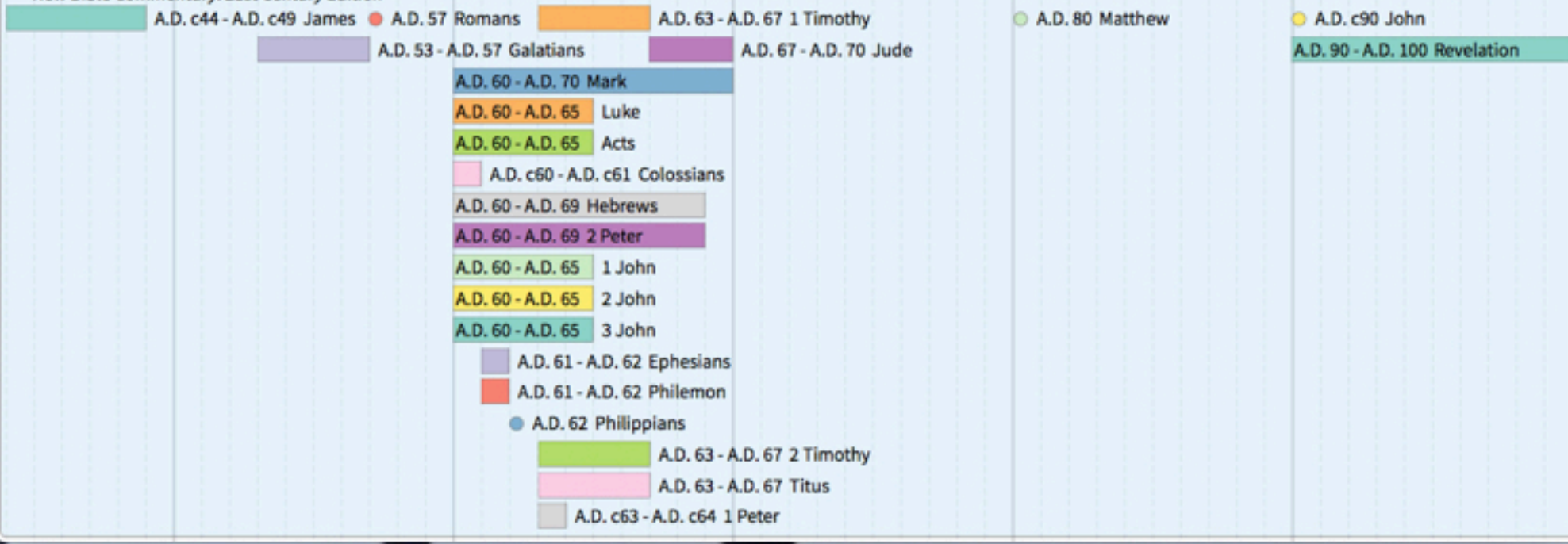


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New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

A Socio-Rhetorical
Commentary

BEN WITHERINGTON III

Basic Acts Timeline

- A.D. 30 — Jesus is crucified under Pontius Pilate. Resurrection appearances, Pentecost, initial growth of the church in and around Jerusalem.
- A.D. 31-33 — The events of Acts 3–7 transpire with mounting concern on the part of Jews and especially the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. The rising tension results in vigilante action taken against Stephen, and then an authorized effort under Saul to disrupt and even destroy this new messianic sect, involving persecution and even the death of some Christians (cf. Acts 8:1-3 to Gal. 1:13). The persecution led various Christians such as Philip to go elsewhere, such as Samaria, and bear witness (Acts 8:4-40). THE FIRST EIGHT CHAPTERS OF ACTS COVER ONLY THE PERIOD FROM ABOUT 30 TO 33.²⁶⁹
- A.D. 33 or 34 — Saul is converted on the road to Damascus during his period of persecuting the church (Acts 9; Galatians 1).

266. Cf. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, p. 68, to Graf, "Aretas," p. 375.

267. See the brief discussion in Barrett, *Caligula*, p. 183 and notes. Cf. Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life*, pp. 30-33.

268. Rightly Hemer, *Book of Acts*, pp. 163-64.

269. Rightly stressed by Lake, "Chronology," pp. 445f.

- A.D. 34-37 or 38 — Saul is in Damascus and Arabia; he returns to Jerusalem for the first time as a Christian in 37.
- A.D. 37-46 — Saul sent off to Tarsus and home region. In the meantime, Peter has a notable ministry up and down the Mediterranean coast between Lydda, Joppa, and Caesarea, involving at least one notable Gentile and his family. This, in turn, leads to a report to the Jerusalem church (Acts 11). The precise timing is unknown.
- A.D. 43 — James (brother of John) is killed, and Peter is imprisoned.
- A.D. 44 — Agabus's prophecy in Antioch; Herod Agrippa dies.
- NOTE THAT LUKE'S DATA FOR THE PERIOD A.D. 37-46 ARE CLEARLY SKETCHY. HE IS BETTER INFORMED ABOUT THE PERIOD AFTER THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL (49), IN PARTICULAR ABOUT THE PAULINE PART OF THE STORY.
- A.D. 46-48 — famine in Judea.
- A.D. 48 — Second visit by Paul to Jerusalem (with Barnabas, cf. Galatians 2) for famine relief to Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-30).
- A.D. 49 — Claudius expels Jews from Rome; Priscilla and Aquila go to Corinth; Jerusalem council (Acts 15).
- A.D. 50-52 — Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:23).
- A.D. 51 or 52 — The Gallio incident in Corinth (Acts 18).
- A.D. 53-57 — Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:26).
- A.D. 57-59 — Paul in custody under Felix, and then briefly under Festus.
- A.D. 59-60 — Paul goes to Rome (for a fuller discussion of the Pauline material for the period from 48 to 50, see below).
- A.D. 60-62 — Paul under house arrest in Rome.

Chronology of Paul's Life and Letters²⁷⁰

Phase One — Pre-Christian Saul

- A.D. 5-10 — Saul is born in Tarsus in Cilicia of orthodox Pharisaic Jews who are Roman citizens.
- A.D. 10 + — Saul's family moves to Jerusalem while he is still quite young (Acts 26:4).
- A.D. 15-20 — Saul begins his studies in Jerusalem with Rabbi Gamaliel, grandson of Rabbi Gamaliel the elder.
- A.D. 30 (or 33) — Jesus is crucified by Pontius Pilate.
- A.D. 31?-34 — Saul persecutes the church in Jerusalem/Judea, Samaria); Stephen is stoned (Acts 6-7, ca. 32-33).

270. On all of what follows one should compare the somewhat different conclusions in Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life*.

Phase Two — Conversion and “Hidden Years”

- A.D. 33 (or 34) — Saul is converted on the Damascus road and then travels on to Damascus (Ananias episode).
- A.D. 34-37 — Saul in Arabia, the Nabatean region of Syria east of Damascus and in the Transjordan (cf. Gal. 1:17). Saul returns to Damascus and narrowly escapes the authorities under King Aretas IV, who may have controlled the city beginning in 37 once Gaius Caligula became Emperor (cf. 2 Cor. 11:32/Acts 9:23-25).
- A.D. 37 — Saul’s first visit to Jerusalem, a private meeting with Peter and James (Gal. 1:18-20). Saul preaches to the Hellenists, and escapes to his home region of Syria and Cilicia by way of boat from Caesarea Maritima (Acts 9:29-30).
- A.D. 37-46 — Saul preaches in home region; results unknown or inconsequential (possible great persecutions, cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-29).
- A.D. 41-42 — Saul has a visionary experience; receives “thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor. 12:1-10), a physical malady possibly involving his eyes (Gal. 4:13-16).
- A.D. 47 — Saul is found by Barnabas in Tarsus and brought to Antioch; preaches there for a year (Acts 11:25-26).
- A.D. 48 — Second visit to Jerusalem (the famine visit) with Barnabas and Titus (Acts 11:27-30/Gal. 2:1-10). Private agreement between Saul and the church leaders that he and Barnabas would go to Gentiles, Peter and others to Jews, and circumcision not be imposed. Issues of food and fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians unresolved (cf. Gal. 2:11-14).

Phase Three — Paul Begins His Endorsed Missionary Travels and Efforts

- A.D. 48 — First missionary journey with Barnabas and Mark; commissioned by Antioch church after basic endorsement from Jerusalem (Acts 13-14). Saul uses his Greco-Roman name Paul (Paulos).
- A.D. 48 — Return to Antioch.²⁷¹ Antioch incident with Peter and Barnabas withdrawing from fellowship meals with Gentiles due to pressure from Judaizers from Jerusalem (Pharisaic Jewish Christians, Gal. 2:11-14).
- A.D. 49 (early) — Paul discovers the Judaizers had moved on to Asia Minor and were upsetting some of his converts made during the first missionary journey in south Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, etc.). He writes his letter to the Galatians shortly before going up to Jerusalem for the third time.
- A.D. 49 (later) — Apostolic council in Jerusalem. Public agreement that Gentiles not be required to become Jews in order to become Christians. Apostolic decree mandates that Gentiles must forsake idolatry and im-

271. Lake, *Beginnings*, 5:469, stresses that a thirty-two-week minimum was required for this journey; in other words, the portion of one year that was good for travel.

morality, in particular, dining in pagan temples where such things transpire (i.e., no eating of meat offered to and partaken of in the presence of idols, Acts 15).

- A.D. 50-52 — Second missionary journey of Paul with Silas (Silvanus) instead of Barnabas and Mark. This is important, for Silas is the apostolic delegate who was to explain the decree to the churches, and he had independent authority from Jerusalem, not from Paul (Acts 15:22). Paul travels to Philippi and Thessalonica, and eventually he stays a considerable time in Corinth before going to Ephesus and then Jerusalem, returning afterward to Antioch (Acts 15:40–18:23). On this journey he picks up Timothy in Lystra (Acts 16:1) and Luke in Troas (16:10ff.).
- A.D. 51-52 — During his stay in Corinth, Paul writes 1 and 2 Thessalonians, with the help of Silvanus.
- A.D. 51 or 52 — The Gallio incident (Acts 18:12-18) and increasing troubles from Jews in Corinth eventually precipitate Paul leaving Corinth after staying between eighteen and twenty-four months.
- A.D. 52 — Second missionary period concludes apparently with a report to the Jerusalem church (Acts 18:22), and a return to Antioch.

Later Pauline Chronology

- A.D. 53-57(58) — Third missionary journey. After an eighteen-month stay in Corinth (Acts 18:11), Paul sails for Syria, probably in the spring of 52, stopping briefly in the port of Ephesus and leaving Aquila and Priscilla to lay the groundwork for future missionary work (cf. below). After preaching once in the synagogue and promising to return (18:19), he goes to Caesarea Maritima, visits briefly in Jerusalem, and returns to Syrian Antioch. After a stay there, Paul sets out on his last major missionary period as a free man, passing through the Galatian region and strengthening the congregation there, but pressing on to Ephesus where he stays for at least two and perhaps three years.
- A.D. 54 (55) — Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. Not the first letter he had written them, but the first one still extant (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-10). This letter addresses the many questions and problems raised by the Corinthians both orally and in writing in their communication with Paul since he had left there. First Corinthians failed to solve the problems in Corinth, however, as 2 Corinthians makes evident. News, perhaps from Timothy, comes to Paul of real trouble in Corinth after writing 1 Corinthians.
- A.D. 55 — The painful visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 2:1, not mentioned in Acts). This visit is a disaster, as opposition comes to a head. Paul's authority is questioned and he leaves, feeling humiliated. As a result, Paul writes a stinging, forceful letter (the so-called severe letter), a fragment of which may be found in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Titus is the bearer of this severe

letter. Paul begins to regret this letter, and after some missionary work in Troas he crosses over into Macedonia anxious to hear Titus's report on the results of the severe letter (this journey corresponds to the journey from Troas to Macedonia found in Acts 20:1-16).

Fall A.D. 55 or 56 — After hearing some good news from Titus, Paul writes 2 Corinthians (at least chaps. 1-9) with some relief, though he realizes there are still problems to be overcome. Shortly after, he journeys to Corinth, where he stays for three months, then returns to Philippi in Macedonia at Passover.

Late A.D. 56 or early 57 — Paul writes Romans from Corinth (cf. Rom. 16:1), shortly before setting out for Jerusalem for the last time (Rom. 15:25).

A.D. 57 — Paul travels by way of boat from Philippi to Troas (where the famous Eutychus incident happens, Acts 20:7-12), and then to Miletus, where he makes his famous farewell speech (Acts 20:18ff.), and finally hastens on to be in Jerusalem in time for Pentecost in May 57. Landing at Tyre, he strengthens Christians there and is warned not to go to Jerusalem, but he continues southward, stopping at Caesarea Maritima to visit with Philip the evangelist and his prophesying daughters (Acts 21:8-9). Here he encounters Agabus, who prophesies his being taken captive and handed over to the Gentiles (NOTE THAT LUKE WAS WITH PAUL ON THIS JOURNEY AND LATER CHRONICLED THESE EVENTS).

A.D. 57-59 — After an incident in the temple courts which leads to Paul being taken into custody by a Roman tribune, Paul asks to speak to his people and recount his conversion and mission (Acts 22, in Aramaic). A near riot breaks out, and Paul is taken to the Roman ruler's Palestinian headquarters in Caesarea Maritima so that Governor Felix can deal with Paul. He is allowed to languish in some kind of prison or house arrest situation for two years until Festus becomes governor (probably in 59 or at the latest, 60). Some scholars believe Paul wrote the Captivity Epistles (Philemon, Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians) from Caesarea before departure for Rome by boat.

A.D. 59-60 — Seasonal data suggest the journey to Rome took place in late 59, during the risky time for sea travel, and that Paul probably arrived in Rome at least by February of 60 (cf. Acts 27-28).

A.D. 60-62 — Paul is under house arrest in Rome, during which time he is traditionally thought to have written the Captivity Epistles, with Philippians probably being the last of these (in 62, shortly before the resolution of Paul's trial).

NOTE THAT ALL DATA BEYOND THIS POINT IS LARGELY INFERENTIAL AND CONJECTURAL SINCE ACTS ENDS WITH PAUL IN ROME, AND SINCE EVEN IF THE PASTORAL EPISTLES ARE BY PAUL, THEY DO NOT TELL US A GREAT DEAL ABOUT PAUL'S MOVEMENTS.

A.D. 62 — The conclusion of Acts shows that Luke knows that Paul was under house arrest for only two years, and it is to be pointed out that at no point in his many interviews or trials is Paul ever found guilty of any crime at the hands of the Romans (cf. especially Acts 24–26). Furthermore, if Paul's case was resolved in 62, this was before the time of the fire in Rome (July 64), which also means it was before the time Nero descended into tyranny and was looking for scapegoats, and before Christianity really had come under close imperial scrutiny. Note, too, that the Pastorals do not suggest a situation of house arrest but rather imprisonment by Roman authorities; in other words, a situation that Paul was not in during the period from 60 to 62, so far as we know. The following scenario is possible if Paul was released in 62.

A.D. 62–64 or later — Paul travels back east in response to problems. This includes a possible summer in Asia Minor (Ephesus?) and a summer and winter in Crete and Greece.

Sometime after July 64, Paul is arrested in Asia Minor and taken overland to Rome.

A.D. 64 (late) to 68 — The years of the Neronian tyranny and paranoia. If the Pastorals are by Paul, then they were likely written during this time when Paul appears to have been in Mamertine prison, or a similar facility in Rome. Under such circumstances, it is likely that Paul would have had to rely heavily on a trusted amanuensis (secretary) to write the Pastoral Epistles for him. The most likely conjecture is that Luke provided this service, which explains why these letters often reflect Lukan style, diction, and even some ideas.

A.D. 65–68. Paul is executed as a Roman citizen by beheading.