ending and cannot prove it; and the discipline of keeping each in its place is not skepticism but the only way to honor witnesses of such different kinds. The significance: Paul called himself the least of the apostles, "as by one born out of due time," and insisted the title mattered less than the grace—"But by the grace of God, I am what I am; and his grace in me hath not been void, but I have laboured more abundantly than all they: yet not I, but the grace of God with me" (1 Cor 15:8–10). The historian's ledger and the saint's self-accounting here converge on one uncontested fact: the labor. What remains unresolved—the year of his birth and of his death, the harmony of the Jerusalem visits, the reach toward Spain, the bones in the sarcophagus—is listed with its evidence in the appendix that follows; none of it disturbs the outline just drawn, and the honest preservation of these open questions is part of what this series owes both to history and to the communion that venerates him as the Apostle of the Nations.

A Scope, Chronology, and Evidence

A.1 Identity, names, and range

Subject: Paul the Apostle (Greek *Paulos*, Latin *Paulus*; Jewish name Saul, Acts only; "Saul, otherwise Paul," Acts 13:9), Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, Pharisee, Roman citizen by Acts' testimony, tent-maker, apostle, and martyr. Whole-life range used in this study: born within the first decade AD by convention (the Pauline Year assumed c. AD 8); revelation near Damascus c. 33–36; documented mission c. 46–57; custody and voyage c. 57–60; Roman custody to c. 62; death at Rome under Nero between 64 and 68. Principal places: Tarsus and Jerusalem (Acts); Damascus,

Arabia (Nabataea), Syria and Cilicia, Antioch, Cyprus, southern Asia Minor, Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea), Achaia (Athens, Corinth), Ephesus and Asia, Jerusalem, Caesarea, Malta, Rome; Spain as stated intention only. No birth, civil, or execution record exists; exactly one event (the Gallio hearing) is externally datable.

A.2 Reader, question, and thesis boundary

Written for a serious general reader, student, or researcher who wants one coherent, evidence-graded life. The governing questions are stated in the opening section. The organizing synthesis—a first-person documentary core in seven letters; Acts as an independent, designed, near-contemporary narrative to be used severally; an early, convergent, non-narrated martyrdom tradition; cleanly stratified legend; and a continuous, scientifically probed but not scientifically provable grave tradition—is historical. This study does not adjudicate confessional readings of justification, the authorship of the disputed letters beyond reporting the debate, the identity of the sarcophagus remains, or any doctrinal question; it claims no theological, archaeological, forensic, epigraphic, or rights review and no ecclesiastical approval. Saint Peter is treated only where Paul’s evidence requires him, and has his own publication in this series.

A.3 Corpus and citation conventions

Scripture is quoted from the Challoner revision of the Douay–Rheims Bible as transcribed at drbo.org (public domain), cited by conventional book, chapter, and verse in that edition’s numbering (which occasionally shifts a verse against modern versification, as flagged in place); its renderings translate the Latin Vulgate, and readings peculiar to the Vulgate (the goad in Acts 9:5) are noted where they matter. The Apostolic Fathers are quoted from the Ante-Nicene Fathers series as transcribed at New Advent (1 Clement in the translation there presented, attributed to John Keith, ANF vol. 9; Ignatius, middle [“shorter”] recension, and Polycarp, trans. Roberts–Donaldson, ANF vol. 1); Irenaeus follows Roberts–Rambaut (ANF vol. 1); Tertullian, ANF vol. 3 (Holmes); the Muratorian fragment, the ANF vol. 5 translation as transcribed at Early Christian Writings; Eusebius follows McGiffert (NPNF series 2, vol. 1); Jerome’s *De viris illustribus* follows Richardson (NPNF series 2, vol. 3); Chrysostom follows the Oxford translation revised in NPNF series 1, vol. 11; Tacitus follows Church–Brodribb (1876); Suetonius follows Rolfe (1914); the *Acts of Paul* follows M. R. James (1924), an apocryphal romance cited as such. The Delphi inscription is used through Deissmann’s 1912 study, read in full in a public scan. Papal texts follow the English versions at vatican.va. All web transcriptions were read as retrieved on 2026-07-25; translations quoted are public domain.

A.4 Evidence classes

Class	Meaning
A	Subject-authored evidence: the seven undisputed letters—Rom, 1–2 Cor, Gal, Phil, 1 Thess, Phlm—occasional and rhetorical, graded in place. The six disputed letters are used only as labeled, never as sole support.
N	Contemporary or near-contemporary external witness: Acts, read as a designed Lukan history with speeches in character; Tacitus and Suetonius for Roman context; the Delphi inscription (via the named epigraphic study) for Gallio.
E	Early received tradition: 1 Clement; Ignatius; Polycarp; Dionysius of Corinth, Gaius, and Origen at exact loci in Eusebius; Irenaeus; Tertullian; the Muratorian fragment.
L	Later hagiographic and devotional tradition: the <i>Acts of Paul</i> (c. 160) with Thecla, the portrait, and the martyrdom legend; Pseudo-Abdias and Pseudo-Marcellus; Tre Fontane; the Seneca correspondence; iconography.
M	Official ecclesial reception, limited to each act’s object: the liturgical calendar; the basilica’s official tomb presentation; Benedict XVI’s Pauline-Year texts and the 28 June 2009 sarcophagus announcement.
K	Named modern critical reconstruction: Deissmann on the Gallio inscription; the authorship debates as reported; conventional datings identified as conventions.

Class	Meaning
S	Source-grounded project synthesis, never attributed to a source.

A.5 Chronology

All dates except the Gallio anchor are reconstructions; the table states each basis and status. “Convention” means a widely used scholarly date not independently verifiable here.

Date	Event	Basis	Status
c. AD 1–10	Birth at Tarsus (Acts); family of Benjamin; Pharisaic formation; “brought up” in Jerusalem at Gamaliel’s feet (Acts)	Phil 3:5 (A); Acts 22:3 (N); age-words <i>neanias/presbytes</i> ; Pauline-Year convention c. 8 (M/K)	Places secure at their witness level; all dates conventional
30 or 33	Crucifixion of Jesus; Paul not a witness	Standard alternatives (K)	Unresolved; propagates through all early dates
c. 31–35	Persecution of the church; Stephen’s death (Acts); arrests “even unto foreign cities”	Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6; 1 Cor 15:9 (A); Acts 7:57–8:3; 9:1–2; 26:10–11 (N)	Fact certain (A+N); theater and extent unresolved
c. 33–36	Revelation near Damascus; call as apostle to the nations	Gal 1:12, 15–16 (A); 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8 (A); Acts 9; 22; 26 (N, three tellings)	Event certain on A; date from Gal 1–2 arithmetic back from Gallio anchor
c. 33–37	Arabia (Nabataea); return to Damascus	Gal 1:17 (A)	Secure as bare fact; contents unknown
by c. 36–39	Escape from Damascus in a basket; before Aretas IV’s death c. 39/40	2 Cor 11:32–33 (A); Acts 9:23–25 (N)	Event secure; pursuer differs by witness
c. 35–38	First Jerusalem visit: fifteen days with Cephas; James seen	Gal 1:18–19 (A); Acts 9:26–30 (N, differing)	Secure on A; “after three years”
c. 36–45	Syria and Cilicia (Tarsus); the silent years; brought to Antioch by Barnabas; a year teaching	Gal 1:21 (A); Acts 11:25–26 (N)	Outline only
c. 46–48	First journey: Cyprus (Sergius Paulus), Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra (stoning), Derbe	Acts 13–14 (N); 2 Cor 11:25; Gal 6:17 (A, corroborating violence)	Route Lukan; events corroborated in kind
c. 48–49	Jerusalem council; Titus not compelled; right hands of fellowship; “mindful of the poor”	Gal 2:1–10 (A); Acts 15 (N)	Substance secure; Gal 2 = Acts 15 vs. Acts 11 unresolved; date conventional
after the council	Antioch incident: public rebuke of Cephas	Gal 2:11–14 (A only)	Event secure; date and outcome unrecorded
c. 49–52	Second journey: Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea), Athens, Corinth 18 months; 1 Thessalonians written	Acts 16–18 (N, with “we”-passages); 1 Thess (A)	Frame anchored by Gallio (below)
51–52	Hearing before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, at Corinth: the absolute anchor	Acts 18:12–17 (N); Delphi inscription, Claudius imp. XXVI, dating Gallio’s year from summer 51 (Deissmann 1912, read in full; K); Benedict XVI 27 Aug 2008 (M, reporting 51–53)	The one externally dated event; proconsulship 51–52 (or 52–53)
c. 52–55/57	Third journey: Ephesus c. 3 years; Corinthian crisis and correspondence; Galatians (on many datings); collection organized	Acts 19 (N); 1 Cor 16:8 (A); 2 Cor 1–9 (A)	Residence secure; letter datings approximate

Date	Event	Basis	Status
c. 55–57	Macedonia; three months in Greece; Romans written from Corinth; Spain announced	Acts 20:1–3 (N); Rom 15:24–28; 16:1–2, 22 (A)	Secure within frame
c. 57	Last Jerusalem journey with the collection; arrest in the temple	Acts 20–21 (N); Rom 15:25–31 (A, intention and fear); 1 Cor 16:3–4 (A)	Arrest secure; collection’s reception unrecorded
c. 57–59	Caesarea: two years under Felix; Festus; Agrippa; appeal to Caesar	Acts 23–26 (N); Festus’s accession datable only c. 55–60 (K)	Two-year block secure in Acts; absolute dates loose
c. 59–60	Voyage under escort; storm; wreck at Malta; three months wintering; arrival at Rome	Acts 27–28 (N, “we”-narrative)	Secure as narrative; dates derived
c. 60–62	Rome: two whole years, own lodging, open preaching; Acts ends	Acts 28:16, 30–31 (N); Phil/Phlm if Roman (A, disputed provenance)	Secure; ending open by design or date
c. 62–67?	Hypothetical release; Spain and/or renewed East (Crete, Ephesus, Nicopolis); second arrest	Rom 15:24 (A, intention); 1 Clem. 5 “extreme limit of the west” (E, ambiguous); Muratorian fragment (E, assumes Spain); Eusebius HE 2.22 “it is said” (E); 2 Tim 4; Ti 3:12 (disputed letters)	Coherent tradition; unproven; explicitly not asserted
64–68	Martyrdom at Rome under Nero, by the sword in early tradition	1 Clem. 5 (E, c. 95–96); Ignatius <i>Rom.</i> 4 (E); Dionysius and Gaius via HE 2.25 (E); Tertullian <i>Praescr.</i> 36 (E); <i>Acts of Paul</i> (L, c. 160); Tacitus 15.44 (N, context); Jerome: Nero’s 14th year, i.e. 67/68 (E/L)	Rome/martyrdom morally certain; year and day not fixed; beheading early and unanimous but not contemporary
c. 200	Gaius can point to the “trophy” on the Ostian way	HE 2.25.7 (E)	Secure as testimony to the marked grave
324; 386–395	Constantinian basilica consecrated (18 Nov 324, official account); replaced by the Three Emperors’ basilica (consecrated 395)	Official basilica presentation (M); Benedict XVI 4 Feb 2009 (M)	Secure as institutional history
1823; 1854	Fire destroys the basilica; rebuilt church consecrated by Pius IX	Official basilica presentation (M)	Secure
2002–2006	Vatican excavation re-exposes the sarcophagus beneath the altar; window opened for pilgrims	Official presentation (M); Benedict XVI 2009 homily (M)	Secure at reported level
2008–2009	Pauline Year; 28 June 2009: announcement of probe results (fabrics, incense, bone fragments carbon-dated 1st–2nd century)	Homily of 28 June 2009, vatican.va (M)	Announcement secure; no full scientific publication located; identification not provable

A.6 Method, limits, and negative results

Earliest controlled evidence governs; the letters outrank Acts where they conflict; Acts is used for what only it preserves, labeled; witnesses separated in time are never merged. Geographic and linguistic limits: the study reads English translations throughout; no Greek or Latin critical text, manuscript, inscription (beyond Deissmann’s published facsimile and transcription), or site was examined; the Gallio inscription’s current critical edition, the *Depositio martyrum*’s text, Orosius, Epiphanius, and Euthalius were not inspected (their claims are cited at the reported level from the named intermediaries); post-2009 scientific literature on the sarcophagus was searched only as stated in the source audit. Bounded negative results from the witnesses read for this study (all retrieved 2026-07-25): no New Testament narrative of Paul’s death; no first-century statement of its manner; no witness earlier than c. 160–200 (*Acts*

of Paul; Tertullian) for beheading; no ancient witness gives a death year except by Nero-regnal reckoning (variants 12th/13th/14th year); no first-century evidence for the Spain journey’s execution; no source before the second century describes Paul’s appearance; the three Acts accounts, not the letters, carry every narrative detail of the Damascus event. These are bounded, correctable literal-search results over the named English transcriptions, not proofs of absence. Mutable online sources (drbo.org, newadvent.org, earlychristianwritings.com, vatican.va, basilicasanpaolo.org, wikisource, archive.org) are cited as checked on 2026-07-25.

A.7 Rights and review state

Project prose is original. Quotations follow public-domain translations: Challoner Douay–Rheims; ANF/NPNF (1880s–1890s); Church–Brodrigg Tacitus (1876); Rolfe Suetonius (1914); Deissmann/Strachan (1912); M. R. James (1924, public domain in the United States). Brief quotations from Benedict XVI’s homilies and audiences and from the basilica’s official presentation are cited with attribution for reporting and study. This publication has received internal editorial and production checking only: no independent historical, theological, archaeological, epigraphic, scientific, or rights review, and no ecclesiastical approval, is claimed or implied.

B References

All web sources were accessed and checked on 2026-07-25. Ancient-work citations in the text use conventional titles and loci with the translations listed here.

Scripture

- The Holy Bible, Douay–Rheims version, Challoner revision, as transcribed at drbo.org (public domain). Chapters retrieved and checked verbatim for this study: Acts 7–9, 11, 13–28; Rom 1, 11, 15, 16; 1 Cor 1, 9, 11, 15, 16; 2 Cor 2, 8, 10, 11, 12; Gal 1, 2, 6; Eph 3; Phil 1, 3; Col 4; 1 Thess 1, 2, 4; 2 Thess 2, 3; 1 Tim 1; 2 Tim 1, 4; Titus 3; Phlm; 2 Pet 3 (chapter pages under <https://drbo.org/chapter/51009.htm> and the same numbering pattern, e.g. 55001 for Galatians 1, 64001 for Philemon).

Ancient witnesses

- Clement of Rome (attributed), *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 5–6, 36, 47, in the translation presented at New Advent and there attributed to John Keith, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9 (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1010.htm>). Conventional dating c. 95–96 as reported in the 1912 Catholic Encyclopedia, “Pope St. Clement I” (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04012c.htm>).
- Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 12 and *Epistle to the Romans* 4, middle (“shorter”) recension, trans. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, ANF vol. 1 (Buffalo, 1885/1887), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0104.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0107.htm>). A catalog-level source-library record of ANF vol. 1 exists in the repository and is bound in [research/source-bindings.toml](https://www.newadvent.org/research/source-bindings.toml).
- Polycarp of Smyrna, *Epistle to the Philippians* 3 and 9, trans. Roberts–Donaldson, ANF vol. 1, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0136.htm>).
- The Muratorian fragment (canon list, Rome?, conventionally c. 170–200), ANF vol. 5 translation as transcribed at Early Christian Writings (<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/muratorian.html>); lines on Luke’s omission of “the journey of Paul, when he went from the city—Rome—to Spain,” the seven churches, and the Marcionite forgeries.
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.14.1, trans. A. Roberts and W. Rambaut, ANF vol. 1, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103314.htm>).
- Tertullian, *The Prescription Against Heretics* 36, trans. P. Holmes, ANF vol. 3, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0311.htm>).

- Eusebius of Caesarea, *Church History* 2.22, 2.25, 3.1, 3.4, trans. A. C. McGiffert, NPNF series 2, vol. 1 (New York, 1890), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250102.htm>; <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250103.htm>); preserving Dionysius of Corinth, Gaius, and Origen at the loci cited in the text. A catalog-level source-library record of NPNF2 vol. 1 was created for this study and is bound in `research/source-bindings.toml`.
- Jerome, *De viris illustribus* 5 (Paul) and 12 (Seneca), trans. E. C. Richardson, NPNF series 2, vol. 3, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2708.htm>).
- John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans*, Homily 32 (conclusion), Oxford translation revised in NPNF series 1, vol. 11, at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/210232.htm>).
- Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44, trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb (1876), at Wikisource ([https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_\(Tacitus\)/Book_15](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Annals_(Tacitus)/Book_15)).
- Suetonius, *Claudius* 25, trans. J. C. Rolfe (1914), at Wikisource (https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Lives_of_the_Twelve_Caesars/Claudius).

Apocrypha and later tradition

- *The Acts of Paul* (apocryphal; per the translator’s headnote, composed by a presbyter of Asia and datable c. A.D. 160 from Tertullian’s notice), including the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and the *Martyrdom*, in M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), as transcribed at Early Christian Writings (<https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/actspaul.html>).
- Ferdinand Prat, “St. Paul,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (New York, 1911), at New Advent (<https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11567b.htm>); source for the Aquae Salviae/Tre Fontane execution tradition, the Nero-regnal death-year variants (Epiphanius, Euthalius, Jerome), the *kata ton auton kairon* judgment, and the feast history (29 June; 30 June commemoration; 25 January conversion feast). A catalog-level source-library record of CE vol. 11 was created for this study and is bound in `research/source-bindings.toml`.
- Pseudo-Marcellus, *Acts of Peter and Paul* (fifth century), and Pseudo-Abdias, *Passion of Paul* (fourth century): cited only at the reported level from Benedict XVI’s General Audience of 4 February 2009 (below); not independently inspected.

The Gallio anchor

- Adolf Deissmann, *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, trans. L. R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), Appendix I, “The Proconsulate of L. Junius Gallio,” pp. 235–260, with phototype facsimile of the Delphi inscription; read in full in the public scan at the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/details/stpaulstudyinsoc00deis>, plain text at `stpaulstudyinsoc00deis_djvu.txt`). Basis for the dating of Claudius’s 26th imperatorial acclamation (with Dessau’s collation) and of Gallio’s proconsulship from the summer of 51.
- Benedict XVI, General Audience of 27 August 2008 (English), Vatican website (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080827.html); the modern official statement of the anchor (“Gallio was Proconsul in Corinth between the years 51 and 53”) and of the c. AD 8 birth convention.

Tomb, basilica, and ecclesial reception

- “The Tomb of the Apostle,” “The Constantine Building,” and “The Fire in July 1823,” official presentation of the Papal Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, English pages hosted at vatican.va (https://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/en/basilica/tomba.htm; [costantino.htm](https://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/en/basilica/costantino.htm); [incendio.htm](https://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/san_paolo/en/basilica/incendio.htm)); source for the PAULO APOSTOLO MART slab, sarcophagus dimensions and position, Lucina and Aquae Salviae traditions as officially stated, and the 324/395/1823/1854 building history.
- Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers of Sts. Peter and Paul, opening of the Pauline Year, 28 June 2008 (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080628_vespri.html).

- Benedict XVI, General Audience of 28 January 2009 (the Pastoral Letters; “Pauline School” statement) (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090128.html); General Audience of 14 January 2009 (Colossians/Ephesians as twins) (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090114.html); General Audience of 4 February 2009 (martyrdom and heritage: 1 Clement quoted; Spain “open to discussion”; *Acts of Paul* beheading; Tre Fontane “most legendary”; Lucina; basilica history) (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20090204.html).
- Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers for the closing of the Pauline Year, Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls, 28 June 2009; the sarcophagus-probe announcement quoted in full in the text (https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2009/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20090628_chius-anno-paolino.html).
- General Roman Calendar: current observances (29 June solemnity; 25 January Conversion; 18 November Dedication of the basilicas) stated per the repository’s source-library record of the *Calendarium Romanum Generale* (Missale Romanum, ed. typica tertia, 2002), with the cult’s history from the Catholic Encyclopedia articles above; mutable facts carry the 2026-07-25 cutoff.

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