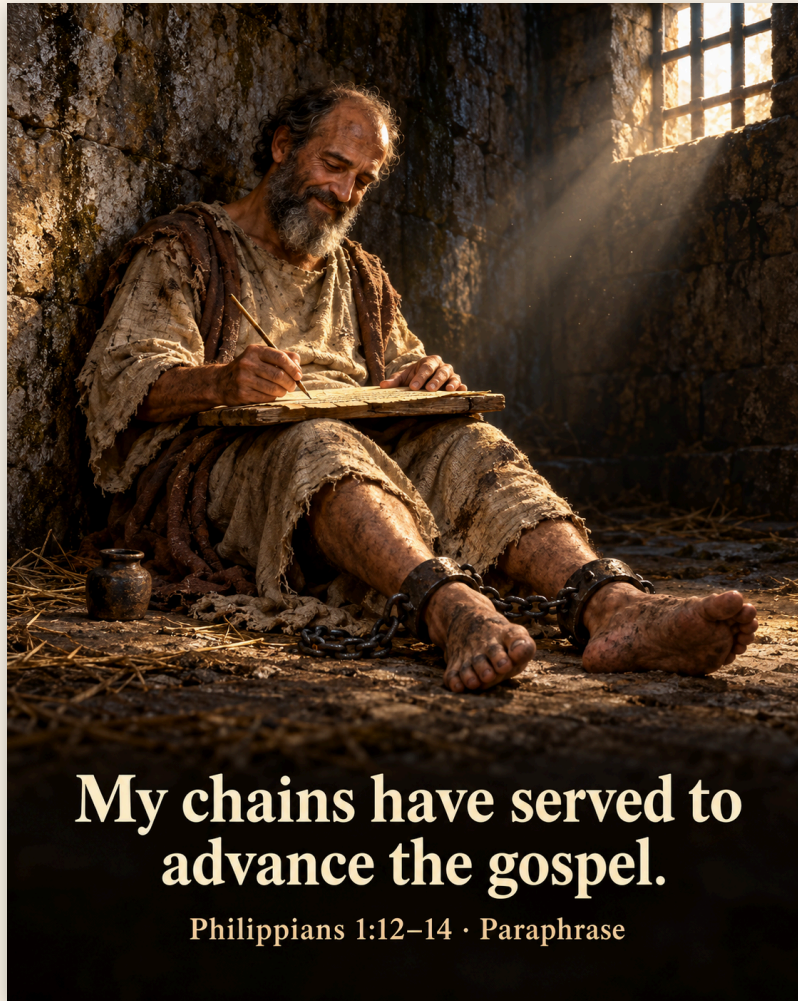


AIMING FOR JESUS

Paul Essentials

His Life, His Letters, His Lord



A substantial, approachable guide for Bible readers and teachers.

“My chains have served to advance the gospel.” Philippians 1:12–14, paraphrase. Imagined portrait; appearance and setting are artistic reconstruction.

Illustrated edition | October 30, 2026

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Contents: added in this edition

Two sections have been added to this edition so that a reader can see at a glance where Paul was in custody and in what order he most likely wrote his letters.

Paul's imprisonments — the most widely accepted order

Follows the detailed timeline. Philippi · Jerusalem · Caesarea · Rome (first) · Rome (second, ending in martyrdom) · the imprisonments Acts does not record.

The likely order of Paul's letters

Follows the thirteen letters. All thirteen in their probable order of writing, with approximate dates and where each was written from; why Galatians comes first and why 2 Timothy is last; and a postscript on the Letter to the Hebrews.

Dates throughout are approximate. They rest on the letters themselves, on Acts, and on the work of respected scholars; where careful interpreters differ, the text says so.

Begin here

Paul's story is about what Jesus Christ can do with a life. The man who tried to destroy the church became a servant who carried the gospel across much of the Roman world. His letters still help believers understand salvation, grow in holiness, love one another, and hold fast through suffering.

This book follows his life, explains his central message, and introduces all thirteen New Testament letters that bear his name. It is meant to be read beside an open Bible. You do not need scholarly training to use it.

Read in two ways. Follow the story from beginning to end, or use the contents to find an event, letter, or teaching. The Scripture references identify where to look more closely. The reading guide at the end offers a manageable way through the material.

What is certain? Events explicitly reported in Scripture are presented as such. Calendar dates are approximate. Proposed connections between Acts and the letters are identified where needed. Paul's death belongs to later Christian testimony; Acts does not describe it.

About the illustrations. Eight scenes adapted from the original Paul artwork open major sections. Faces, clothing, and settings are artistic reconstructions, not historical portraits or exact archaeological views. The journey guides preserve the principal biblical routes; they are not geographic maps. Scripture is paraphrased with references, not presented as exact ESV quotations.

Who Paul was and what he did

Paul was a Jewish man from Tarsus, a Roman citizen by birth, and a Pharisee educated under Gamaliel. Known first in Acts as Saul, he fiercely persecuted the followers of Jesus.

An encounter with the risen Jesus near Damascus changed the direction of his life. The persecutor became a witness to the Lord he had opposed. His mission especially carried the gospel to Gentiles, while he continued to reason with fellow Jews.

Paul traveled, planted churches, trained coworkers, endured opposition and imprisonment, and wrote letters that continue to teach the church. His message centered on Jesus Christ: crucified, risen, and Lord.

The timeline that follows puts his life, travels, and letters together. Five maps then help you follow the places: the early years, three missionary journeys, and the prisoner voyage to Rome.

Reading the dates: “c.” means approximately. Acts gives the sequence more clearly than the calendar. Dates differ among careful chronologies, especially for conversion, Galatians, and the years after Acts. The timeline uses a common working framework.

Scripture anchors: Acts 9; 13-28; 22:3; 22:25-28; Galatians 1:11-24; Philippians 3:4-11.

Timeline 1: Before and at Damascus

Birth and upbringing to about AD 33–36

Dates approximate. Scripture references identify the event; calendar dates are reconstructed.

Date unknown | Tarsus • Birth and citizenship

Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, Jewish by descent and a Roman citizen by birth. Scripture gives no birth year. Acts 21:39; 22:25–28; Philippians 3:5.

Youth and early adulthood | Jerusalem • Learning and zeal

Brought up in Jerusalem and educated under Gamaliel. Paul later identifies himself as a Pharisee. Acts 22:3; 26:4–5. Exact years are not stated.

Before conversion | Jerusalem • Stephen and persecution

Saul approves Stephen's death and attacks the church, entering homes and imprisoning believers. He seeks authority to arrest disciples in Damascus. Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:1–2.

c. AD 33–36 | Near Damascus • Jesus confronts Saul

The risen Jesus meets Saul on the road. Saul enters the city blind, led by his companions. Acts 9:3–9; 22:6–11; 26:12–18.

The following days | Damascus • Ananias and new life

Ananias visits Saul. He regains sight, is baptized, and soon proclaims Jesus as the Son of God. Acts 9:10–22.

Timeline 2: The early ministry years

After conversion to the mid-AD 40s

Dates approximate. Scripture references identify the event; calendar dates are reconstructed.

After conversion | Arabia → Damascus

Paul reports going to Arabia and returning to Damascus. Neither his precise destination nor his activities in Arabia are stated. Galatians 1:15–17.

After three years | Damascus → Jerusalem

Paul escapes Damascus in a basket. In Jerusalem, Barnabas helps believers receive him. Paul visits Cephas for fifteen days and sees James. Acts 9:23–30; Galatians 1:18–20.

Late 30s-early 40s | Caesarea → Tarsus; Syria and Cilicia

Believers send Paul from Caesarea to Tarsus. He describes ministry in Syria and Cilicia, but Scripture does not provide a complete itinerary. Acts 9:30; Galatians 1:21–24.

Early-mid 40s | Tarsus → Syrian Antioch

Barnabas finds Saul and brings him to Antioch. Together they teach the church for a year. The disciples are first called Christians there. Acts 11:25–26.

Mid-40s, approximately | Antioch → Judea → Antioch

Barnabas and Saul carry famine relief to Judea. Acts later reports their return with John Mark. The exact visit date is debated. Acts 11:27–30; 12:25.

Timeline 3: The first mission

About AD 46–49

Dates approximate. Scripture references identify the event; calendar dates are reconstructed.

c. AD 46 | Antioch → Cyprus

Sent by the Spirit and the church, Barnabas and Saul travel through Seleucia to Salamis and Paphos. John Mark accompanies them. Sergius Paulus believes. Acts 13:1–12.

c. AD 47–48 | Perga → Pisidian Antioch → Derbe

Mark returns home. Paul and Barnabas preach in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Paul is stoned at Lystra and survives. Acts 13:13–14:21.

c. AD 48 | Back through the new churches

They retrace the inland route, strengthen disciples, and appoint elders. Through Perga and Attalia they return to Syrian Antioch and report God's work. Acts 14:21–28.

c. AD 48–49? | Galatians • An early possibility

The early-date view places Galatians after this journey, before the Jerusalem Council. A later view places it around AD 53–55. Its exact date and writing location remain debated.

c. AD 49 | Jerusalem Council; then Antioch

The council rejects circumcision as a requirement for Gentile salvation. Later, Paul and Barnabas separate over Mark; Paul chooses Silas for the next journey. Acts 15:1–41.

Timeline 4: Into Macedonia and Greece

About AD 49–52

Dates approximate. Scripture references identify the event; calendar dates are reconstructed.

c. AD 49–50 | Syria and Cilicia → Lystra → Troas

Paul and Silas strengthen churches; Timothy joins them. The Spirit redirects their plans. At Troas, the Macedonian vision leads them across the sea. Acts 15:40–16:10.

c. AD 50 | Philippi • Lydia and the jailer

Lydia responds to the gospel. Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned; the jailer and his household hear the word and are baptized. Acts 16:11–40.

c. AD 50 | Thessalonica → Berea → Athens

Paul reasons from Scripture, encounters opposition, and addresses the Areopagus in Athens concerning the Creator, repentance, judgment, and resurrection. Acts 17:1–34.

c. AD 50–52 | Corinth • A long stay and two letters

Paul works with Aquila and Priscilla and teaches for eighteen months. First and Second Thessalonians are commonly placed here. Gallio dismisses the case against Paul. Acts 18:1–17.

c. AD 52 | Ephesus → Caesarea → Antioch

The second journey ends. Paul soon sets out again through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening disciples, then begins extended ministry at Ephesus. Acts 18:18–23; 19:1.

Timeline 5: Churches, letters, Jerusalem

About AD 52–57

Dates approximate. Scripture references identify the event; calendar dates are reconstructed.

c. AD 52–55 | Ephesus • The third journey

Paul's extended teaching reaches many people. First Corinthians is written from Ephesus, about AD 54–55. The later-date view may also place Galatians in this period. Acts 19; 1 Corinthians 16:8.

c. AD 55–56 | Macedonia • Second Corinthians

After leaving Ephesus, Paul meets Titus and receives encouraging news about Corinth. Second Corinthians belongs to this setting. Acts 20:1–2; 2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–7.

c. AD 56–57 | Greece, probably Corinth • Romans

During three months in Greece, Paul writes Romans from Corinth or its vicinity. He prepares to deliver aid to Jerusalem and hopes to go to Spain. Acts 20:2–3; Romans 15:22–29.

c. AD 57 | Troas → Miletus → Jerusalem

Eutychus is restored at Troas. Paul bids farewell to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, then continues through Tyre and Caesarea to Jerusalem. Acts 20:6–21:17.

c. AD 57 | Jerusalem → Caesarea • Arrest

A temple disturbance leads to Paul's arrest. After a plot against his life, Roman authorities transfer him to Caesarea under guard. Acts 21:27–23:35.

Timeline 6: Imprisonment and the finish

About AD 57–67; later dates less certain

Dates approximate. Scripture references identify the event; calendar dates are reconstructed.

c. AD 57–59 | Caesarea • Two years confined

Paul appears before Felix and then Festus, appeals to Caesar, and testifies before Agrippa. Acts 24–26. Some chronologies place this period one year later.

c. AD 59–60 | Mediterranean → Malta → Rome

A storm drives the prisoner ship off course. All survive shipwreck on Malta. After winter, Paul continues through Sicily and southern Italy to Rome. Acts 27:1–28:16.

c. AD 60–62 | Rome • Two years under guard

Acts ends with Paul receiving visitors and teaching. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are traditionally placed here; some writing locations are debated. Acts 28:16–31.

c. AD 62–65 | Further ministry • Reconstructed

First Timothy and Titus describe work involving Macedonia, Ephesus, and Crete, plus a planned winter at Nicopolis. A release after Acts is inferred. Spain remains unconfirmed. 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5; 3:12.

c. AD 64–67 | Rome • Final imprisonment and death

Second Timothy reflects imprisonment and expected death. Later Christian tradition places Paul's martyrdom under Nero; Scripture gives no execution date or method. 2 Timothy 1:16–17; 4:6–18.

Map 1: The early years

Before the first missionary journey · Acts 9–12; Galatians 1



Red: Damascus journey · Blue dashes: later movements

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. Tarsus | 2. Syrian Antioch | 3. Damascus |
| 4. Caesarea | 5. Jerusalem | |

Jerusalem → Damascus: the persecutor meets Jesus. Arabia → Damascus: Paul names the region, but gives no exact destination or route.

Damascus → Jerusalem → Caesarea → Tarsus; later Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch. The timeline also records the famine-relief visit.

Schematic routes; approximate ancient sites on a general modern coastline. Geography: Natural Earth (public domain).

Tarsus: where the story begins



An imagined boyhood scene in Paul's birthplace. Scripture does not describe this moment. Acts 21:39; 22:3.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

Paul's imprisonments — the most widely accepted order

Scripture records four occasions when Paul was held in custody, and Paul himself tells us there were more. The order below follows Acts and Paul's own letters. Dates are approximate — Scripture gives the sequence far more clearly than the calendar.

1. **Philippi — a night in the inner prison** (Acts 16:16–40; about AD 49–50). Paul and Silas, beaten and fastened in the stocks; the earthquake; the jailer and his household saved. Released the next day as Roman citizens.
2. **Jerusalem — arrest in the Temple and custody in the Roman barracks** (Acts 21:27–23:30; about AD 57). Seized by the crowd, rescued by the tribune, and held in the Antonia fortress; the plot to kill him leads to a night transfer to Caesarea.
3. **Caesarea — two years in Herod's praetorium** (Acts 23:31–26:32; about AD 57–59). Hearings before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa; Paul appeals to Caesar.
4. **Rome — the first imprisonment: two years under house arrest** (Acts 27–28; about AD 60–62). After the storm and shipwreck on Malta, Paul lives in his own rented quarters with a soldier guarding him, “proclaiming the kingdom of God... with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:30–31). The traditional view places Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians here.
5. **Rome — the second imprisonment and martyrdom** (2 Timothy 1:8, 16–17; 2:9; 4:6–18; about AD 64–67). Not recorded in Acts. Paul is now “suffering, bound with chains as a criminal” (2 Tim 2:9), deserted at his first defense (4:16), and expecting death: “the time of my departure has come” (4:6). Early Christian testimony (Clement of Rome, about AD 96; Eusebius) records that he was executed in Rome under Nero.

More imprisonments than Acts records. Writing from Macedonia in about AD 55–56 — before Jerusalem, Caesarea, or Rome — Paul already speaks of “far more imprisonments” (2 Corinthians 11:23). Clement of Rome, writing about AD 96, says Paul was “seven times in bonds” (1 Clement 5:6). Some scholars propose an imprisonment at Ephesus during the third journey (compare 1 Corinthians 15:32; 2 Corinthians 1:8–9), but Scripture does not describe one. The list above is therefore the imprisonments we can place; it is not the whole count.

1. Saul before Jesus stopped him

Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia and brought up in Jerusalem, where he was educated under Gamaliel. He belonged to the tribe of Benjamin and identified himself as a Pharisee. He also possessed Roman citizenship by birth. These facts help explain his knowledge of Scripture and his later legal protections. **Read Acts 21:39; 22:3, 25-29; Philippians 3:4-6.**

His learning did not keep him from being wrong about Jesus. Saul believed that he ought to oppose Jesus' name. He imprisoned believers and pursued them beyond Jerusalem. He later described his former conduct with grief, while pointing to the mercy he had received. **Read Acts 26:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:12-16.**

At Stephen's death, witnesses laid their garments at Saul's feet. He approved the killing. Acts then describes him entering homes and dragging believers away to prison. The text identifies him as a persecutor; it does not say that he personally threw the stones that killed Stephen. **Read Acts 7:58-8:3.**

Saul and Paul: Acts 13:9 identifies Saul as also called Paul. Scripture does not describe Jesus renaming him at his conversion. Acts increasingly uses Paul as the narrative follows his Gentile mission.

What to carry with you: Sincerity and religious knowledge cannot make a false belief true. Paul needed more than increased zeal. He needed the Lord he was opposing.

The risen Jesus meets Saul



On the Damascus road, light from heaven surrounds Saul. The persecutor encounters Jesus. Acts 9:1–9.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

2. The road to Damascus

Saul obtained letters from the high priest authorizing him to bring followers of the Way from Damascus to Jerusalem as prisoners. On the road, light from heaven surrounded him. He fell to the ground and heard Jesus addressing him. The One he opposed was alive. **Read Acts 9:1-9.**

Jesus identified Saul's persecution of believers as persecution of Himself. That connection matters: Christ does not regard His people as strangers whose suffering is none of His concern. Saul's entire understanding of Jesus and His followers had to change.

Blinded, Saul was led into Damascus by his companions. For three days he could not see and neither ate nor drank. The man who had set out to arrest others entered the city dependent on their help.

Acts tells the event directly in chapter 9 and records Paul's retellings in chapters 22 and 26. Each account contributes details. The statement about kicking against the goads appears in Acts 26:14; it should not be inserted into an exact quotation of Acts 9:5.

Keep the scene biblical. Acts does not mention a horse or a Roman military escort. Such details should not become part of what we teach as Scripture.

What to carry with you: Paul's apostleship begins with the initiative of the risen Christ. Paul later describes his calling in terms of God's grace, not his own worthiness. **Read Galatians 1:15-16; 1 Corinthians 15:8-10.**

3. Ananias and the early years

The Lord sent Ananias, a disciple in Damascus, to Saul. Ananias knew Saul's reputation and voiced his concern. The Lord explained that Saul was His chosen instrument to bear His name before Gentiles, kings, and Israel. Suffering would be part of that calling. **Read Acts 9:10-19.**

Ananias obeyed. Saul recovered his sight, was baptized, ate, and regained strength. He soon proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues. His hearers were astonished because they knew the purpose for which he had come. **Read Acts 9:19-22.**

Galatians supplies part of the sequence that Acts compresses: Paul went to Arabia, returned to Damascus, and after three years went to Jerusalem. Scripture does not tell us exactly where he went in Arabia or what he did there. We should not invent a three-year retreat or describe a curriculum that the Bible never supplies. **Read Galatians 1:15-18.**

Opposition in Damascus led to his escape in a basket through an opening in the wall. In Jerusalem, believers feared him until Barnabas helped establish that his change was real. Paul also reports spending fifteen days with Cephas, or Peter, and seeing James, the Lord's brother. **Read Acts 9:23-30; 2 Corinthians 11:32-33; Galatians 1:18-20.**

What to carry with you: Ananias and Barnabas remind us that courageous, personal obedience can help someone take the next faithful step.

Sent by the Holy Spirit



After fasting and prayer, the church lays hands on Barnabas and Saul and sends them out. Acts 13:1-4.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

4. Barnabas, Antioch, and being sent

When opposition threatened Paul's life in Jerusalem, believers brought him to Caesarea and sent him to Tarsus. Paul describes going into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. The churches heard that their former persecutor was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. **Read Acts 9:28-30; Galatians 1:21-24.**

Later, Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul and brought him to Antioch in Syria. Together they taught a large number of people for a year. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. This growing church also sent famine relief to believers in Judea through Barnabas and Saul. **Read Acts 11:19-30.**

Antioch became a sending church. While its leaders worshiped and fasted, the Holy Spirit directed them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. After fasting and prayer, they laid hands on the men and sent them out. **Read Acts 13:1-4.**

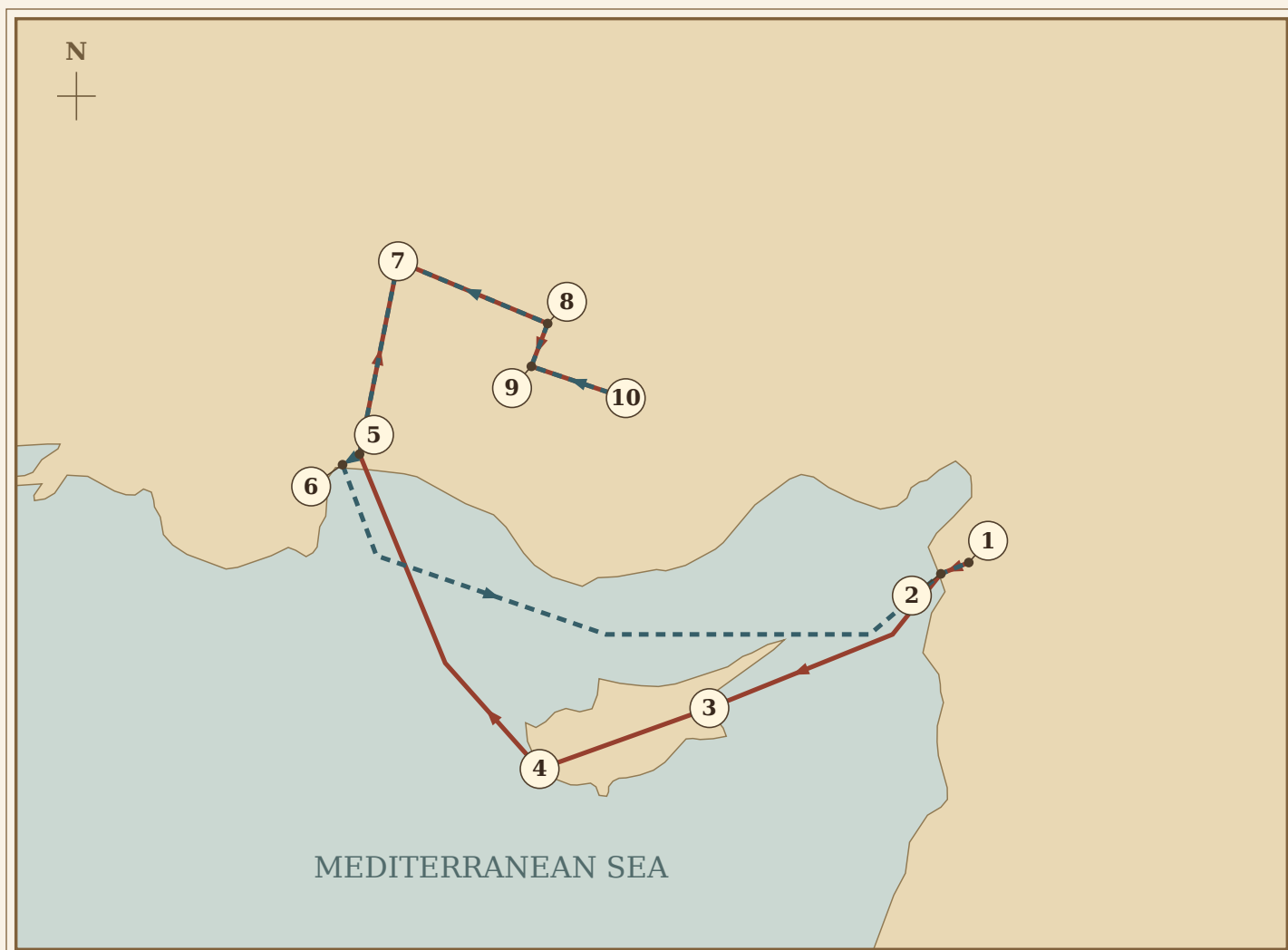
Paul was personally called by Christ, but he did not conduct his ministry as an isolated religious adventurer. He served among believers, traveled with companions, and returned to report what God had done.

Two Antiochs: Syrian Antioch was the sending church. Pisidian Antioch was a city Paul visited during the first journey. Keeping them distinct makes Acts much easier to follow.

What to carry with you: Mission grows out of dependence on the Spirit and partnership in the church. The Lord's work is larger than one gifted person.

Map 2: The first journey

About AD 46-48 · Acts 13-14



Red: outward journey · Blue dashes: return journey

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Syrian Antioch | 2. Seleucia | 3. Salamis |
| 4. Paphos | 5. Perga | 6. Attalia |
| 7. Pisidian Antioch | 8. Iconium | 9. Lystra |
| 10. Derbe | | |

Sent from Syrian Antioch, Paul and Barnabas cross Cyprus, then establish churches in southern Asia Minor. John Mark leaves at Perga.

Return: Derbe → Lystra → Iconium → Pisidian Antioch → Perga → Attalia → Syrian Antioch. They strengthen disciples and appoint elders.

Schematic routes; approximate ancient sites on a general modern coastline. Geography: Natural Earth (public domain).

5. The first journey

Barnabas and Saul sailed from Seleucia to Cyprus with John Mark as their helper. They proclaimed God's word in Salamis and traveled to Paphos. There, opposition from Elymas did not prevent the proconsul Sergius Paulus from believing. **Read Acts 13:4-12.**

From Cyprus they sailed to Perga, where Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas continued to Pisidian Antioch. Paul's synagogue message traced God's work in Israel to Jesus, His death and resurrection, and the forgiveness proclaimed through Him. **Read Acts 13:13-43.**

The response included both faith and bitter opposition. They continued to Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. In Lystra, the healing of a man unable to walk led the crowd to mistake the missionaries for gods. Paul and Barnabas urgently refused the worship and directed the people to the living Creator. Later, Paul was stoned and left for dead. Acts reports that he rose and continued; it does not explicitly say that he had died. **Read Acts 14:1-20.**

On the return trip they revisited the new disciples, strengthened them, and appointed elders in the churches with prayer and fasting. Their work included helping believers continue, not merely collecting initial responses. **Read Acts 14:21-28.**

What to carry with you: The gospel produced real faith, real opposition, and real communities that needed care. Paul's endurance was joined to concern for the believers he left behind.

6. Grace and the Jerusalem Council

Some men taught that Gentiles could not be saved unless they were circumcised according to Moses' custom. Paul and Barnabas strongly opposed this requirement. The matter went to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. **Read Acts 15:1-6.**

Peter reminded the gathering that God had given Gentile believers the Holy Spirit and cleansed their hearts by faith. Salvation came through the grace of the Lord Jesus. Barnabas and Paul described God's work among the Gentiles. James then spoke from Scripture in support of receiving them. **Read Acts 15:7-21.**

The resulting letter did not require Gentile converts to become Jews. It did direct them to abstain from specified practices, including sexual immorality and matters involving food and idolatry. These instructions should not be turned into an alternative way to earn salvation. **Read Acts 15:22-35.**

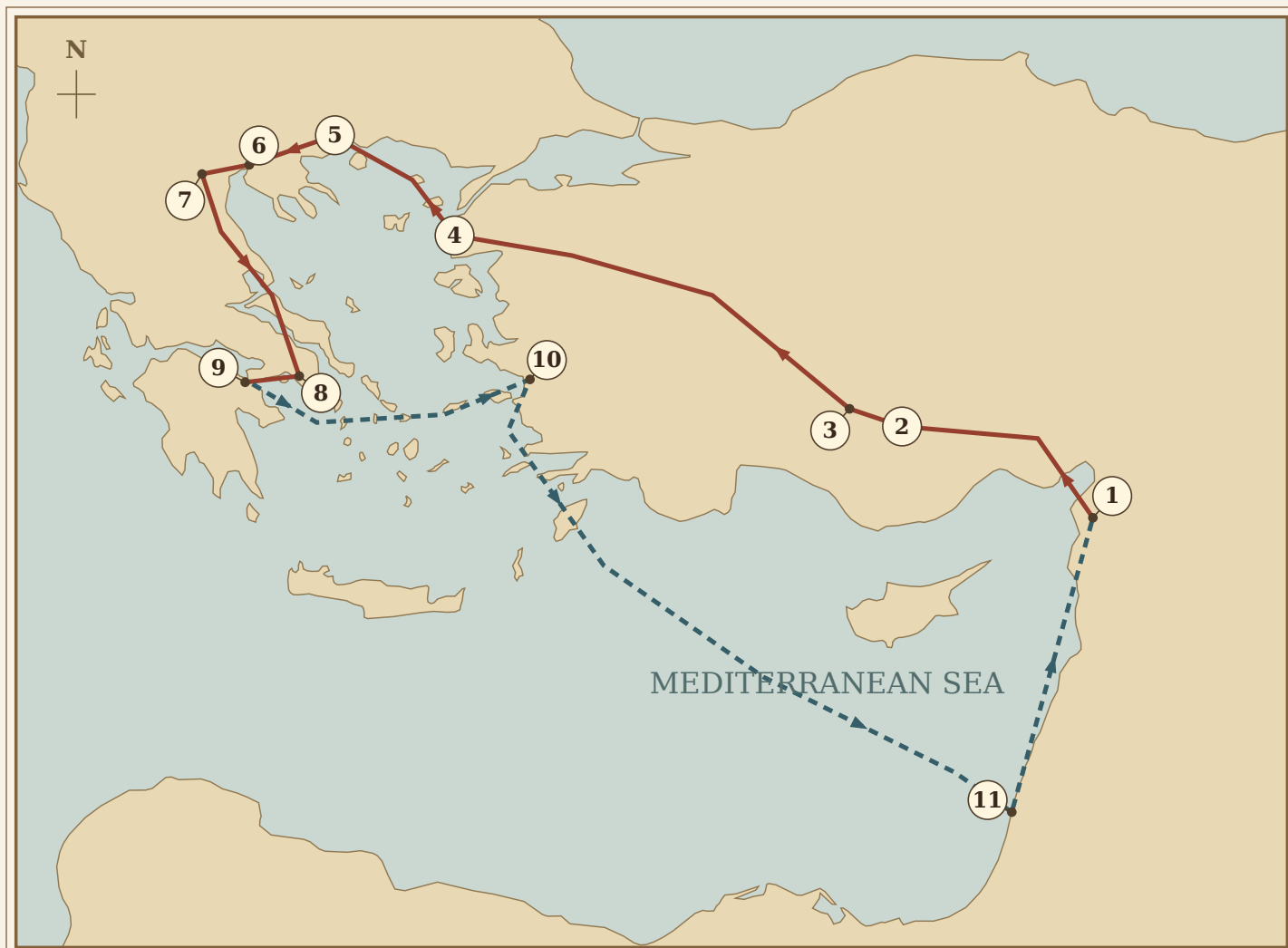
Galatians addresses the same central danger: adding law-keeping to faith in Christ as the basis of being right with God. The date of the letter and the precise correspondence between Paul's Jerusalem visits in Galatians and Acts remain debated. The gospel issue itself is plain.

Paul later had Timothy circumcised because of the Jewish people in the region; Timothy had a Jewish mother. Paul would not allow Titus, a Greek, to be compelled to undergo circumcision in a setting where gospel freedom was at stake. **Read Acts 16:1-3; Galatians 2:3-5.**

What to carry with you: Adaptation for ministry must never turn into an added requirement for salvation.

Map 3: The second journey

About AD 49-52 · Acts 15:36-18:22



Red: outward journey · Blue dashes: return journey

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Syrian Antioch | 2. Derbe | 3. Lystra |
| 4. Troas | 5. Philippi | 6. Thessalonica |
| 7. Berea | 8. Athens | 9. Corinth |
| 10. Ephesus | 11. Caesarea | |

Paul and Silas leave Antioch; Timothy joins at Lystra. Through Phrygia and Galatia they reach Troas, then cross to Macedonia and continue into Greece.

Return: Cenchreae → Ephesus → Caesarea → Antioch. Acts 18:22 likely implies a Jerusalem visit. The interior route is schematic; smaller stops appear in the journey guide.

Schematic routes; approximate ancient sites on a general modern coastline. Geography: Natural Earth (public domain).

Faith in the midst of suffering



In Philippi, Paul and Silas pray and sing while their feet are held in stocks. Acts 16:22-25.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

7. A divided team and an opened door

Before the second journey, Paul and Barnabas disagreed sharply about taking John Mark. Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and traveled through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Acts reports the disagreement without assigning a simple verdict that one man was entirely right. **Read Acts 15:36-41.**

The story also did not end with permanent rejection of Mark. Much later, Paul asked Timothy to bring Mark because he was useful for ministry. Reconciliation and renewed usefulness belong in our understanding of Paul's relationships. **Read 2 Timothy 4:11.**

Timothy joined the work at Lystra. As they traveled, the Holy Spirit prevented the team from following certain plans. At Troas, Paul saw a vision of a Macedonian man asking for help. The group concluded that God was calling them to preach there. **Read Acts 16:1-10.**

They crossed to Macedonia and reached Philippi. By the river, Paul spoke with women gathered for prayer. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to respond. She and her household were baptized, and she offered hospitality to the missionaries. **Read Acts 16:11-15.**

Notice the pattern: God's direction included closed routes as well as an open invitation. Paul kept serving and responding; he was not given a complete travel schedule in advance.

What to carry with you: Faithfulness does not require knowing every coming turn. It requires obedience to the light God has given.

8. Philippi: suffering and salvation

In Philippi, Paul commanded a spirit to leave a slave girl who had been used to make money through divination. Her owners, having lost their profit, brought Paul and Silas before the authorities. The missionaries were beaten and imprisoned.

Read Acts 16:16-24.

Around midnight they prayed and sang hymns while the other prisoners listened. An earthquake opened the doors and released the restraints. The jailer, believing the prisoners had escaped, was about to kill himself. Paul called out that they were all present. **Read Acts 16:25-28.**

The jailer asked about salvation. Paul and Silas directed him to faith in the Lord Jesus and spoke the word of the Lord to him and everyone in his house. The household promise must be read with that explanation: the word was brought to the household. It is not a guarantee that one person's faith automatically saves relatives without their own response. **Read Acts 16:29-34.**

The jailer washed their wounds, and he and his household were baptized. The next day Paul insisted that the authorities address their unlawful treatment of Roman citizens. He used his legal standing openly rather than quietly accepting dismissal. **Read Acts 16:35-40.**

The later letter to Philippi shows that a lasting partnership grew from these beginnings.

What to carry with you: Paul's concern for the jailer continued while Paul himself was suffering. Pain did not erase his calling to love people and point them to Christ.

9. Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens

In Thessalonica, Paul reasoned from the Scriptures that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, and that Jesus was that Christ. Some believed; opposition followed. Believers helped Paul and Silas leave for Berea. **Read Acts 17:1-10.**

The Bereans received the message eagerly and examined the Scriptures daily to see whether it was true. Their example joins openness with careful testing. Respect for a teacher does not replace attention to God's word. **Read Acts 17:11-15.**

In Athens, Paul was deeply troubled by the city's idols. He spoke in the synagogue and marketplace, and addressed the Areopagus. Beginning with an altar to an unknown god, he proclaimed the Creator who gives life to everyone, cannot be confined to human temples, and calls all people to repent. **Read Acts 17:16-31.**

Paul used points his hearers could recognize, including words from their poets. Yet he did not leave them with vague spirituality. He spoke of God's appointed judgment and the resurrection of the Man God had appointed. Some mocked, some wanted to hear more, and some believed. **Read Acts 17:32-34.**

What to carry with you: Paul's starting point varied with his audience. His message still led to the living God, repentance, and the risen Christ. Understanding people helps us speak clearly; it does not require changing the truth to win their approval.

10. Corinth: work, courage, and care

In Corinth, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla and worked with them because they shared the same trade, described in Acts as tentmaking. He reasoned in the synagogue and testified that Jesus was the Christ. When opposition hardened, his ministry continued nearby. **Read Acts 18:1-8.**

The Lord encouraged Paul in a vision to keep speaking and not be afraid. He stayed eighteen months, teaching God's word. Paul was courageous, but the Lord's encouragement reminds us that courage does not mean never needing reassurance. **Read Acts 18:9-11.**

When opponents brought Paul before Gallio, the proconsul dismissed the case as a dispute concerning Jewish matters rather than a Roman crime. Paul's time in Corinth supplies an important point of reference for the approximate chronology of his ministry. **Read Acts 18:12-17.**

The Thessalonian letters are commonly placed during this Corinthian stay. Paul was building one church while carrying concern for another. Later letters to Corinth reveal serious problems there: factions, sexual sin, misuse of spiritual gifts, disputes, and confusion about resurrection. Those problems did not make the church unworthy of patient correction.

Paul eventually sailed east with Priscilla and Aquila, stopped at Ephesus, and returned by Caesarea to Antioch. **Read Acts 18:18-22.**

What to carry with you: Paul's ministry included ordinary labor, sustained teaching, practical friendships, and repeated correction. Deep Christian growth usually requires more than a brief visit or one powerful message.

Map 4: The third journey

About AD 52-57 · Acts 18:23-21:17



Red: outward journey · Blue dashes: return journey

- | | | |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Syrian Antioch | 2. Ephesus | 3. Philippi |
| 4. Corinth | 5. Troas | 6. Miletus |
| 7. Rhodes | 8. Patara | 9. Tyre |
| 10. Caesarea | 11. Jerusalem | |

From Antioch through Galatia and Phrygia to Ephesus; then Macedonia and Greece. Regional lines summarize the journey where Acts gives no complete list of stops.

Return through Macedonia to Troas and Miletus; then Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, and Jerusalem. Paul meets the Ephesian elders at Miletus.

Schematic routes; approximate ancient sites on a general modern coastline. Geography: Natural Earth (public domain).

Teaching in Ephesus



Paul teaches in Ephesus, where sustained ministry helps the word spread through Asia. Acts 19:8-10.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

11. Ephesus and the third journey

Paul began another journey through Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples, and then came to Ephesus. He taught in the synagogue and later in the hall of Tyrannus. His extended ministry helped the word spread widely in the Roman province of Asia. **Read Acts 18:23; 19:1-10.**

Acts describes extraordinary miracles, the failure of men who attempted to use Jesus' name without belonging to Him, and converts publicly abandoning magical practices. The account does not present Jesus' name as a formula people can manipulate. **Read Acts 19:11-20.**

The gospel also disturbed established business interests. Demetrius and other craftsmen feared for their trade in shrines of Artemis. A riot followed. Changed worship had consequences for ordinary economic life. **Read Acts 19:23-41.**

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus. After leaving for Macedonia, he wrote 2 Corinthians in the setting of Titus's encouraging report. During the later stay in Greece, commonly understood as centered in Corinth, he wrote Romans. These letters let us hear the pastoral concerns behind the travel account. **Read 1 Corinthians 16:8; 2 Corinthians 7:5-7; Romans 15:25-26; 16:1, 23.**

He was also organizing help for needy believers in Jerusalem. The collection expressed practical love across the churches.

What to carry with you: A changed life involves more than adopting religious language. The lordship of Jesus reaches worship, habits, money, loyalties, and care for other people.

A shepherd's farewell



At Miletus, Paul urges the Ephesian elders to care for themselves and the flock. Acts 20:17-38.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

12. The journey toward Jerusalem

After three months in Greece, a plot caused Paul to return through Macedonia. In Troas, a young man named Eutychus fell from a window during Paul's prolonged teaching and was taken up dead. Paul went down to him, and the believers later brought the young man away alive. **Read Acts 20:1-12.**

At Miletus, Paul called the Ephesian elders to meet him. His farewell recalled service marked by humility, tears, and trials. He had taught publicly and from house to house, proclaiming repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus. **Read Acts 20:17-27.**

He warned the elders to watch themselves and the flock. Threats would arise both from outside and within. Shepherding required vigilance, sound teaching, and care for the weak. Paul's example included working to help others. **Read Acts 20:28-38.**

Warnings of suffering accompanied the journey to Jerusalem. In Caesarea, Agabus portrayed Paul's coming captivity. Friends pleaded with Paul not to go, but he expressed readiness to suffer and die for Jesus' name. Acts includes both warnings and Paul's conviction; we should not flatten the account into a claim that it contains no interpretive difficulty. **Read Acts 20:22-24; 21:1-14.**

What to carry with you: Faithful ministry is measured by loyalty to Christ and care for His people. Paul could not control what awaited him, but he could determine to complete the ministry he had received.

13. Arrest, hearings, and an appeal

In Jerusalem, opponents accused Paul of teaching against the people, the law, and the temple, and of bringing Greeks into the temple. Acts explains that the latter accusation rested on an assumption about Trophimus. A violent crowd seized Paul, and Roman soldiers intervened. **Read Acts 21:27-36.**

Paul addressed the crowd and later appeared before the council. His Roman citizenship prevented an unlawful examination by flogging. When a plot against his life became known through his nephew, the Roman commander sent him under guard to Caesarea. **Read Acts 22:1-29; 23:1-35.**

Before Felix, Paul defended his conduct and spoke about faith in Christ Jesus, righteousness, self-control, and coming judgment. Felix kept him imprisoned for two years. Festus succeeded Felix, and Paul appealed to Caesar rather than agree to a dangerous transfer for trial in Jerusalem. **Read Acts 24-25.**

Paul then spoke before Agrippa and Bernice, explaining his former persecution, his encounter with Jesus, and his commission. He argued that his proclamation fulfilled what Moses and the prophets had anticipated concerning the suffering and resurrection of the Christ. **Read Acts 26.**

What to carry with you: Paul defended himself truthfully and used available legal protections. At the same time, he treated hearings as occasions to bear witness. His circumstances changed; the Lord he served and the gospel he proclaimed did not.

Map 5: To Rome as a prisoner

About AD 59-60 · Acts 27-28



Red: coastal / onward travel · Blue dashes: uncertain storm drift

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Rome | 2. Puteoli | 3. Rhegium |
| 4. Syracuse | 5. Malta | 6. Myra |
| 7. Sidon | 8. Caesarea | |

CRETE DETAIL · EAST TO WEST

Cnidus → Salmone (east tip) → Fair Havens (south coast)
→ Cauda (small island southwest of Crete) → storm at sea

Caesarea → Sidon → sheltered waters by Cyprus → Myra → Cnidus → Crete. After Fair Havens, a storm carries the ship past Cauda toward Malta; its exact drift is unknown.

After winter: Malta → Syracuse → Rhegium → Puteoli; then overland via the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to Rome. Phoenix was an intended harbor, never reached.

Schematic routes; approximate ancient sites on a general modern coastline. Geography: Natural Earth (public domain).

Brought safely through the storm



The ship is lost, but everyone reaches land safely. The island is Malta. Acts 27:39-28:1.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

14. Storm, shipwreck, and Malta

Paul sailed for Italy as a prisoner under the care of a centurion named Julius. Luke's account follows a difficult route through several ports. At Myra, the party boarded an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy. They eventually reached Fair Havens on Crete. **Read Acts 27:1-8.**

Despite Paul's warning, the voyage continued. A violent storm drove the ship away from its intended course. After many days, hope of rescue faded. Paul then reported God's assurance that he must stand before Caesar and that the lives of those sailing with him had been granted to him. **Read Acts 27:9-26.**

That assurance did not make practical action irrelevant. Paul warned against the sailors abandoning the ship, urged everyone to eat, and encouraged them. The ship was wrecked, but all 276 people reached land safely. **Read Acts 27:27-44.**

On Malta, a viper fastened onto Paul's hand as he helped with a fire. He shook it off and suffered no harm. The islanders first assumed guilt and then imagined he was a god. Their changing conclusions were not reliable judgments about him. Paul prayed for Publius's father, who was healed, and others received healing. **Read Acts 28:1-10.**

What to carry with you: Paul trusted God's promise while giving practical help. He did not manufacture danger to test God. The snake incident is a report of God's preservation, not a command to handle poisonous snakes.

15. Rome and the closing years

After wintering on Malta, Paul traveled by Syracuse, Rhegium, and Puteoli. Believers met him on the approach to Rome, and their presence encouraged him. In Rome he lived under guard and received visitors. **Read Acts 28:11-22.**

For two full years he proclaimed God's kingdom and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts ends with this ministry continuing. It does not report the outcome of his appeal, his release, or his death. **Read Acts 28:23-31.**

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are commonly placed in this Roman imprisonment. The letters themselves establish imprisonment, but the precise location of some is debated. We can learn their message without treating every proposed date as certain.

Beyond Acts: First Timothy and Titus describe ministry arrangements involving Ephesus, Macedonia, and Crete, along with a proposed winter at Nicopolis. The traditional reconstruction places these after a release from Rome. Second Timothy reflects imprisonment, abandonment by some, help from others, and Paul's expectation of death. **Read 1 Timothy 1:3; Titus 1:5; 3:12; 2 Timothy 1:16-17; 4:6-18.**

Paul hoped to visit Spain, but Scripture does not confirm that he reached it. Later Christian tradition places his martyrdom under Nero, commonly by beheading; the method and exact year are not supplied in the Bible. **Read Romans 15:24, 28.**

What to carry with you: Paul's final confidence rested in the Lord's faithfulness, not in freedom from suffering.

16. The heart of Paul's gospel

Paul did not present Christianity as a program for impressive people to improve themselves. All have sinned. Neither Gentile moral failure nor Jewish possession of the law supplies a ground for boasting. People need the righteousness God provides. **Read Romans 1:16-17; 3:9-26.**

At the center stands Jesus Christ: He died for our sins, was buried, and was raised. His resurrection is not an optional addition to the message. Without it, Paul says, Christian faith would be futile. **Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-22.**

Justification means being declared righteous before God. It is His gracious gift through Christ, received by faith, not a wage earned by good conduct. Abraham's example helps Paul show that this principle is not a late departure from God's earlier promises. **Read Romans 3:24-4:25.**

Reconciliation addresses our alienation from God. Through Christ, enemies are brought into peace with Him. **Adoption** describes the privilege of belonging to God's family as His children and heirs. **Read Romans 5:1-11; 8:14-17; Galatians 4:4-7.**

Grace does not make sin harmless. It removes boasting and establishes a new allegiance. Believers are created in Christ for good works; those works are the fruit of salvation, not its purchase price. **Read Ephesians 2:1-10.**

What to carry with you: We do not come to Jesus with a life already made worthy. We come needing mercy, and His grace begins to change how we live.

17. Growing into the likeness of Christ

Paul joins salvation by grace with a serious call to holiness. Those united to Christ must not treat sin as their rightful master. They are to offer themselves to God. **Read Romans 6:1-14.**

Sanctification is God's work of making His people holy, expressed in their growing obedience. The Holy Spirit empowers this life. Paul contrasts the works of the flesh with the Spirit's fruit: qualities such as love, joy, peace, patience, and self-control. **Read Galatians 5:16-25.**

Having the mind of Christ includes humble concern for other people. Philippians points to Jesus' self-humbling and obedience, then calls believers to work out their salvation because God is at work in them. This is the lived expression of salvation, not an instruction to earn it. **Read Philippians 2:1-16.**

Growth reaches ordinary moments: telling the truth, controlling anger, forgiving, speaking words that help, and putting away bitterness. Paul does not separate spiritual maturity from the next conversation or choice. **Read Ephesians 4:17-32.**

Romans 7 describes the seriousness of the struggle with sin; Christians differ over aspects of the speaker's situation. Romans 8 plainly points to freedom from condemnation in Christ and life through the Spirit. **Read Romans 7:14-8:17.**

What to carry with you: Dependence on grace and active obedience belong together. We rely on God's power while taking the next faithful step He sets before us.

18. The church, suffering, and hope

Paul describes the church as Christ's body. Believers receive different gifts, but all need one another. Gifts are for building up the church; without love, even remarkable abilities fail their purpose. **Read 1 Corinthians 12-14.**

Jews and Gentiles are brought near through Christ and joined in one new humanity. Unity does not mean that every personal or cultural distinction disappears. It means that neither ancestry nor social standing gives a believer superior access to the Father. **Read Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:26-29.**

Paul's own ministry included beatings, danger, hardship, grief, and a persistent affliction he called a thorn in the flesh. Scripture does not identify that thorn precisely. Christ's sufficient grace taught Paul to depend on divine strength in weakness. **Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-29; 12:7-10.**

His hope reached beyond present relief. Because Jesus rose, believers await resurrection and life with Him. Paul offered that hope to grieving people and called the church to steadfast work. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58.**

Romans 8:28-29 belongs together. God's good purpose includes conforming His people to the image of His Son. The passage does not promise that every event will feel good or produce immediate comfort. Nothing can separate His people from His love in Christ. **Read Romans 8:28-39.**

What to carry with you: The Christian life is shared, grace-sustained, and directed toward a hope that suffering cannot cancel.

Letters that still speak



An imagined scene of Paul writing under guard. His letters strengthen the churches. Colossians 4:3-18.

Artistic reconstruction adapted from the original Paul artwork.

The thirteen letters: how to use this guide

Paul wrote to actual people facing actual needs. Read each letter as a whole before building a teaching from one isolated verse. Ask who is receiving it, what problem is being addressed, and how the passage advances Paul's argument.

The following pages follow the familiar New Testament order. That order is not the sequence in which Paul wrote the letters.

During the missionary years: First and Second Thessalonians are usually placed during the second journey. First and Second Corinthians and Romans belong to the third-journey period. Galatians has an earlier and a later dating proposal.

During imprisonment: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon are traditionally grouped as the Prison Letters. Rome is a common setting; some locations and dates remain debated.

Later ministry and imprisonment: First Timothy, Titus, and Second Timothy are commonly called the Pastoral Letters. This book follows the traditional understanding that Paul wrote them, with the later sequence reconstructed from their details.

Why not Hebrews? Hebrews does not identify its author. It should not be assigned to Paul as an established fact.

A simple reading habit: Notice what the passage says about God, what He has done in Christ, and the response He calls for. Commands are best understood in the light of the grace and truth supporting them.

Romans

Setting: Written before Paul reached Rome, commonly dated about AD 56–57 from Corinth or its vicinity. He was preparing to carry aid to Jerusalem and hoped later to visit Rome on the way to Spain. **Read Romans 15:22–29.**

The need: A fuller understanding of the gospel and of life together among Jewish and Gentile believers, with a view toward partnership in mission.

The message: The gospel reveals God's righteousness and His saving power. All need grace. God justifies through faith in Christ, gives new life by His Spirit, remains faithful to His purposes, and calls believers to offer their lives to Him.

Follow the argument: Chapters 1–3 expose sin; 4–5 explain justification and peace with God; 6–8 address new life, struggle, the Spirit, and assurance; 9–11 consider Israel and God's purposes; 12–16 show the gospel shaping everyday conduct and relationships.

Read closely: Romans 1:16–17; 3:21–26; 5:1–11; 8:1–39; 12:1–2.

Keep the balance: Paul does not promise an easy life. His assurance includes people facing weakness, suffering, and death. Mercy becomes the foundation for transformed living.

For your life: Ask whether the mercy you have received is changing how you treat someone whose conscience, background, or preferences differ from yours.

1 Corinthians

Setting: Written from Ephesus, about AD 54–55, in response to reports and questions from the church. **Read 1 Corinthians 1:11; 7:1; 16:8.**

The need: Believers were divided around leaders, tolerating serious sin, mistreating one another, and misunderstanding worship, spiritual gifts, and resurrection.

The message: A church belongs to Christ. His cross overturns human boasting, and His lordship reaches bodies, relationships, freedom, worship, and hope.

Follow the argument: Chapters 1–4 confront division; 5–6 address moral and legal conflicts; 7 discusses marriage and related circumstances; 8–10 examine freedom and idolatry; 11–14 address gathered worship and gifts; 15 explains resurrection; 16 closes with practical arrangements.

Read closely: 1 Corinthians 1:18–31; 6:12–20; 10:23–33; 13:1–13; 15:1–28, 50–58.

Keep the balance: Love in chapter 13 is not an interruption for a wedding reading. It is essential to Paul's correction of a church that could value impressive gifts above the good of its people.

For your life: Before asking what you are free to do, ask whether your choice builds up another person and honors Christ.

2 Corinthians

Setting: Written from Macedonia, about AD 55–56, after painful conflict and Titus's report about the church's response. **Read 2 Corinthians 2:12–13; 7:5–16.**

The need: Reconciliation, renewed confidence in Paul's ministry, completion of the offering for Jerusalem, and resistance to deceptive teachers.

The message: True ministry displays Christ through weakness, integrity, suffering, and love. Outward impressiveness is an unreliable measure of spiritual authority.

Follow the argument: Chapters 1–7 explain Paul's ministry and relationship with the church; 8–9 address generous giving; 10–13 confront challenges to his apostleship and call the church to examine itself.

Read closely: 2 Corinthians 4:1–18; 5:14–21; 8:1–15; 9:6–11; 12:7–10.

Keep the balance: Generosity is not a transaction that makes God owe us wealth. The giving passages emphasize willing participation, provision for good works, and thanksgiving to God. Paul's own life contradicts a promise of uninterrupted material comfort.

For your life: Weakness need not end your usefulness. Ask how Christ's strength can become visible through faithful service within your present limits.

Galatians

Setting: Written to churches in Galatia. An early date around AD 48–49 and a later date around AD 53–55 are both proposed; the destination and relation to Acts 15 affect the reconstruction.

The need: Teachers were pressing Gentile believers toward circumcision and law observance in a way that compromised the sufficiency of Christ.

The message: We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, not works of the law. Belonging to Abraham's family comes through Christ. Christian freedom is then lived through love and the Spirit.

Follow the argument: Chapters 1–2 defend the gospel Paul received and preached; 3–4 explain faith, promise, law, and sonship; 5–6 show freedom expressed in Spirit-led conduct and mutual care.

Read closely: Galatians 2:15–21; 3:23–29; 4:4–7; 5:1, 13–26; 6:1–10.

Keep the balance: Freedom from the law as a basis of justification is not freedom to serve sinful desires. Paul expressly rejects that conclusion. Love fulfills the law's concern for one's neighbor.

For your life: Refuse both self-righteousness and careless living. Depend on Christ's grace, walk by the Spirit, and help restore a struggling believer gently.

Ephesians

Setting: A prison letter, traditionally placed in Rome about AD 60–62. Its scope is broad, presenting God's purpose in Christ and the life of His people.

The need: A deep grasp of Christian identity and unity, followed by conduct that fits the calling believers have received.

The message: God saves by grace through faith and creates a people united in Christ. The church is His body and dwelling place, called to mature in truth and love.

Follow the argument: Chapters 1–3 describe God's saving work and the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles; 4–6 call believers to unity, transformed behavior, faithful relationships, and spiritual resistance.

Read closely: Ephesians 1:15–23; 2:1–22; 4:1–16, 25–32; 5:1–2; 6:10–20.

Keep the balance: Spiritual warfare is met through truth, righteousness, faith, salvation, God's word, and prayer. The armor passage is not permission to treat people as the enemy.

For your life: Let your identity in Christ govern your speech at home as surely as your language in church. Forgiveness and patient love are part of spiritual maturity.

Philippians

Setting: Written from imprisonment, traditionally Rome about AD 60–62; an earlier Ephesian setting is also proposed. The Philippians had supported Paul and sent help through Epaphroditus.

The need: Encouragement, unity, steadfastness, and gratitude within an enduring gospel partnership.

The message: Knowing Christ is worth more than status or achievement. His humble obedience shapes His people. Joy and faithful service remain possible amid hardship.

Follow the argument: Chapter 1 views imprisonment through the advance of the gospel; 2 calls for Christlike humility and obedient living; 3 rejects confidence in religious credentials and presses toward Christ; 4 addresses unity, prayer, thought, contentment, and generosity.

Read closely: Philippians 1:12–26; 2:1–16; 3:7–14; 4:4–13.

Keep the balance: Philippians 4:13 concerns Christ-given strength to live faithfully in plenty or need. It is not a promise that any ambition will succeed. Likewise, working out salvation in 2:12–13 rests on God's work within believers.

For your life: In the next small moment, put another person's good ahead of your pride. That is a practical expression of the mind of Christ.

Colossians

Setting: A prison letter, traditionally Rome about AD 60–62. Epaphras had brought news of the believers. Tychicus and Onesimus connect its closing arrangements with Paul's wider ministry.

The need: Protection against teachings and requirements that diminished confidence in the sufficiency of Christ.

The message: Christ is supreme in creation and the church. The fullness believers need is found in Him, and union with Him changes everyday life.

Follow the argument: Chapter 1 presents Christ's supremacy and Paul's ministry; 2 warns against deceptive teaching and man-made religious demands; 3–4 describe the renewed life, relationships, prayer, and witness.

Read closely: Colossians 1:15–23; 2:6–15, 20–23; 3:1–17; 4:2–6.

Keep the balance: Calling Christ the firstborn of all creation in 1:15 does not identify Him as a created being. The surrounding verses say that all things were created through Him and for Him, and that He is before all things.

For your life: Put off the old practices and put on compassion, kindness, humility, patience, and love. The supremacy of Christ should become visible in the way you treat people.

1 Thessalonians

Setting: Commonly dated about AD 50–51 from Corinth, after Timothy returned with news of the young church. **Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1–6.**

The need: Encouragement under affliction, growth in holiness, and reassurance concerning believers who had died.

The message: A church that has turned to the living God can stand firm, love increasingly, and wait for Jesus with confidence. Those who die in Christ will not miss His coming.

Follow the argument: Chapters 1–3 recall the church's beginnings and Paul's concern; 4 calls for holy living and explains hope for the dead in Christ; 5 teaches watchfulness and gives practical instructions for church life.

Read closely: 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10; 2:7–12; 4:1–18; 5:1–24.

Keep the balance: Christian hope does not forbid grief. Paul distinguishes grieving with hope from grieving without it. His teaching about the Lord's coming is intended to encourage believers, not to supply a date for prediction.

For your life: Encourage someone who is weary. Faithfulness includes honoring leaders, helping the weak, being patient, praying, and giving thanks in all circumstances.

2 Thessalonians

Setting: Usually placed soon after the first letter, during Paul's Corinthian ministry, about AD 50–52.

The need: Perseverance under persecution, correction of alarm about the day of the Lord, and a response to disruptive idleness.

The message: God will judge justly. Believers should remain steady, hold to the apostolic teaching, and continue responsible daily life while awaiting Christ.

Follow the argument: Chapter 1 encourages endurance and speaks of coming justice; 2 addresses false claims about the day of the Lord; 3 requests prayer and corrects unwillingness to work.

Read closely: 2 Thessalonians 1:3–12; 2:1–17; 3:6–15.

Keep the balance: Christians differ over several details in chapter 2. The book's clear pastoral direction does not depend on settling every proposed end-times chart. In chapter 3, Paul addresses those unwilling to work, not those unable to work because of illness, disability, or other genuine limitations.

For your life: Waiting for Jesus should strengthen steadiness and responsibility. Do today's faithful work, resist sensational claims, and continue doing good.

1 Timothy

Setting: Paul had urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus while he went to Macedonia. The traditional chronology places the letter after the imprisonment at the end of Acts, about AD 62–65.

Read 1 Timothy 1:3.

The need: Resistance to false teaching and guidance for the conduct of God's household.

The message: Sound doctrine should produce love, a good conscience, sincere faith, and godly conduct. Church leadership requires tested character, not merely the ability to attract attention.

Follow the argument: Chapter 1 addresses false teaching and mercy; 2–3 concern prayer, conduct, and leadership; 4 urges faithful teaching and example; 5–6 address relationships, care, money, and steadfastness.

Read closely: 1 Timothy 1:5, 12–17; 3:1–15; 4:6–16; 6:6–19.

Keep the balance: Paul identifies the love of money as a root of all kinds of evils; he does not say that money itself is the root of every evil. Those who possess wealth are called to humility, generosity, and hope in God.

For your life: Let others see the teaching in your conduct. Faithfulness in speech, love, purity, and practical care gives substance to what you say.

2 Timothy

Setting: Paul is imprisoned and expects his death to be near. The traditional chronology places this later imprisonment in Rome during the AD 60s.

The need: Timothy must endure, guard the gospel, entrust it to faithful teachers, and continue proclaiming the word despite opposition.

The message: The Lord remains faithful. His servant must not be ashamed of the gospel or abandon the work when it becomes costly.

Follow the argument: Chapter 1 calls Timothy to courage and faithfulness; 2 emphasizes endurance and faithful teaching; 3 warns of corrupt conduct and directs him to Scripture; 4 charges him to preach and records Paul's personal requests and confidence.

Read closely: 2 Timothy 1:6-14; 2:1-15; 3:10-17; 4:1-18.

Keep the balance: The childhood knowledge of Scripture mentioned in 3:15 belongs to Timothy, not Paul. Paul's confidence at the end does not erase his desire for companionship, a cloak, and books. Faithful servants remain human.

For your life: Finish today's assignment faithfully. The Lord who stood by Paul is the center of Paul's confidence; the letter directs our attention to Him rather than to human toughness.

Titus

Setting: Paul had left Titus in Crete to put remaining matters in order and appoint elders. The traditional reconstruction places this ministry after Acts 28, about AD 62–65. **Read Titus 1:5.**

The need: Qualified leadership, resistance to false teachers, and instruction that leads to visibly godly lives.

The message: God's saving grace trains His people to reject ungodliness and live faithfully while waiting for Christ. Good works belong to a redeemed life, but they do not earn redemption.

Follow the argument: Chapter 1 addresses elders and false teaching; 2 gives instructions for different groups and explains grace's training work; 3 calls for respectful conduct, mercy, good works, and avoidance of fruitless disputes.

Read closely: Titus 1:5–9; 2:1–14; 3:1–11.

Keep the balance: Titus 3:5 grounds salvation in God's mercy, not our righteous works. Titus 3:8 then urges believers to devote themselves to good works. Paul sets the order clearly: mercy received, then fruitful living.

For your life: Make the goodness of the gospel visible in dependable, respectful, helpful conduct. A sound lesson should lead to a sound life.

Philemon

Setting: A personal prison letter, closely connected with Colossians and the circumstances of Onesimus. Rome about AD 60–62 is the traditional setting.

The need: Paul appeals to Philemon concerning Onesimus, an enslaved man who has become dear to Paul and is now a brother in Christ.

The message: The gospel transforms how believers receive one another. Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus as he would welcome Paul himself and offers to bear any debt. **Read Philemon 8–21.**

Follow the appeal: Paul begins with thanksgiving, appeals on the basis of love, describes his relationship with Onesimus, and asks for a reception shaped by Christian brotherhood.

Read closely: Read the whole letter, especially verses 8–19.

Keep the balance: It is often assumed that Onesimus fled and stole from Philemon, but the letter does not explicitly narrate those events. Paul's reference to any wrong or debt is conditional. The letter does not describe Philemon's eventual response, and it is not a general endorsement of slavery.

For your life: Reconciliation may require more than warm words. Paul puts his relationship and resources behind his appeal. Ask what receiving someone as a brother or sister should change in your own conduct.

The likely order of Paul's letters

The New Testament does not arrange Paul's letters in the order he wrote them. When they were collected, they were placed roughly by length — letters to churches first, then letters to individuals, longest first. The order below is the likely order of writing. The dates are approximate; they rest on the letters themselves, on Acts, and on the research of respected scholars (F. F. Bruce, the Lexham Bible Dictionary, the CSB Study Bible notes, Philip Schaff, and others). I claim no such scholarship myself; where careful interpreters differ, I say so.

#	Letter	Approx. date	Written from	Note
1	Galatians	AD 48–49	Syrian Antioch	Before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15, about AD 49). See below.
2	1 Thessalonians	AD 50–51	Corinth	Second journey; Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18:12) anchors the date.
3	2 Thessalonians	AD 51–52	Corinth	Shortly after the first.
4	1 Corinthians	AD 54–55	Ephesus	Third journey (1 Cor 16:8).
5	2 Corinthians	AD 55–56	Macedonia	“Far more imprisonments” (11:23).
6	Romans	AD 57	Corinth	Before the final trip to Jerusalem (Rom 15:25).
7	Ephesians	AD 60–62	Rome (first imprisonment)	Traditional view; some place the prison letters at Ephesus (mid-50s) or Caesarea (57–59).
8	Colossians	AD 60–62	Rome	Sent with Philemon (Col 4:7–9).
9	Philemon	AD 60–62	Rome	Carried by Onesimus.
10	Philippians	AD 61–62	Rome	Paul expects release (Phil 1:25–26; 2:24).
11	1 Timothy	AD 63–65	Macedonia	After release; Timothy left at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3).
12	Titus	AD 63–65	Macedonia or on the way	Titus left in Crete (Titus 1:5).
13	2 Timothy	AD 66–67	Rome (second imprisonment)	Paul's last letter — see the next page.

Why Galatians comes first — and why 2 Timothy is last

Galatians first. If “Galatia” means the Roman province, the churches of Paul's first journey — Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe — are the readers, and the letter can be the earliest Paul wrote. The strongest reason is this: the problem Galatians fights (circumcision and “works of the law” added to the gospel) is exactly the question the Jerusalem Council settled (Acts 15). Had the Council already met, Paul would almost certainly have cited its decision. He does not, which points to a date of about AD 48–49, just before the Council of about AD 49. Many scholars hold this view; others date Galatians in the mid-50s. I hold the earlier date.

Why 2 Timothy is last

The evidence that 2 Timothy was Paul's final letter, written shortly before his death, is strong from inside and outside the letter.

Inside the letter. Paul is chained in Rome as a criminal (1:16–17; 2:9); at his first defense everyone deserted him (4:16); Demas has left, only Luke is with him (4:10–11); he asks for his cloak and books before winter (4:13, 21); and he says plainly, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (4:6–7).

Outside the letter. Clement of Rome (about AD 96) and later Eusebius record Paul's martyrdom in Rome under Nero; tradition places it in about AD 67, near the end of Nero's reign (Nero died in June AD 68). The letter was most likely written within months of his death.

Postscript — the Letter to the Hebrews

Hebrews does not name its author, and the question has been debated since the second century. Origen's verdict in the third century is still the honest one: “who wrote the epistle, in truth God knows.” Even so, the letter plainly comes from Paul's circle. It closes with news of Paul's closest co-worker — “You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon” (Hebrews 13:23) — carries greetings from “those who come from Italy” (13:24), and breathes Paul's gospel of Christ's finished work.

One long-standing view, going back to Clement of Alexandria in the second century, is that the letter carries Paul's thought in another man's hand — and Luke, Paul's companion and the author of Luke and Acts, is the most frequently suggested hand, because the polished Greek of Hebrews is closer to Luke's than to Paul's. On this view, Hebrews may have grown out of a sermon of Paul's, written down and sent under his apostolic authority. I find that view persuasive, and offer it as a view, not a certainty. What is not in doubt is that the early church received Hebrews as the Word of God, and that its message — Jesus, our great High Priest, “the same yesterday and today and forever” (13:8) — stands with everything Paul taught.

Paul's companions

Barnabas: Helped believers receive Saul in Jerusalem, brought him to Antioch, and traveled with him on the first journey. Later took Mark to Cyprus. Acts 9:26-27; 11:25-26; 13-15.

Silas, also called Silvanus: Traveled with Paul on the second journey and shared imprisonment in Philippi. Acts 15:40; 16:19-40; 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

Timothy: Joined the team at Lystra, carried responsibilities in several churches, and received two of Paul's letters. Acts 16:1-3; Philippians 2:19-24.

Titus: Helped with the troubled Corinthian relationship and served in Crete. Second Corinthians 7:5-16; Titus 1:5.

Priscilla and Aquila: Fellow workers and hosts; helped Apollos understand God's way more accurately. Acts 18:1-3, 18-26; Romans 16:3-5.

Luke: Identified as the beloved physician and a fellow worker; present with Paul in the situation reflected in Second Timothy. Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:11.

Mark: Left during the first journey, became the subject of disagreement, and was later valued by Paul for ministry. Acts 13:13; 15:36-39; 2 Timothy 4:11.

Phoebe, Epaphroditus, and Tychicus: Examples of the many people whose service, travel, and practical help sustained the churches. Romans 16:1-2; Philippians 2:25-30; Ephesians 6:21-22.

Remember: Paul's letters reveal a network of servants. Christian ministry was never his achievement alone.

Journey guide: the first mission

About AD 46-48 • Acts 13-14

This is an ordered route guide, not a geographic map. Ancient travel involved additional stops and variable sea routes.

- 1. Syrian Antioch → Seleucia → Cyprus.** Sent from the church, the team sailed to Salamis and crossed the island to Paphos.
- 2. Paphos → Perga → Pisidian Antioch.** John Mark returned to Jerusalem from Perga. Paul and Barnabas continued inland.
- 3. Pisidian Antioch → Iconium → Lystra → Derbe.** The gospel met faith and opposition. Paul was stoned at Lystra.
- 4. Derbe → Lystra → Iconium → Pisidian Antioch.** They returned to strengthen the disciples and appoint elders.
- 5. Through Pisidia → Perga → Attalia → Syrian Antioch.** They sailed back and reported what God had done among the Gentiles.

Places to distinguish: Cyprus is an island. Cilicia is Paul's home region. Galatia can refer to a region or the Roman province; that distinction contributes to discussion about the letter's recipients. Pisidian Antioch is not the Antioch that sent the missionaries.

The journey's lasting importance: The missionaries did not insist that Gentiles adopt Jewish identity to receive the gospel. The growth of these churches helped bring the circumcision dispute into sharp focus.

Journey guide: the second mission

About AD 49-52 • Acts 15:36-18:22

1. Syrian Antioch → Syria and Cilicia → Derbe and Lystra.

Paul traveled with Silas; Timothy joined them.

2. Phrygia and Galatia → Mysia → Troas. The Spirit redirected their plans. The Macedonian vision came at Troas.

3. Troas → Samothrace → Neapolis → Philippi. They crossed the sea into Macedonia. Lydia and the jailer became part of the Philippian beginnings.

4. Philippi → Amphipolis → Apollonia → Thessalonica → Berea. Paul proclaimed Jesus from the Scriptures; opposition required further travel.

5. Athens → Corinth. In Athens he addressed a pagan audience; in Corinth he taught for eighteen months and worked with Priscilla and Aquila.

6. Cenchreae → Ephesus → Caesarea → Antioch. Acts 18:22 says he went up and greeted the church before going down to Antioch; a Jerusalem visit is commonly understood but not explicitly named there.

Letters commonly placed here: First and Second Thessalonians, during the Corinthian stay.

The journey's lasting importance: New churches took root in Macedonia and Achaia. Paul's continuing care for them would produce letters that still teach the church about holiness, unity, suffering, and resurrection hope.

Journey guide: the third mission

About AD 52-57 • Acts 18:23-21:17

1. Antioch → Galatia and Phrygia → Ephesus. Paul strengthened disciples and began his extended Ephesian ministry.

2. Ephesus → Macedonia → Greece. He revisited believers, responded to Corinth's troubles, and spent three months in Greece.

3. Back through Macedonia → Philippi → Troas. A plot changed the intended sailing plan. The Eutychus episode occurred at Troas.

4. Troas → Assos → Mitylene → past Chios → Samos → Miletus. At Miletus Paul met the Ephesian elders for his farewell.

5. Cos → Rhodes → Patara → Tyre. The party changed ships and sailed toward Syria, passing Cyprus on the left.

6. Tyre → Ptolemais → Caesarea → Jerusalem. Warnings of suffering continued as Paul approached Jerusalem.

Letters commonly placed here: First Corinthians from Ephesus; Second Corinthians from Macedonia; Romans from Corinth or its vicinity. The later-date view also places Galatians in this period.

The journey's lasting importance: Paul invested in existing churches and their leaders. The collection for Jerusalem gave practical expression to the bond between believers across regions and backgrounds.

Read alongside the route: Acts 20:17-38 reveals the heart of a shepherd behind the movements of a missionary.

Journey guide: the prisoner voyage

About AD 59-60 • Acts 27-28

This was a guarded transfer to Rome, not a direct sailing from Jerusalem and not another freely planned missionary journey.

1. Caesarea → Sidon → under the shelter of Cyprus → Myra.

At Myra the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy.

2. Slowly toward Cnidus → under the shelter of Crete → Fair Havens.

Difficult winds constrained the route.

3. Attempt toward Phoenix → driven by storm → under the shelter of Cauda.

The vessel was blown far off its intended course. A line on a map could only approximate its drifting track.

4. Shipwreck → Malta.

Everyone survived. Paul remained there through the winter interval described in Acts.

5. Malta → Syracuse → Rhegium → Puteoli.

The journey resumed on another Alexandrian ship.

6. Toward Rome → Forum of Appius and Three Taverns → Rome.

Believers came to meet Paul along the approach.

What to notice: Paul was a prisoner, yet he encouraged others, gave practical counsel, and served those around him. God preserved his life without preventing every frightening experience.

Read alongside the route: Acts 27:21-44 and 28:11-16. Watch how God's assurance, responsible action, and the encouragement of fellow believers fit together.

A manageable reading path

Use these eight readings alone, with a friend, or in a group. Each can be divided over several days.

1. Mercy that changes a life. Read Acts 9:1–31 and 1 Timothy 1:12–17. Use chapters 1–3 of this book. What changed Paul's understanding of Jesus?

2. Sent together. Read Acts 11:19–30 and 13–14. Use chapters 4–5. How do the church, the Spirit, and the missionaries work together?

3. Grace and freedom. Read Acts 15:1–35 and Galatians 2:15–21; 5:13–26. Use chapter 6 and the Galatians guide. How does grace produce obedience?

4. People along the road. Read Acts 16–18. Use chapters 7–10. What changes in Paul's approach, and what remains constant?

5. A shepherd's heart. Read Acts 19–20. Use chapters 11–12. What did Paul want the elders to protect?

6. Witness under pressure. Read Acts 21:27–28:31 over several sittings. Use chapters 13–15. How does Paul serve while confined?

7. The gospel lived. Read Romans 3:21–26; 6:1–14; 8:1–39 and Philippians 2:1–16. Use chapters 16–18. What is God's gift, and what response follows?

8. Faithful to the finish. Read 2 Timothy. Use its letter guide. What should Timothy preserve, practice, and pass on?

Closing: look where Paul points

Paul deserves careful study because his life and letters help us know Jesus and understand His gospel. But Paul is never the final destination.

His earlier religious credentials could not save him. His later suffering did not make him the Savior. His learning, travels, and labors were instruments in the hands of the Lord who had shown him mercy. Paul credited the grace of God for the work accomplished through him. **Read Philippians 3:4-11; 1 Corinthians 15:10.**

He could be bold and tender, determined and deeply concerned. He corrected churches, prayed for them, wept over them, and depended on the help of friends. The Lord used a real man, with real needs, to carry a message greater than himself.

The best result of studying Paul is not merely being able to name his stops or date his letters. It is understanding the gospel more clearly, loving Christ more deeply, and becoming more faithful in the life God has given us.

Keep these truths close: Salvation is God's gift in Christ. The Spirit enables a changed life. The church needs truth and love. Suffering does not cancel God's faithfulness. Resurrection gives lasting hope.

Then return to your Bible. Listen carefully. Look to Jesus. Take the next faithful step.

Sources and illustration notes

The Bible is the primary source. This book draws chiefly on Acts 7–28 and Paul’s thirteen named letters. References throughout point readers back to the biblical text. Explanations paraphrase Scripture; they are not direct ESV quotations.

Built from the existing Paul project. The original chronology, research, and selected events form the foundation. This essentials edition condenses technical dating debates while retaining the important events, letters, teachings, and relationships.

Dates and tradition. Calendar dates are approximate. The release and travel sequence after Acts is a reconstruction. A completed Spanish mission is not asserted. Paul’s death is identified as later Christian tradition.

About the pictures. The cover portrait and eight section illustrations come from the existing project. The eight scenes were adapted to remove old page text and numbering, with identified visual errors corrected. Faces, clothing, buildings, and compositions are artistic reconstructions. The Tarsus boyhood scene is imagined, not a recorded event.

Using this edition. Read it alongside your Bible. The journey guides describe routes in words; they are not geographic maps. The short Paul introduction in the New Testament Reference remains a separate resource.

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