

Paul's Letters

General Observations – but critical to their context.

1. Paul originally wrote his letters to meet specific needs in the church. **KEY:** Paul's letters were never intended for PERSONAL growth, in-and-of themselves. Each letter must be in the context of the PUBLIC whole. In other words, they are written for the health of the body, not just for individual growth. You cannot read them in isolation of that.
2. He was NOT aware that his letters would become Scripture. Which is huge, when it comes to understanding his love for his Lord, and his desire that the church be healthy.
 - a. But though he did not write then, to be a theologian, his writings are the basis of all Christian theology.
 - i. FYI – theology is the study of HOW God relates to man.
 1. Who is GOD? What is His nature?
 2. Who is JESUS – and why?
 3. The work of the Holy Spirit?
 4. The Trinity?
 5. Salvation – by grace or works?
 6. The Second Coming?
 7. Heaven? Hell?
 8. Sin?
3. Paul's letters have been universally accepted by the church throughout history.
4. Paul's letters were the first Christian writings regarded as Scripture.
 - a. The early church father's often quoted Paul as an authority.

Their testimony provides external evidence that from the beginning, the church recognized the authority of the apostolic writings, and that the distribution of those documents was widespread. This is true from as early as the end of the first century. Their writings are important evidence because of their early date, where they lived, where their recipients lived, and the large number of New Testament references they contain.

Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church at Corinth in about A.D. 95. The letter was written to address problems in the church including insubordination to the elders. Clement quotes from or alludes to the following books: at least one of the synoptic gospels, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Hebrews, and possibly John, Acts, James, and 1 Peter. He quotes the words of Jesus as being at least as authoritative as those of the prophets (Bruce 121).

Ignatius (d. c. A.D. 110) was a bishop of Antioch in Syria around the beginning of the second century. Most of what we know about him is found in the account of his martyrdom. Ignatius was condemned by the imperial authorities in about A.D. 110 and sent to Rome to die. As he passed through Asia Minor on his way to Rome, Ignatius wrote seven letters to churches and individuals along the way. From Smyrna, where Polycarp was bishop, Ignatius wrote letters to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, and Romans. From Smyrna he was taken to Troas, where he wrote to the Philadelphians, the Smyrnaeans, and Polycarp. In these letters Ignatius cites

Matthew, John, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and possibly Luke, Hebrews, and 1 Peter.

Polycarp (c. A.D. 110-35) was possibly a disciple of the apostle John and a bishop of the church in Smyrna. In his letter to the Philippians (A.D. 110-120), he used Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 John, 1 Peter, and possibly 2 John. He included many quotations from these writings, sometimes introducing them with expressions like “the Scripture saith.” He cites Ephesians 4:26, where Paul quoted Psalm 4:4, and then makes an additional comment of his own, introducing the reference with the words, “It is declared in these Scriptures” (Epistle to the Philippians 12).

These writings were all written between A.D. 95 and 110. The authors and recipients of the letters lived in areas of the Roman Empire including Rome, Macedonia, Achaia, Asia Minor, and Syria. The evidence shows that within about a decade of the writing of the last New Testament document (if we accept the late date for Revelation), the majority of the New Testament documents were being widely duplicated and circulated.

WHY Study PAUL?

1. We can trust it? His understanding of what it means to have a humbled, personal relationship with Jesus is crazy inviting.
 - a. You see, though Paul’s apostleship was valid, he was always aware of the distinction of who he was among the other disciples (Galatians). **For ME:** Why is this so important? **LOOK UP HERE:** Paul’s one of us. He’s not only so transparent, but humbled – by the way – he’s really practical and simple. **We just need to learn to APPLY.**
 - b. Why Study? Paul is considered to be an out-sider, even though he was accepted by the **original 12**. **For ME:** Ever feel that way? Paul get us...
 - i. **LISTEN:** Paul killed a dude – and God wasn’t finished with him? That’s good news.
2. **Why Study?** Paul saw Jesus as a PRESENT living reality – not just some historical figure. *“I’ve been crucified with Christ. It is who no longer live, but Christ within me”* (Galatians 2:20).
3. **Why Study?** Paul’s interpretation of Christ was made in the process of facing everyday challenges – which simply means – it works. **His teachings are tried and true.**

TRANSITION: So, with that all said – let me help you with the environment in which Paul would write.

The Jewish Dispersion:

HUGE: On multiple fronts, the Jews were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire. This is important, because large pockets of Jews are everywhere.

- **In fact:** Historians believe that in Rome, there was a suburb of over 100,000 Jews.

Here's why I say this? HUGE: The dispersion was THEE major contributor to the rapid spread of the Gospel in the 1st Century. **NOTE: Philippians 1:12-14...**

Key PRINCIPLE: Focus NOT on the WHAT and the WHY when you face your difficulties – but on the WHO by which you face them with? **This is also WHY we can TRUST Paul.** What an incredible example of trusting and living out the power of God.

Let me SHOW you THIS – in a bigger picture – why we FOCUS on the WHO not the WHAT.

The Extent of the Dispersion

- A. **Egypt** – The Greek Empire truly brought the Greek language to the entire known world, but one important event sprang from this that would also influence the whole world and especially the Jews.

The Septuagint is recognized in history as a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Hebrew Torah. In fact the Septuagint contained not only the entire Old Testament, but the **Apocrypha** as well.

NOTE: The Apocrypha, are intertestamental books of the Bible, that were not received during the of the Bible, the Geneva Bible states, *“though not received by a common consent to be read and expounded publicly in the Church, and did not meet the consent of the other Scriptures that were canonical zed, the still serve to be read for the advancement and furtherance of the knowledge of history and for the instruction in godly manners.”*

There are 14 Books: 1 Esdras (Vulgate 3 Esdras)

2 Esdras (Vulgate 4 Esdras)

Tobit

Judith

Rest of Esther (Vulgate Esther 10:4-16:24)

Wisdom

Ecclesiasticus (also known as Sirach)

Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremy (all part of Vulgate Baruch)

Song of the Three Children (Vulgate Daniel 3:24-90)

Story of Susanna (Vulgate Daniel 13)

The Idol Bel and the Dragon (Vulgate Daniel 14)

Prayer of Manasses

1 Maccabees

2 Maccabees

125BC there was a letter, known as the Letter of Aristeas which revealed that Ptolemy II Philadelphus (275BC) was persuaded by those who studied in the Library of Alexandria to

acquire a copy of the Jewish Torah for the library. They were no doubt influenced by the nearly 1 million Greek speaking Jews of the Diaspora (dispersion) who were living in Alexandria at the time. Ptolemy contacted the High-priest in Jerusalem who name was Eleazar, and 72 men (6 from each other 12 tribes of Israel) skillful linguists were sent from Jerusalem to Alexandria, Egypt). You getting this.

HUGE: Sometimes your pain is used of God for the greater work beyond imagination. *“And we know that **in all things** God works for the **good** of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28).

Joseph – *“What you meant for evil – God meant for good”* (Genesis 50:20).

Targums

These were spoken paraphrases, explanations and expansions of the Jewish Scriptures that a Rabbi would give in the common language of the listeners, which was then often Aramaic. You might liken this to a modern day message or morning devotional. A brief explanation of what was just read.

Targum is derived from early Akkadian meaning ‘translator’ or ‘interpreter.’ It actually occurs in the Hebrew Bible in Ezra 4:18 – *“And the document which you sent us has been read in translation (targum) before me.”*

Now – why do I say this is important – because Paul used these as a source of reference. KEY: He met people where they were at.

B. **Asia Minor** (Modern Day Turkey) – Most of Paul’s Missionary work was done here.

Comparison of the Jewish Religious Parties

Now, thought the Jews were JEWS – there was a class system.

1. Pharisees

- They were made up of the common people – and were to represent them.
- They were the largest group of leaders (estimated at 6,000 of them during Jesus’ time)
- They consider the oral law to be an authority in addition to the Torah.
 - o **What is the Oral Law?** These are the things that have been passed down, orally, from generation to generation – and they MATTER. According to Jewish tradition, the Oral Torah was passed down orally in an unbroken chain from generation to generation until its contents were finally committed to writing following the destruction of the 2nd Temple
- They believed in the Providence of God and did NOT stress free will
- They believed in the resurrection and punishment or reward in the after-life.
- They believed in the existence of angels and spiritual beings.

- They generally followed a simple lifestyle. Religion was more important to worry about it than living it.
- Very intellectual
- Controlled religious customs especially the synagogues.
- Very patriotic

2. Sadducees

- Generally wealthy. Made up, or included, most of the Priest. Not a very large group.
- Accepted the Torah as the only authority. **They rejected the oral law.**
- They stressed free will and denied the providence of God.
- They did not believe in the resurrection or existence of angels.
- Rewards and punishment were distributed only in this life.
- A very lovely life style. They lived rich and let everyone know it.
- Control of Temple and priesthood.
- Willing to compromise politically with Rome.

3. Essenes (they are NOT mentioned in New Testament)

- Similar to Pharisees in belief but more extreme and exclusive.
- They withdrew from society to live in the dessert.
- Main intensity was the coming Messiah.
- They renounced the comforts of society and marriage.
- The practiced sacrifices, but not in the temple.
- It is possible that John the Baptist was influenced by this group.

4. Zealots

- Also similar to Pharisees in belief.
- Main interest was the violent over-throw of the Roman Government.

Roman and Greek Influence in the First Century

- **Cynicism** – the belief that all men are motivated by selfishness.
- **Skepticism** – absolute knowledge is impossible, therefore, to find truth you must doubt.
- **Epicureanism** – life is the pursuit of pleasure; eat, drink and be merry.
- **Stoicism** – all aspects of life are governed by fate; which led to an attitude of indifference to pleasure and pain.
- **And boat load of MYSTERY Religions:**
 - They offered the *elixir* to every problem. They originated from ancient cults and crafting's.
 - They appealed to a sense of **belonging**. This is very important...
 - They offered a purification from sin.
 - They offered a sense of release through ritual.

- They guaranteed immortality.
- Stars...

HUGE: Paul was highly influenced and knowledgeable of every one of these.

Life of Paul

Birthplace – City of Tarsus (Map)

- It was a major city of commerce in the Roman Empire.
- The citizens of that city were very loyal to Rome.
- It became a Free City by Marc Anthony. Which means many of the Jews were granted Roman citizenship. (Acts 16:35 – Paul was born into citizenship).
 - **Why is this important?**
 - A Roman Citizen had a right to a fair trial?
 - They had a right to appeal to the emperor?
- **There was a University there.** The citizens had a great interest in knowledge.

NOTE: The University ranked in comparison to that of Athens and Alexandria.

- There is evidence that Paul attended that University.
- Because of his birthplace – Paul was well-versed in language. He spoke 4: Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin.
- **FYI – Paul was from the Tribe of Benjamin** – the smallest of the 12 tribes.

Paul's Education?

- Gamaliel (Acts 22:3)
 - **PERSONAL:**
 - Pharisee
 - Member of the Sanhedrin (the Supreme Court of Jews)
 - FYI – on Gamaliel. Some believe he eventually became a Christian, but that can't be proven. Accept – when it's too late.
 - **His EDUCATION:**
 - Memorize the Torah and the complete Oral Law

His MINISTRY?

- Conversion (Road to Damascus – 33 AD).
- Stay in Damascus (Arabian Desert): 33-36
- Visit to Jerusalem: 36
- Stayed in Tarsus: 36-45
- Call to Antioch: 45-47
- First Missionary Campaign: 47-49
- Great Jerusalem Council: 50

- Second Missionary Campaign: 50-53
- Third Missionary Campaign: 53-57
- Visit to Jerusalem: 57
- Prison in Caesarea: 57-59
- Trip to Rome: 59-60
- Roman Imprisonment: 60-62
- Death: 67

Significance of Paul's Conversion?

- He did NOT view his conversion as a change of Judaism to Christianity.
- Paul always regarded himself as a Jew and regarded Christ as the fulfilment of the Old Testament (Romans 9:3-5; Matthew 5:17). Paul would describe himself as a Jew who would follow Christ.
- He did not view his conversion as a change from a life of sin to a life of moral goodness (Philippians 3).
 - Rich Young Ruler – *"I've kept them all..."*
- His change was from **ignorance about God** to **intimacy with God**.

Couple Key NOTES?

- Paul's success as a theologian and missionary was due in part to his preparation.
- God worked in Paul's life as he does in ours – according to His time schedule.
- It is important that we live inside of God's will whether it means a time of preparation or time of special service.
- Paul was NEVER idle during his preparation, but served the Lord where he was.

The Letters?

LETTER:	DATE:	CITY from which he WROTE:
• Galatians	49	Antioch, Syria
• 1 Thessalonians	51	Corinth
• 2 Thessalonians	52	Corinth
• 1 Corinthians	55	Ephesus
• 2 Corinthians	56	Macedonia
• Romans	57	Corinth
• Ephesians	60-62 (prison)	Rome
• Philippians	60-62 (prison)	Rome
• Colossians	60-62 (prison)	Rome
• Philemon	60-62 (prison)	Rome
• 1 Timothy	65-67 (free)	Roman Empire

- Titus 65-67 (free) Roman Empire
- 2 Timothy 67 (Prison) Rome

Classifications?

Letters in Doctrinal Emphasis: Romans; Galatians; Ephesians; Colossians; 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Ethical Issues: 1 Corinthians

Pastoral Ministry: 1 Timothy; 2 Timothy; Titus; 2 Corinthians

Personal Matters: Philippians; Philemon

The Letters?

Galatians

Purpose of this Letter

- To refute the Judisers – the ones who said you must become a Jew to be a Christian.
- To defend his own apostleship.
- Message – Justification by faith.
- Paul also discusses the Christian life and the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians

Purpose of this Letter

- He expresses Thankfulness to the Believers (Christians).
- To defend his apostleship.
- To encourage them in the face of persecution.
- Answer Question concerning; “What happens to Christians who die before the Lord’s return?”
- Give advice on how to live the Christian life.

2 Thessalonians

- Teachings or corrections concerning the Day of the Lord. (2:1-17)
 - The day of the Lord has not come yet.
 - Day will not come until the Apostasy and the revealing of the son of destruction.
 - Apostasy means a world-wide attitude of rebellion against God.
 - Son of destruction – is the anti-Christ (satan’s man)
 - At the present time this evil is being restrained (held back).
 - Non-believers will follow this false teaching or false prophet.
 - Believers are not to worry because the Lord will destroy this rebellion.

6) Believers are chosen by God and will be held secure.

B. Call to prayer and discipline.

Philippians (Book of Joy)

Written while in Roman imprisonment.

- A. Jesus was using Pauls' imprisonment to further the Gospel.
- B. There is victory for the Christian whether he faces life or death.
- C. Joy can be experienced even in the face of suffering.

Joy is found in following the example of Christ. (2:1-11)

Being a part of God's plan and Purpose brings joy.

The goal of the Christian life is to know Christ. (3:1-21)

Joy and peace is found in the presence of Christ. (4:8)

1 Corinthians

- A. Concerning division in the church.
- B. Problem of moral disorders in the church. (1 Cor. 5 – 6)
- C. Concerning the question of marriage. (7:1-40)

Colossians

- A. Supremacy of Christ.
- B. Supremacy of Christianity. (2:1-23)
- C. Supremacy of Christian life style.

Romans

The wrath of God or Doctrine of condemnation. (1:18-3:20)

- A. God's wrath is demonstrated against the pagan world.
- B. God's wrath is also demonstrated to and against the Jews.
- C. God's wrath is demonstrated against the whole world.

The righteousness of God, doctrine of Justification. (3:21 – 5:21)

2 Corinthians

Discussion concerning the ministry.

Philemon

Ephesians

- A. Position of Believers.
- B. Lifestyle of Believers.

C. The protection of the believers.

1 Timothy

- A. Instructions concerning doctrine.
- B. Instructions concerning worship. (1 Tim. 2)
- C. Instructions concerning church leaders. (1 Tim. 3)
- D. General Instructions for ministry. (1 Tim. 4 – 6)

2 Timothy

- A. Call to be a “soldier of Christ” is a call of courage and faithfulness.
- B. Character of the “soldier of Christ”.
- C. Warnings to the “soldier of Christ”.
- D. A charge to the “soldier of Christ”. (4:1-5)
- E. Reflections on the life of the “soldier of Christ”.

Titus

- A. Qualifications of the elders. (1:5-9)
- B. The minister is to deal with offenders in the church.
- C. Instructions concerning the operation of the church. (2-3)