

The following attempts to summarize his book: Paul, A Critical Life. Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 416 p.

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Chapter 1: The Chronological Framework p. 1-31

There are few chronological references to Paul's life and ministry. Paul himself provides two of them. The rest come from Luke in his Acts of the Apostles.

A. The Evidence from the Pauline Letters

a. Date of Birth

In Philemon 1:9, Paul writes: "Yes, I, Paul, who am an old man (*presbytēs*). At what age is one considered an "old man"?"

1. The Greek Tradition

Philo from Alexandria (20 BC – 45 AD), a great Jewish philosopher and a contemporary of Paul, wrote:

The growth of men from infancy to old age, when measured by the number seven, displays in a most evident manner its perfecting power; for in the first period of seven years, the putting forth of the teeth takes place. And at the end of the second period of the same length, he arrives at the age of puberty; at the end of the third period, the growth of the beard takes place. The fourth period sees him arrive at the fulness of his manly strength. The fifth seven years is the season for marriage. In the sixth period he arrives at the maturity of his understanding. The seventh period is that of the most rapid improvement and growth of both his intellectual and reasoning powers. The eight is the sum of the perfection of both. In the ninth, his passions assume a mildness and gentleness, from being to a great degree tamed. In the tenth, the desirable end of life comes upon him, while his limbs and organic senses are still unimpaired; for excessive old age is apt to weaken and enfeeble them all (De Opificio Mundi, 103-5, trans. Yonge).

Solon, the Athenian lawgiver (635–560 BC), described these different ages in the following elegiac verses:

In seven years from the earliest breath,

The child puts forth his hedge of teeth;
 When strengthened by a similar span,
 He first displays some signs of man.
 As in a third, his limbs increase,
 A beard buds o'er his changing face.
 When he has passed a fourth such time,
 His strength and vigour's in its prime.
 When five times seven years o'er his head
 Have passed, the man should think to wed;
 At forty-two, the wisdom's clear
 To shun vile deed or folly or fear;
 When seven times seven years, to sense
 Add ready wit and eloquence.
 And seven years further skill admit
 To raise them to their perfect height.
 When nine such periods have passed,
 His powers, though milder grown, still last;
 When God has granted ten times seven,
 The aged man prepares for heaven.

Solon therefore thus computes the life of man by ten periods of seven years. But [Pseudo] Hippocrates the physician says that there are seven ages of man—infancy, childhood, boyhood, youth, manhood, middle age, old age—and that these too are measured by periods of seven, though not in the same order. He said:

In the nature of man there are seven seasons, which men call ages: infancy, childhood, boyhood and the rest:
 He is an infant [*paidion*] till he reaches his seventh year, the age of the shedding of his teeth.
 He is a child [*pais*] until he arrives at the age of puberty, which takes place in fourteen years.
 He is a boy [*meirakion*] till his beard begins to grow, and that time is the end of a third period of seven years.
 He is a youth [*neaniskos*] till the completion of the growth of his whole body, which coincides with the fourth seven years.
 Then he is a man [*anēr*] until he reaches his forty-ninth year, or seven times seven periods.
 He is an elderly man [*presbytēs*] till he is fifty-six, eight times seven years old.
 And after that he is an old man [*gerōn*].

Solon and Hippocrates divide human life into seven-year periods, but Solon is more realistic than Hippocrates, for whom 49 years is artificially the peak of life—since it is the square of seven—followed by a long decline. In contrast, Solon's view aligns with Psalm 90:10a: "Seventy years is the span of our life, or eighty, if we are strong." And the characteristics of its ninth phase are those we associate with "the elderly" as opposed to "the old."

2. The Jewish Tradition

Jewish tradition confirms this interpretation. According to Leviticus 27:2–5: "For a man between the ages of twenty and sixty, the value is fifty shekels of silver... for a man sixty years of age or older, the value is fifteen shekels..." Thus, a person's value decreases after the age of 60, as explained in the Damascus Document found at Qumran:

Let no man be in office from 60 years and over as judge of the congregation; for because of the unfaithfulness of men their days are diminished, and in the heat of his anger against the inhabitants of the earth God has ordained that their understanding should decline before their days are fulfilled (CD 10:7–10).

A rabbinic list offers us a slightly different perspective:

At 5 years old one is fit for the Scripture,
 At 10 for the Mishnah,
 At 13 for the fulfilling of the commandments,
 At 15 for the Talmud,
 At 18 for the bride-chamber,
 At 20 for pursuing a calling,
 At 30 for authority,
 At 40 for discernment,
 At 50 for counsel,
 At 60 for to be an elder,

At 70 for grey hairs,
 At 80 for special strength,
 At 90 for bowed back,
 At 100 a man is as one that has already died.

This list corresponds to what is found at Qumran: education begins in early childhood, the age of majority (including the right to marry) is set at 20, people begin to assume responsibilities at 25, and a man can serve as a judge at 30.

In short, for Paul's contemporaries, a man in his late fifties or early sixties was considered an elder. And we can assume that Paul shared this perspective when he wrote to Philemon and identified himself as an elder. However, this letter was written in the year 53, which means that Paul was about 60 years old, placing his birth in the final years before the start of the modern era—that is, around the same time as the birth of Jesus.

b. Date of Departure from Damascus

In 2 Cor 11:32–33, Paul writes: “In Damascus, the ethnarch under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped from his hands”, and Gal 1, 17–18: “I went away at once into Arabia, and afterward I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days”.

The Arabia Paul refers to was under the control of the Nabatean king Aretas IV (whose reign began in 9 BC and ended upon his death around AD 40). We must assume that Paul encountered trouble in Arabia and was forced to return hastily to Damascus, where he then spent three years in peace before the Nabataeans took control of the city, forcing him to flee again, this time to Jerusalem.

c. Nabataean Control of Damascus

It should be noted that Damascus had been an integral part of the Roman Empire of Syria since Pompey's conquest in 65 BCE. However, according to a model found in Alexandria, the ethnarch of Damascus was a sort of “consul” who governed the Nabatean trading colony established there. And if he bore the title of ethnarch rather than that of *stratēgos*, usually used to designate Nabatean governors, it is because it reflected the governor's rank as prince of his own tribe. However, the use of such a title places us after March 16, 37 CE, i.e., after the death of Emperor Tiberius, who demanded well-structured provinces, not “client” kings, as his successor Caligula would later permit. Caligula had to be open to the Nabataeans, who regarded the city as a nerve center for trade, because they had aided his father, Germanicus, in his campaign in 18–19 CE against Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, governor of Syria.

The Implications for Pauline Chronology

It is therefore likely that the Nabataeans took control of Damascus in the second half of the year 37. From this date, which forced Paul to leave Damascus, we can deduce the other events. Since Paul tells us that he stayed in Damascus for three years—that is, from 34 to 37—his previous stay in Arabia must have taken place in 33 or 34. Furthermore, since Paul seems to indicate that this stay in Arabia followed his conversion (Gal 1:16–17), we can conclude that his conversion took place in the year 33, when he was in his thirties. Finally, Paul writes that, after leaving Damascus, he went up to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18), and fourteen years later, he went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas and Titus (Gal 2:1), which brings us to the year 51. Here is a brief summary table.

Birth	c. 6 BC
Conversion	AD 33
Arabia	34
Damascus	34–37
Jerusalem (1st visit)	37
Syria and Cilicia	37–?
Jerusalem (2 nd visit)	51

B. The Evidence from the Acts of the Apostles

a. The Edict of Claudius

In Acts 18 :1-2, Luke writes :

After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila from Pontus, who had recently (*prophatōs*) come from Italy with his wife Prisca, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them.

The Claudius imperial edict evoked by Luke is also mentioned by Suetonius:

He expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus

But when did this expulsion take place? Suetonius does not tell us.

1. The Evidence of Orosius

The Christian historian Paul Orosius (385 - 420) writes:

Josephus refers to the expulsion of Jews by Claudius in his ninth year. But Suetonius touches me more in saying, 'Claudius expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Christus.' It cannot be determined whether he ordered only the Jews agitating against Christ to be restrained and suppressed, or whether he also wanted to expel Christians as being men of a related faith. (*Historiae adversus paganos* 7. 6. 15-16)

So, according to Orosius, Claudius's expulsion took place during his ninth year. However, Claudius was acclaimed emperor on January 25, 41, and thus his ninth year corresponds to the period from January 25, 49, to January 24, 50, which places Paul's arrival in Corinth, mentioned in Acts 18:1-2, in the year 49. Unfortunately, Orosius is unreliable, as one would search in vain for the reference to Josephus of whom he speaks; he likely deduced this figure from Paul's encounter with Gallio around the year 51, subtracting eighteen months from that date. Tacitus, whose Annals are complete for the year 49, makes no mention of any expulsion.

2. The Evidence of Dio Cassius

Dio Cassius furnishes an important item of information regarding the relationship of the emperor and the Jewish community:

As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly by reason of their multitude that it would have been hard without raising a tumult to expel them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings (*History* 60.6.6)

Based on the way Dio Cassius organizes his annals, the event he refers to must be placed in the first year of Claudius's reign, that is, in the year 41. But is this the same event that Suetonius mentions? Among the common elements are: (1) an action by Claudius, (2) the mention of an expulsion, (3) of Jews, (4) from Rome, (5) and the idea of a riot. But there are major differences: (1) Suetonius states that the Jews were expelled, while Cassius Dio denies this; (2) the riot feared by Cassius Dio actually took place in Suetonius' account.

Unfortunately, Cassius Dio offers us no reason why the emperor would have ordered the Jews to stop gathering. Furthermore, it is unthinkable that the emperor would have prevented the Jews from gathering, since this was guaranteed by Roman law and would have created a permanent cause for grievance; an expulsion would have been simpler. It is possible that Cassius Dio was in possession of inaccurate information that he further misinterpreted.

The most plausible hypothesis is that Claudius expelled only the troublemakers among the Jews. In fact, the expulsion likely targeted a single synagogue among all the synagogues in Rome. Furthermore, he could only expel visitors, not those who were Roman citizens. Thus, it appears that Claudius could only expel the missionaries who were not Roman citizens and deny that particular synagogue the right to assemble. This hypothesis is confirmed by Philo of Alexandria, who writes, while completing his *Legatio ad Gaium* in Rome in the year 41, while awaiting an audience with Claudius:

Augustus knew that they had synagogues, and they were in the habit of visiting them, and most especially on the sacred sabbath days, when they publicly cultivate their national philosophy. He knew also that they were in the habit of contributing sacred sums of money from their first fruits and sending them to Jerusalem by the hands of those who were to conduct the sacrifices. But *he never removed them from Rome*, nor did he ever deprive them of their rights as Roman citizens, because he had a regard for Judaea, nor did he ever meditate any new steps of innovation or rigour with respect to their synagogues, *nor did he forbid their assembling for the interpretation of the Law*, nor did he make any opposition to their offerings of first fruits.

This text by Philo presupposes that he had heard the rumor of the emperor's intention (text in italics) to expel the Jews from Rome or to prohibit them from gathering, but that by invoking Emperor Augustus, whom Claudius revered, he knew the tradition would be respected. In short, we can assign a very high degree of probability to the hypothesis that, following an imperial decree issued in 41, certain Jews were expelled from Rome.

3. The Attitude of Claudius to the Jews

The question arises because some historians have denied that Claudius could have expelled Jews from Rome, since at the beginning of his reign he restored the privileges that his predecessor, Gaius (Caligula), had revoked.

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus preserved this letter in which Claudius reaffirms the traditional rights of the Jews. However, the third paragraph contains a warning that reads as follows:

It will, therefore, be fit to permit the Jews, who are in all the world under us, to keep their ancient customs without being hindered in so doing. But I charge them also to use this my kindness to them with moderation, and not to show contempt of the superstitious observances of other nations, but to keep their own laws only (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, 19.290).

There is, therefore, a limit to what Claudius can tolerate. This is clear from a letter addressed to the Alexandrians on November 10, 41, which includes the following paragraph:

On the other hand I explicitly order the Jews not to agitate for more privileges than they formerly possessed, and not in future to send out a separate embassy as if they lived in a separate city, a thing unprecedented, and not to force their way into gymnasiarchic or cosmetic games, while enjoying their own privileges and sharing a great abundance of advantages in a city not their own, and not to bring in or admit Jews who come down the river from Syria or Egypt, a proceeding which will compel me to conceive serious suspicions; otherwise I will by all means take vengeance upon them as fomentors of what is a general plague infecting the whole world.

This document reveals that from the very beginning of his reign, Claudius was prepared to react vigorously to anything that might be seen as a threat to public order. And so, if in the year 41 certain Jews were perceived as agitators, Claudius could certainly have acted in the manner described by Suetonius and Cassius Dio.

Let us return, then, to Acts 18:1–2 and Luke's statement that Paul arrived in Corinth at the time Prisca and Aquila had left Italy. This means that Paul's arrival in Corinth would date to the year 42 at the latest. Note that Luke does not mention Rome, but Italy. It is plausible that, having been expelled from the city of Rome under Claudius's edict, they might have remained in Italy to see how the situation developed. Luke writes: "who had recently (*prophatōs*) arrived from Italy"; what does "recently" mean? On this point, Luke is not always reliable, as evidenced by his reference to Quirinius' census to justify the journey of Jesus' parents to Bethlehem (Luke 2:2), even though we know that this census took place in the year 6 or 7 CE.

b. Paul's Encounter with Gallio

In Acts 18, 12, Luke writes :

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal.

The only way we have to date Gallion's proconsulship is a badly broken inscription.

1. The Delphi Inscription

Four fragments were discovered at Delphi in 1905, and three more from the same inscription in 1910. In 1967, André Plassart succeeded in piecing together the two sets of fragments and added two more. This yielded the following result:

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

2. Dating the Letter of Claudius

The letter was written after Claudius had been acclaimed emperor for the twenty-sixth time. Such acclamations were ritualized public applause that sanctioned a triumph of the emperor, e.g. the conclusion of a successful military campaign or an especially significant victory. Unfortunately, we have no text which dates the twenty-sixth acclamation precisely. The problem, then, is to delimit as tightly as possible the time-span within which it must have occurred.

The upper limit is fixed by the twenty-seventh acclamation which took place before 1 August 52. The dedicatory inscription on one of these aqueducts requested by Claudius, the Aqua Claudia, reads in part, "Tiberius Claudius son of Drusus Caesar Augustus Germanicus Pontifex Maximus, 12th year of tribunician power, consul for the 5th time, acclaimed emperor for the 27th time, father of the country." Now, tribunician power was accorded to an emperor at the moment of his accession to the purple, and for each year of his reign he added one unit. Since the first tribunician year of Claudius was 25 January 41 to 24 January 42, his twelfth year was 25 January 52 to 24

January 53. The twenty-seventh acclamation, therefore, took place between 25 January 52 and 1 August 52. This period, however, can be narrowed significantly. Acclamations were related to military prowess, and normally no major campaigns were undertaken in winter; the battle season was from late March to early November. Thus, the twenty-seventh acclamation must be dated between April and July 52. In consequence, the twenty-sixth acclamation must have taken place in the same period or in or before the previous November.

The lower limit is fixed by a series of inscriptions which affirm that the twenty-second, twenty-third, and twenty-fourth acclamations took place in the eleventh tribunician year of Claudius, i.e. 25 January 51 to 24 January 52. No inscription correlates the twenty-fifth acclamation with a tribunician year. So, on the one hand, the twenty-seventh acclamation must be dated between April and July 52, and the twenty-fourth acclamation took place between April and July 51. When did the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth acclamations take place? The most probable answer is the twenty-fifth to place during the period of April - July 51 and the twenty-sixth during the period of April - July 52, which would spread in a balanced way all the acclamations, on average every two months.

Thus, the twenty-sixth acclamation would have taken place after the first significant victory in the spring campaign of ad 52, i.e. in April at the earliest. Thus, the letter of Claudius was probably written in the late spring or very early summer of that year.

3. Dating the Proconsulship of Gallio

Roman officials usually took office on July 1. This is inferred from an edict issued by Emperor Tiberius in the year 15, which required them to leave Rome in early June, allowing a month to reach their posts. In the year 42, Claudius moved this departure date forward to early April to account for the difficulties of traveling in the spring. Arriving early at their post was important for proconsuls, as they were appointed for only one year and therefore needed time to acclimate. Thus, a proconsul's term ran from July 1 to the end of June of the following year.

However, we have established that Claudius's letter to Delphi was likely written in April or May of the year 52. And since this letter mentions a previous report by Gallio from when he was proconsul, this proconsulship must cover the period from July 51 to June 52 at the latest. But could this proconsulship have taken place earlier? This is unlikely, since Gallio was promoted to proconsul thanks to his brother Seneca, who returned from eight years of exile in Corsica in the year 49 and, having been rehabilitated, was appointed tutor to Nero. Thus, this proconsulship must cover, at the earliest, the period from July 50 to June 51.

But how do we choose between the two possible periods of Gallio's proconsulship, 50-51 or 51-52? It all depends on how quickly Emperor Claudius reacted to Gallio's report regarding Delphi, a city in Achaia. Now, the historian Suetonius tells us this:

He paid just as much attention to Greek studies, seizing every opportunity to express his esteem for that language and its superiority... and, in commending Achaia to the senators, he declared that it was a province dear to him because of its association with related studies (Claudius, 42).

This attachment to Achaia implies that Claudius would have reacted quickly to Gallio's report. However, this report would have reached him at the earliest by late fall of 51, or at the latest when the sea was once again open to normal navigation in the spring of 52. Gallio's term therefore most likely took place in 51-52 rather than the previous year.

We also know that Gallio did not complete his one-year term. We know this from a note by his brother Seneca: "When he began to feel feverish in Achaia, he immediately set sail, claiming that it was not an ailment of the body, but an ailment of the place" (Epistulae morales 104.1). The impression of a fussy hypochondriac is confirmed by Pliny's account that Gallio felt the need for a long sea voyage to recover after his consulship (Natural History 31.62). This "illness of the place" likely refers to the fact that Gallio took a dislike to Achaia and used a minor ailment as a pretext to leave his post. Furthermore, it is unlikely that Gallio remained in Achaia for more than four months, that is, from June to September. Otherwise, he would have been stuck in Achaia all winter, as it was too dangerous to set sail during the winter season.

All of this means that Paul's encounter with Gallio, as described by Luke (Acts 18:12-17), must have taken place between July—when Gallio arrived in Corinth—and September of the year 51, the latest possible date before the end of the sailing season to Rome. All of this is confirmed by Galatians 2:1, which places Paul in Jerusalem in the year 51; he would have left Corinth for Jerusalem very soon after his meeting with Gallio. Such a journey could not have taken place after mid-September, the deadline before the sea became too dangerous. If this is the case, Paul's arrival in Corinth would have occurred in April of the year 50, an 18-month stay entirely plausible for someone who founded a community there (see Acts 18:11). All of this confirms the 14-year period (see Gal 2:1) between Paul's departure from Damascus and his journey to Jerusalem. At the same time, these dates show that Paul's stay in Jerusalem in Acts 18:22 and that in Acts 15:2-3 constitute a parallel account.

c. Hearings of Felix and Festus

After Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, Luke reports that he was sent to the governor Antonius Felix in Caesarea (Acts 23:24). Two years later (Acts 24:27), Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus (Acts 25:1). The date of the beginning of Felix's term is determined by two rather imprecise references. According to Flavius Josephus, "Claudius sent Felix, the brother of Pallas, to handle the affairs of Judea, and when he had completed the twelfth year of his reign, he entrusted to Agrippa the tetrarchy of Philip and Batanea" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20:137–8). The mention of the 12th year allows us to establish that Claudius's grant of territories to Agrippa II took place in the year 53, likely during the second half of the year. The juxtaposition of the mention of Antonius Felix suggests that his appointment took place shortly before, that is, toward the end of the year 52 or the beginning of the year 53. As for Festus, who replaced Felix, he died in the year 62, while still in office. This date is inferred from the fact that Albinus, his successor, was in Judea for the Feast of Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) four years before the start of the Jewish revolt in the year 66.

One question remains: during this 10-year period spanning the years 52 and 62, when did power pass from Felix to Festus? The only certainty is that this transfer of power took place after October 13, 54 (the date of Claudius's death), since Felix was deposed by Nero and owed his life only to the entreaties of his brother Pallas. The Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea estimates that Felix's removal occurred two years into Nero's reign, but in fact, he was off by four years in his calculations of Nero's reign, so that this transfer of power from Felix to Festus is now placed between October 59 and October 60. Confirmation of this date can be drawn from a change in the provincial currency of Judea during the fifth year of Nero's reign, i.e., the year 58–59, a sign of the arrival of a new procurator.

C. Developing a Chronology of Paul's Life

a. Prior to AD 51

According to Paul, he went to Jerusalem twice: first on a date we have determined to be the year 37 (Gal 1:18), and then a second time on a date we have determined to be the year 51 (Gal 2:1). So what did Paul do during the 14 years between these two visits? In Galatians 1:21 he writes: "I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." But in Galatians 2:5, when Paul refers to the Galatians regarding his activities prior to the Jerusalem conference, he writes: "We did not yield to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you." We can therefore infer that Paul set out from Cilicia toward the west. He did not need to specify to the Galatians that he was going to visit them.

1. Galatia and a Journey into Europe

In Galatians 4:13, Paul tells us that he went to the Galatians by chance: "As you well know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you." If this visit was unplanned, where was Paul headed then? Luke, in Acts 16–18, offers us an answer. But let us first examine Paul's writings.

According to 1 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul's visit to Thessalonica was preceded by one to Philippi, where he was mistreated; subsequently, he went to Athens (1 Thessalonians 3:1), and then to a place he does not name, from which he writes his letter. In his letter to the Philippians, he alludes to the financial support he received from them when he left Macedonia, just as he had received from them when he was in Thessalonica. From all this, we can infer that the church in Thessalonica had only just been established, that Paul had not yet accomplished anything significant, for in fact, this was Paul's first foray into Europe. Furthermore, after being in Philippi, then in Thessalonica, and subsequently in Athens, Paul must have received this money while he was in Achaia. Finally, since this was a north-south journey through Greece, the earlier churches were located to the east, i.e., in Asia Minor.

In short, we can integrate these data into a single overarching hypothesis: during the same journey, Paul successively founded the churches of Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth, after passing through Athens where he carried out no ministry. A comparison of the data from the Epistles to the Thessalonians and the Galatians confirms that this journey took place before the year 51. Paul's lack of any need to identify himself in his correspondence with the Thessalonians attests to the confidence of an emissary from an important church; these letters therefore date from a time when Paul was commissioned by Antioch. This relationship, however, came to an end in 51–52 (Gal 2:11–14), during his conflict with Peter and James's entourage. All of this is confirmed by what Luke reveals in his Acts of the Apostles (16–18). Thus, the journey began in Antioch (Acts 15:30) and the route to Galatia passed through Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), Derbe and Lystra (Acts 16:1), and Phrygia (Acts 16:6), before arriving in Macedonia.

2. Dating the Stages of the Journey

Our starting point is Paul's arrival in Corinth in April of the year 50, 18 months before his departure for Jerusalem in September 51. Since we must take into account the fact that people did not travel in winter, we can infer that Paul spent the winter of 49–50 in Macedonia. That is the minimum. Given the quality of the communities he established in Philippi and Thessalonica, it is likely that he spent two winters in Macedonia, which was subsequently the case in Corinth, meaning that Paul would have arrived in Philippi in the summer or fall of 48.

Paul arrived in Philippi from Galatia, a distance of approximately 771 km. We can imagine that this required six weeks of travel, if we calculate an average of 18 km per day. Paul must therefore have left Galatia in late spring 48, after the snow had melted, having certainly spent the winter of 47–48 taking refuge in one of his communities. In Galatia, however, a six-month ministry is probably too short. Galatians 4:13 suggests that Paul's illness must have been quite serious, and we must therefore allow him time for his convalescence. Furthermore, it was only in the summer that he could undertake the journeys required to establish several communities, "the churches of Galatia" (Gal 1:2). Thus, Paul would have spent two winters in Galatia, namely 46–47 and 47–48.

Paul arrived in Galatia from Antioch, a distance of 1,069 km that may have been covered in 43 days, at a rate of 25 km per day. If we are to believe Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, Paul would have passed through Syria-Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia. Since Paul could not have left Antioch before the end of April 46 to avoid facing the Gates of Cilicia—the narrow passage through the Taurus Mountains behind Tarsus—the journey to Galatia took place during the summer of 46, and his stops in the communities along the way were very brief, as his involvement in their evangelization was secondary. All of this gives us the following picture:

Antioch	Winter 45-46
Departure From Antioch	April 46
Journey to Galatia	April-September 46
Ministry in Galatia	September 46-May 48
Journey to Macedonia	Summer 48
Ministry in Macedonia	September 48-April 50
Journey to Corinth	April 50
Ministry in Corinth	April 50-September 51
Journey to Jerusalem	September 51
Conference in Jerusalem	October 51.

b. After AD 51

Both Luke (Acts 15:30 = Acts 18:22) and Paul (Galatians 2:11–14) confirm that Paul returned immediately to Antioch after the Jerusalem Council, a journey of 600 km that must have taken between two and four weeks. Paul is said to have spent the winter there. But given his sense of urgency regarding the mission and the conflict he had just experienced there due to the intervention of James's entourage, Paul must have set out again immediately in April of the year 52.

1. Ephesus

According to Luke, Paul traveled through the highlands of central Asia Minor—that is, Galatia (Acts 18:23)—on his way to Ephesus (Acts 19:1). The letters confirm this. We know that Paul was in Ephesus after the Council of Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:8), for he mentions the collection that was decided there (Gal 2:10), and we know that his itinerary took him through Galatia, for, regarding this collection, he tells the Corinthians to do "as I have directed the churches of Galatia" (1 Cor 16:1). The fact that Paul visited Galatia a second time before writing the epistles to the Corinthians and the Galatians is perhaps also suggested by the "before" or "first time" when he announced the good news to them in Gal 4:13. Even assuming a one-month stay with the Galatians, it would have been entirely possible for Paul to arrive in Ephesus in July, or at the latest in August of 52.

Luke gives us two figures for Paul's stay in Ephesus: two years and three months (Acts 19:8–9), a figure that seems fairly accurate, and three years (Acts 20:31), a figure that appears to be rounded. Recall that Ephesus was a city as large, if not larger, than Corinth. And during his stay, he had to deal with problems arising from several churches (Galatia, Philippi, Colossae, Corinth). Therefore, we can state with a fair degree of confidence that Paul definitively left Ephesus in October of the year 54. He had initially planned to leave earlier, at Pentecost (1 Cor 16:5–6), which fell on June 2 that year, but several issues required his attention.

We learn from 2 Cor 12:14; 13:1–2 that Paul had to make a brief visit to Corinth in mid-June by ship. This stay in Corinth was brief and difficult, and he returned by land, passing through Thessalonica and Philippi (2 Cor 1:23–2:1). 736 km separate Corinth from Neapolis (Acts 16:11), today Kavalla, and 350 km separate Troas from Ephesus. At an average of 32 km per day, the journey would have taken a little over five weeks. But we must take into account the time needed for interactions with the churches in Macedonia. It is therefore highly likely that Paul was back in Ephesus by early August 54. It was later that summer that he left Ephesus for good, heading first to Troas and then to Macedonia (2 Cor 2:13; 7:5), presumably just before the end of the sailing season.

2. Macedonia

Paul spent the winter of 54–55 in Macedonia. It was from the Macedonians that he learned of their generosity in the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, and it was from Macedonia that he wrote to the Corinthians: “I know your good intentions, and I boast about you to the Macedonians: ‘Achaia,’ I told them, ‘has been ready since last year, and your eagerness has spurred on most of the churches’” (2 Cor 9:2). Paul is referring here to what he had previously written to them about the collection (1 Cor 16:1–4). Since the First Letter to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus in April or May of the year 54, we can infer from the mention of “a year” that Paul was still in Macedonia in the spring of the year 55.

From Macedonia, Paul plans to travel to Corinth for his third visit (see 2 Cor 9:4; 12:14; 13:1–2; Rom 15:25–26). But before going there, he preached in Illyria (Rom 15:19) until a crisis in Corinth forced him to write 2 Cor 10–13 and led him to travel there urgently. Thus, Paul would have spent the winter of 55–56 in Corinth. And it was in the summer of 56 that he is said to have left for Jerusalem with the collection for the poor.

For the rest of the events, we rely on Luke, who tells us that Paul had been a prisoner in Caesarea for two years when the procurator Felix was replaced by Festus (Acts 24:27–25:1). This change in authority is tentatively dated to the year 59 or 60. Paul’s arrest by the tribune Lysias (Acts 21:33) should therefore have taken place in 57 or 58. His transfer to Rome, at his own request (Acts 25:11), must have occurred before Festus’s death in 62. According to Luke, Paul spent two years in prison in Rome (Acts 28:30), a duration that does not appear to be in doubt. Subsequently, as we shall see, he made an unsuccessful journey to Spain, followed by a tour of the Aegean Sea to visit his churches. He returned to Rome to strengthen the local church after Nero’s persecution and was himself arrested and executed, probably in the year 67.

Jerusalem Conference	October 51
Antioch	Winter 51-52
Journey to Ephesus	April-July 52
Ephesus	August 52-October 54
Macedonia	Winter 54-55
Illyricum	Summer 55
Corinth	Winter 55-56
Journey to Jerusalem	Summer 56
Jerusalem- Caesarea	57?-61?
Journey to Rome	September 61-Spring 62
Rome	Spring 62-Spring 64
Spain	Early Summer 64
Around the Aegean	64-66?
Death in Rome	67

Chapter 2: Growing Up in Tarsus p. 32-51

Paul gives us very little information about his origins.

I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. (Rom 11:1)

Circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews (Phil 3:5)

His emphasis on his Hebrew origins is typical of a Diaspora Jew who feels compelled to highlight his heritage. This is precisely what he does in 2 Cor 11:22: “Are they Hebrews? So am I! Are they Israelites? So am I! Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I!” If he is indeed a Diaspora Jew, where was he born?

Gal 1:21 perhaps offers a clue when Paul refers to his departure during his first visit to Jerusalem: “Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” We can understand the mention of Syria, whose capital was Antioch, one of the major cities of the time. But why Cilicia? We suspect there is a personal connection here.

Luke confirms our intuition by stating that Paul was from Tarsus.

The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying (Acts 9:11)

When the brothers and sisters learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus (Acts 9:30)

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul (Acts 11:25)

"I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city; I beg you, let me speak to the people." (Acts 21:39)

"I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today" (Acts 22:3)

There is no reason to doubt this information which comes to us from Luke.

A. The City of Tarsus

Dion Chrysostom writes the following about the people of Tarsus:

Your home is in a great city, and you live on fertile land, for there you find everything you need to live in abundance and plenty, thanks to the river that flows through the heart of your city; moreover, Tarsus is the capital of all the inhabitants of Cilicia (Discourses 33.17)

Tarsus occupied a strategic position on the trade route that ran from Syria in the east to Asia Minor and the Aegean Sea in the west, passing through the Taurus Mountains in present-day Turkey. The city is built on a fertile plain where grain and grapes are grown, but above all flax, the quality of which gave rise to an industry that made it famous.

Tarsus had a long history before Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC) granted it, in the year 171, the status of a Greek city-state governed by its own elected magistrates and minting its own currency. Its colonization by Jews and Greeks was encouraged to increase the productivity of its eastern population. With Pompey's conquest, the city was integrated into the Roman system of Asia Minor in 66 BC. Furthermore, since the city opposed Cassius, one of the conspirators who assassinated Julius Caesar, it was rewarded in 42 BC by Mark Antony with the privilege of freedom and immunity, a privilege renewed by Augustus after the Battle of Actium in 31 BC. This privilege was likely accompanied by the granting of Roman citizenship to a number of citizens, which contributed greatly to the city's rise.

Even though the Greeks made up part of the population, the culture remained Eastern. This is revealed by Dion Chrysostom, who complains of hearing Phoenician melodies and rhythms in the music there, and writes the following regarding women's attire:

Among these [customs of old] is the convention regarding women's attire, which prescribes that they must be dressed and conduct themselves in such a way in the street that no one can see their faces or the rest of their bodies, and that they themselves cannot see anything in the distance (Discourses 33.48).

Despite its Eastern roots, Tarsus has a thoroughly Hellenistic respect for education and possesses the resources to afford a good education. Strabo notes that "the inhabitants of Tarsus have devoted themselves with such zeal, not only to philosophy but also to the entire field of education in general, that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place where one might find schools and lectures by philosophers" (Geography 14.5.13). At the same time, he notes the peculiarity of this city, where the inhabitants are so passionate about education that they leave their city to study abroad and, upon completing their studies, tend to stay there and not return home.

It was thus in a city at the crossroads of Eastern and Greek culture that Paul was born.

B. The Family of Paul

Paul tells us almost nothing about himself, except that he was a Hebrew (Phil 3:5). Luke adds that he was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:27–28) and a citizen of the city of Tarsus (Acts 21:39), and that he had a sister and a nephew in Jerusalem (Acts 23:16).

a. A Hebrew

What does the term "Hebrew" mean? According to the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria, in most cases it refers to a member of the Jewish people, either by birth or by conversion. But when he compares translations into various languages, he contrasts Greek and Hebrew. Thus, the term refers not only to a religious or ethnic group, but also to a language. This is confirmed by the Letter of Aristeas, which recounts the request of King Ptolemy of Egypt asking the high priest Eleazar of Jerusalem to send him experts because "We have therefore decided that your law should be translated into Greek letters from what you call Hebrew letters, so that they too may take their place among us in our library alongside the other royal books" (Letter of Aristeas, 38); this is said to be the origin of the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, known as the Septuagint. Finding these experts was a challenge, because on the one hand few Jews in the Diaspora knew Hebrew, and on the other hand few Jews in Palestine knew Greek.

All of this helps us understand the context of Acts 6:1: “In those days, the number of disciples was increasing, and the Hellenists began to complain against the Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution”; some spoke Greek, others Hebrew. Thus, even though both groups were Jewish, language fostered a form of chauvinism among those who spoke Hebrew, a sense that Palestine was first and foremost their home. It is significant to note the ascending order of the attributes used by Paul in Phil 3:5: “circumcised on the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.”

Thus, Paul came from a family that, even though it lived in the diaspora, had preserved Hebrew, its ancestral language. It is also likely that Paul’s ancestors had emigrated from Palestine not so long ago. This is what St. Jerome affirms:

We know this story. It is said that the parents of the Apostle Paul were originally from Gischala, a region of Judea, and that when the entire province was devastated by Rome and the Jews were scattered throughout the world, they were displaced to Tarsus, a city in Cilicia; the young Paul inherited his parents’ personal status (Commentarii in Epistolam ad Philemonem, v. 23–24).

Biblical scholars have wondered where Jerome obtained this information. It is thought that he derived it from Origen in his commentary on the Epistle to Philemon. But this merely shifts the question: where did Origen obtain this information? Since Gischala does not appear in the Old Testament and has no connection to the tribe of Benjamin, to the ministry of Jesus, or to any Christian community from the Byzantine period, it is difficult to understand why Origen or Christians would have invented this piece of information. It would therefore seem that Origen relied on an oral tradition that he accepted as plausible.

We know that the Romans took control of Palestine in 63 BC, and subsequently, there were a number of occasions (61, 55, 52, 4 BC, 6 AD) when Jews from various parts of the country were enslaved and deported abroad. This is what is said to have happened to Paul’s parents. Philo informs us that “The vast district of Rome situated beyond the Tiber was owned by Jews and inhabited by them. Most were Roman freedmen, brought to Rome as prisoners of war and freed by their former masters” (Legatio ad Gaium, 155). This is how Paul’s father was able to obtain Roman citizenship in Tarsus, which he passed on to his son.

b. Roman Citizenship

This detail comes from Luke (Acts 25:11–12; 26:32; 28:19), and there is no real reason to think that Luke would have made it up, since it plays no role in Paul’s ministry other than to justify the privilege of being tried in Rome. And in Rome, nothing significant happens there.

On the other hand, Paul never makes any reference to his Roman citizenship in his letters. And some of his personal accounts even lead biblical scholars to doubt that he was a Roman citizen, such as the one in 2 Cor 11:25: “Three times I was beaten with rods,” a treatment forbidden to a Roman citizen. But in reality, this law was far from always being respected, and only the wealthy and prestigious, even while being Roman citizens, enjoyed its legal benefits. Other biblical scholars have pointed out that Roman citizens in the East were part of the provincial aristocracy, which does not seem to fit with the tentmaker. But this overlooks Paul’s level of education, which suggests a social background far superior to that of the average artisan, as well as his rather bourgeois view of manual labor, which he describes as “slavery” (1 Cor 9:19) and “degrading.” This attitude suggests that it was the demands of his missionary strategy that led Paul to learn a trade.

But why does Paul never mention his Roman citizenship? In fact, Paul had no reason to mention his Roman citizenship in his letters, especially since he would have had to provide documentary proof. And in reality, obtaining Roman citizenship was neither a complicated nor a rare occurrence. Competition among Roman generals to secure support during the civil wars after 49 BC led to generous offers of individual emancipation in the East. It is therefore far from impossible that certain prominent members of the Jewish community in Tarsus were enticed by the prospect of obtaining Roman citizenship and rallied to Antony. The simplest hypothesis is that Paul’s father was a slave freed by a Roman citizen of Tarsus, and that he thus acquired a certain degree of Roman citizenship that increased with each generation. And this Roman citizenship was not incompatible with the Jewish faith, for, under Roman law—codified in this regard by Julius Caesar—Jews were exempt from any obligation that conflicted with the requirements of their faith.

In short, there is nothing to suggest that Luke invented Paul’s Roman citizenship out of thin air, and there is nothing in the epistles to contradict this.

c. A Roman Name

As a Roman citizen, Paul had a three-part Roman name, consisting of a given name (*praenomen*), a family name (*nomen*, referring to the founder of the Roman family), and a *cognomen* (surname), for example, Marcus Tullius Cicero. When a slave or a foreigner obtained citizenship, it was customary for them to retain their own name as the *cognomen* and adopt the given name and family name of the Roman who had granted them citizenship. Thus, Tiro, Cicero’s freedman, became Marcus Tullius Tiro. Paulos is the Greek form of the Latin *Paul(l)us*, attested in Paul’s time both as a *praenomen*, e.g., Paullus Fabius Maximus and Paullus Aemilius Lepidus, and as a *cognomen*, e.g., L. Sergius Paullus (Acts 13:8). The former is as rare as the latter is common, and in the Roman world, the *cognomen*

was the most frequently used name because it was the most precise. These observations tend to suggest that *Paul(l)us* was Paul's *cognomen*.

But, since *Paul(l)us* is a typically Roman name, borne by great senatorial families such as the Aemilii, the Vettienii, and the Sergii, how could it be the *cognomen* of a Jew who had only recently acquired Roman citizenship? One possible explanation is that the name *Paul(l)us* was chosen because it was the closest to the Hebrew name *Saulos* or *Sa(o)ulos*, the Hebrew name that Luke presents as Paul's (Acts 9:4, 17; 22:7, 13; 26:14). Moreover, the name Silas also appears, via Aramaic, as the Greek version of a Hebrew name. And there is no reason why Luke would have invented the name "Saul." Furthermore, this name belongs to the most famous figure of the tribe of Benjamin, to which Paul claims to belong. Thus, we may assume that this was his Hebrew name, but as was often the case, especially in Cilicia within the Jewish diaspora, people were given nicknames. This nickname may have been used within the family and among friends before Paul's birth and subsequently became an integral part of his identity. A fine example is provided by an undated inscription found in Naples where someone has a nickname, Neon:

To the spirits of the dead. Lucius Antonius Leo, also called Neon, son of Zoilus, by nation a Cilician, a soldier of the praetorian fleet at Misenum, from the century the trireme 'Aesclepius', lived 27 years, served 9 years. Gaius Julius Paulus his heir undertook the work [of his burial] (Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, 10.3377).

d. A Description of Paul

Saint Augustine believed that Paul had chosen his name based on the Latin adjective *paulus*, meaning "small," to reflect what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:9: "For I am the least of the apostles." The phenomenon of a proper name derived from an adjective exists in several languages. But there is no historical evidence that could give us an idea of Paul's physical appearance. Even the Acts of Paul, a work from the 2nd century CE, provides a description of Paul that is based on his name and certain associations made at the time between physical features and a person's character:

He saw Paul coming, a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and a nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel (3:1).

According to the standards of the time, eyebrows that met in the middle were considered a sign of beauty, and a person with a hooked nose was perceived as likely having a regal or magnanimous character. Short men had poorer blood circulation and were believed to be quick-witted. Bow legs indicated that a man was firmly grounded, that is, very down-to-earth. Baldness was a specifically human trait; no animal went bald. In short, the high likelihood of idealization in the portrait of the Apostle Paul in the Acts of Paul casts doubt on its historical value.

e. Paul's Relative

In Acts 23:16–17, Luke writes: "But Paul's sister's son heard about the plot; he went to the fortress, entered it, and warned Paul. Calling one of the centurions, Paul said to him, 'Take this young man (*neanias*) to the tribune; he has something to tell him.'" The term *neanias* refers to someone over the age of 20. Thus, according to Luke, Paul would have had at least one sister and one nephew. Even though it is likely he had brothers and sisters, and the presence of a sister in Jerusalem can be explained—whether for business or a pilgrimage—it is difficult to assess the historical value of this information. And the fact that this nephew not only appears at this time but may have influence over a Roman officer leaves us skeptical.

Some have sought to glean information about Paul's family from the greetings in the Epistle to the Romans, such as Rom 16:13: "Greet Rufus, the one chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who is also mine." Unfortunately, the term "mother" is often used metaphorically to refer to a person who commands respect; if she were his biological mother, Paul would have named her first. The same applies to the term "relative" (*syngenēs*) in Rom 16:7, 11, 20: the meaning Paul gives it is very clear as early as Rom 9:3, where he is referring to his fellow Jews.

C. Education

Luke mentions only Paul's training in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. But this is part of Luke's theological framework, in which everything begins in Jerusalem. There is no doubt that when Paul left Tarsus, he had already received a solid foundation in his education. Unfortunately, Paul tells us nothing about his education. We must therefore rely on the general practices of the time.

a. Early Formation

Children from both secular and Jewish backgrounds started elementary school at age six. There, they learned basic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as social organization and respect for institutions. In addition to these skills, Jewish children had to learn all the religious observances that defined their identity.

All men are eager to preserve their own customs and laws, and the Jewish nation above all others; for looking upon theirs as oracles directly given to them by God himself, and having been instructed in this

doctrine from their earliest infancy they bear in their souls the images of the commandments. (Philo of Alexandria, Legatio ad Gaium 210)

It was in this context that Paul likely became familiar with the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. For the Bible was regarded as a textbook for learning to read, and students were required to memorize large portions of it (2 Tim 3:15: "From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures..."). Paul's letters contain nearly 90 explicit quotations from Scripture. Like Hebrew, Paul also had to learn Hebrew and/or Aramaic. For Aramaic was common among the Semitic population of Syria and eastern Asia Minor.

On the other hand, Jewish children had to learn to function effectively in the Hellenistic world to which they belonged. They thus developed their knowledge of the Greek language and literature, reading Euripides and Homer. This is what Paul must have learned, in addition to learning to count up to a million.

Secondary education began as soon as the child could read and write easily, usually around the age of 11. The emphasis was not on developing critical thinking, but on transmitting an entire culture through the works of authors such as Homer, Euripides, Menander, and Demosthenes. In a school possessing multiple manuscripts by a classical author, the first step involved rudimentary textual criticism in cases of discrepancies. Next came the reading of the text, a task far more complex than one might imagine. It required meticulous preparation, as words were not separated and the text lacked punctuation. This rigorous analysis laid the foundation for a sound interpretation of the text, intended to contribute to the students' moral development. As their knowledge grew, they practiced literary composition. Although varied, all types of compositions had to adhere to the four essential qualities of conciseness, clarity, plausibility, and grammatical correctness, while incorporating the agent, action, time, place, mode, and cause.

b. Rhetorical Training

A Jewish boy in first-century Palestine completed his compulsory education at the age of 12 or 13, when he technically became an adult. Greek secondary school lasted one or two more years. This was followed by the equivalent of an undergraduate degree program as we know it today. Philostratus' account of Apollonius is typical: "At the age of fourteen, his father took him to Tarsus, to Euthydemus, a Phoenician tutor" (Life of Apollonius 1:7). In Tarsus, there was a gymnasium. The Jewish attitude toward gymnasiums varied depending on individuals and communities. Here is what Philo writes on the subject:

For who can be more completely the benefactors of their children than parents, who have not only caused them to exist, but have afterwards thought them worthy of food, and after that again of education both in body and soul, and have enabled them not only to live, but also to live well, training their body by gymnastic and athletic rules so as to bring it into a vigorous and healthy state, and giving it an easy way of standing and moving not without elegance and becoming grace, and educating the soul by letters, and numbers, and geometry, and music and every kind of philosophy (De specialibus legibus 2:229-230).

Tarsus, however, boasted "all manner of schools of rhetoric," according to Strabo, who also noted the result: "the ease with which the people of Tarsus spoke, enabling them to discuss any given subject instantly, casually, and at length" (Geography 14.5.13-14). In an essentially verbal culture, the art of oratory was the key to success. Its acquisition was divided into three stages.

- i. The first consisted of the theory of discourse, including letter writing. Techniques, rules, formulas, etc., were discussed at length. As divisions and subdivisions multiplied, the complexity of the theory rendered it increasingly obsolete.
- ii. The second, more practical stage consisted of studying the speeches of the great masters of rhetoric: what techniques were employed, how did they produce their effects, and could they have been perfected?
- iii. The final stage involved writing practice speeches, most of which dealt with topics that were more fanciful than useful.

This is likely the training Paul received. Although he chose not to rely on eloquent wisdom in proclaiming the Gospel (1 Cor 1:17; 2:4), his letters demonstrate the skill of a well-trained writer. An analysis of his writings suggests a mastery and confidence that he is unlikely to have acquired without extensive practice, and perhaps also extensive study. It was within the framework of the school of rhetoric that Paul was introduced to the various schools of Greek philosophy, which were an integral part of the general culture of any educated person. The presence of Stoic teachers in Tarsus is mentioned by Strabo.

It should also be remembered that during his formative years (around the age of 15 to 20), Paul would have attended the synagogue in Tarsus, where he was exposed to the Hellenistic Jewish tradition, whose leading representative was Philo of Alexandria. Through his letters, parallels can be drawn with the Jewish philosopher, even though his personality was very different.

According to Strabo, it was customary for young men from Tarsus to leave the city to study abroad. Was this the case for Paul? It is quite possible. For the rhetorical exercises were extremely superficial and suited only those ambitious enough to carve out a place for themselves in public life. And for a Jew like Paul, opportunities were limited. The alternative was to immerse himself in the study of his own tradition. But where? Despite the prestige of Babylon and Alexandria, no city could rival Jerusalem, the cradle of Judaism. Also, since the study of rhetoric lasted no more than four years, we can imagine that Paul must have left Tarsus for Jerusalem around the age of twenty, that is, in the year 15 (Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus was 21 when he went to study in Jerusalem). It has already been established that his conversion took place in the year 33, which means he would have spent 15 years in Jerusalem before becoming a Christian. This period, spanning from the age of 20 to 35, is the time in a man's life when ambitions and personality solidify and reach maturity.

A. A Student in Jerusalem?

We owe our knowledge of this period of Paul's life to Luke, who writes that Paul was educated in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 8:1; 9:1–2; 22:3). Given Luke's theology, in which the church's history begins in Jerusalem, it is legitimate to wonder whether he invented this detail or simply emphasized it.

a. Paul opposed to Luke?

Since Luke is not always reliable in the historical information he provides, and since Paul never mentions in his letters having studied in Jerusalem, some biblical scholars have questioned whether Paul could have stayed in Jerusalem to pursue his studies. Three arguments have been put forward.

- i. When Paul had to defend the orthodoxy of his Judaism, he never cited Gamaliel as his teacher. To this one might respond that Paul was aware that having an excellent academic education did not preclude one from being a traitor or a sinner; he preferred to use the argument of his zeal for the law (Phil 3:6).
- ii. It has also been argued that if Paul had truly stayed in Jerusalem for his studies, he would have used the expression "return to Jerusalem" in Gal 1:18, rather than the expression "I went up to Jerusalem." To this one might reply that Luke himself, who nevertheless made Jerusalem the site of Paul's training, does not use the expression "return to Jerusalem" (except in Acts 22:17), but rather "go up to Jerusalem," which is the standard expression for any stay in Jerusalem.
- iii. Finally, the passage in Galatians 1:22 ("But my face was unknown to the churches of Christ in Judea") is cited to assert that Paul's persecutions did not take place in Judea, and therefore that Paul did not live in Jerusalem. This overlooks the fact that, on the one hand, the persecutions could have taken place in the countryside around Jerusalem, and, on the other hand, Paul himself writes that during his visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, he saw only Cephas and James, and no one else. Thus, Galatians 1:22 provides only an introduction to what the churches in Judea had heard from their converted persecutor. And knowing Paul, he did not spend much time apologizing for what he had done.

b. A Pharisee

In Philippians 3:5, Paul describes himself as "as for the law, a Pharisee." So who were the Pharisees? Where could they be found?

Let's start with the first question. It is not easy to answer, since we have only two sources: the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who tells us he was a Pharisee, and first-century traditions that were incorporated into a rabbinic collection.

Josephus mentions the Pharisees in three of his works: The Jewish War (published in 75–79 CE), The Antiquities of the Jews (published in 93–94 CE), and The Life of Josephus (published in 95 CE). It is sometimes difficult to reconcile elements that appear contradictory. However, a careful analysis reveals that the Pharisees constituted a political interest group deeply involved in the conflicts of the Hasmonean period, and whose participation in public life continued into the first century CE, though to a lesser extent.

If we refer to rabbinic traditions, it is difficult to extract information dating back to before the destruction of the Temple in the year 70. The Pharisees constituted, above all, a society in which sharing a meal was the pinnacle of their communal life. This conclusion stems from the fact that approximately 67% of the legal passages deal with dietary laws: the ritual purity of meals and the agricultural rules governing the suitability of food for Pharisaic consumption. Observance of the Sabbath and festivals comes far behind. It would appear that Hillel the Elder played a major role around 37–34 BCE in steering this group away from political action. An important figure in the group was Gamaliel I, Hillel's successor, whose activity spanned the years 20–50 CE. Gamaliel's focus was on the temple: he was a teacher who played a major role in deliberations concerning the administration of the temple. This is also the portrait Luke paints of him in Acts 5:34: "There was a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, held in high esteem by all the people." His reputation was very high, as he appears in a 3rd-century list of great rabbis.

One point from Gamaliel's teaching is worth noting. One day, he was asked, "How many Torahs were given to Israel?" Gamaliel replied, "Two: one written and the other transmitted orally." Thus, not only was the written Law binding upon the Pharisees, but so were its traditional interpretation and its expansion. This is the only point on

which rabbinic traditions and Flavius Josephus agree. The latter states: "The Pharisees imposed upon the people many laws derived from the tradition of the fathers, not written in the Law of Moses." Here we find confirmation of Paul's claim that he was a Pharisee. "I was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14); this is precisely the kind of language a Pharisee would have used.

c. Where could Pharisee be found?

If our only sources were Flavius Josephus and the Gospel of John, the answer would be simple: both place the Pharisees exclusively in Jerusalem. But the Gospel of Mark has complicated matters by presenting accounts in which the Pharisees are in Galilee. However, upon closer examination, we see that with the exception of Mark 12:13 and 10:2, not a single account in Mark featuring the Pharisees contains any element that would allow us to identify the location. The evangelist's compositional method, which groups the stories based on criteria other than their location, does not imply a transposition of the original context (most likely Jerusalem), and it is highly unlikely that the Gospel's intended audience understood it that way. For readers in the Diaspora, this would have been irrelevant, and educated Palestinians would have unconsciously made the necessary corrections. In their parallels with the examples mentioned, neither Matthew nor Luke can be considered to have had access to independent historical information. Furthermore, both exhibit a tendency to multiply references to the Pharisees, presented as stereotypical adversaries of Jesus.

Luke 13:31 is an exception to the rule: "At that moment some Pharisees came up to him and said, 'Get away from here, leave this place, for Herod wants to kill you.'" The reference is clearly to Herod Antipas, king of Galilee, who had authority over Jesus. This single instance, however, does not demonstrate a permanent Pharisaic presence in Galilee. On the contrary, the Pharisees' knowledge of the king's intentions would rather suggest that they were on a mission to the court from Jerusalem.

In short, it is possible that some Pharisees traveled sporadically to Galilee to inspect the crops they intended to purchase, but there is no evidence of a Pharisaic movement, even a remote one, in Galilee. This makes a permanent and significant Pharisaic presence in the Diaspora all the more unlikely. Their ambition to live the Law as perfectly as possible would have been thwarted by a non-Jewish environment. Thus, there is no reliable evidence of the presence of Pharisees permanently settled outside Jerusalem. Luke's statement that Paul was "a son of Pharisees" (Acts 23:6) must be dismissed as a figure of speech with no historical value. If Paul joined a Pharisaic group—and there is no reason to doubt his word (Phil 3:5)—it was necessarily a personal decision made after his arrival in Jerusalem. Furthermore, if Paul arrived in Jerusalem around the year 15, his stay in the city would have coincided with that of Gamaliel I, and it is extremely unlikely that Paul or any other Pharisee would have escaped his influence.

B. Pharisaic Studies

The rabbinic tradition of devoting oneself to study appears to be one of the fundamental characteristics of the Pharisees. Hillel, though of a moderate bent, is said to have remarked, "Whoever does not study [the Law] deserves death," while Shammai, of a stricter bent, simply advised: "Make [the study of] the Law a constant habit," and Gamaliel I offered the practical advice: "Find yourself a teacher and stay away from doubt" (see Mishnah, *Aboth*, 1:13–16). Since the Pharisees prided themselves on their meticulous observance of the Law, a detailed knowledge of the commandments as formulated in the written and oral Torah was indispensable.

This study took place in groups. For those concerned with the ritual purity of food, it was simpler for people sharing the same beliefs to eat together; as they trusted that each respected the other's standards. The consensus on interpretation regarding the requirements this entailed required joint study and discussion. One can imagine the heated atmosphere in this environment of young men poring over the texts, which led to this warning from Hillel:

Do not isolate yourself from the community. Do not trust yourself until the day you die. Do not judge your neighbor until you have been in his place. Do not say of something incomprehensible that it will be understood in the end. And do not say, "When I have free time, I will study!" Perhaps you will never have any (Mishnah, *Aboth* 2:5)

All of this helps us imagine the context in which Paul pursued his studies in Jerusalem. In Galatians 1:14 he writes: "I was making progress in Judaism, surpassing most of my contemporaries and my own people in my overflowing zeal for the traditions of my fathers." His desire to surpass his peers can likely be explained by the fact that he began his studies of Jewish traditions late: he came from the Diaspora, lagging behind his peers in Jerusalem who had been fortunate enough to have teachers from an early age. What did Paul retain from this period in Jerusalem? It would seem that certain details in his letters reflect the training he received under Gamaliel.

Let us conclude with the question: if Paul received training in Jerusalem during the period from AD 15 to 33, how can we explain that he never mentions having met Jesus, who must have made pilgrimages to Jerusalem and was crucified there in AD 30? First, there is a tendency to overestimate Jesus' reputation, as the Gospels suggest that Jesus enjoyed widespread support among the people, at least in Galilee. But even in Galilee, someone like Herod, who seems uninterested in the figure (Luke 23:8–12), regarded him as harmless and sent him to Pilate—an attitude very different from the one he reserved for John the Baptist, whom he had imprisoned and killed. If Jesus' impact in Galilee was minimal, it was even less so in Jerusalem. His execution likely took place without fanfare, amid the indifference of a city preoccupied with Passover preparations. Second, even if the crucifixion has been the great event of the spring of the

year 30—which is doubtful—there is no guarantee that it would have captured the attention of a Paul passionately devoted to the study of the Law. Despite the ubiquity of radio, television, and rumors, Hasidic students in Jerusalem today manage to uphold their principle of remaining ignorant of secular events.

C. A Married Man

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, he was unmarried. But the wording regarding his unmarried status is ambiguous: “I say, then, to the unmarried and to the widows that it is good for them to remain as I am” (1 Cor 7:8). Does this sentence mean that Paul never married or that he was a widower? Older biblical scholars believe it refers to the latter, while younger scholars opt for the former.

Of course, we cannot rule out a priori that Paul never married. The prophet Jeremiah refused to marry as a symbolic gesture (Jer 16:1). Simeon ben Azzai (c. 110 CE) justified his celibacy with these words: “My soul is in love with the Torah. Others may follow the ways of humanity.”

Jews placed great value on marriage, to the point of instituting the law of levirate marriage, which required that men from the family of a husband who died childless marry the woman to provide her with an heir (Deut. 25:5–10). It was therefore expected that a man would marry between the ages of 18 and 20. There were, of course, exceptions. Josephus married at the age of 30, Levi at 28, and Issa at 30 or 35 according to The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, and Philo of Alexandria recommended marrying at 40.

When Paul experienced his conversion, he was about 40 years old. Even if it is possible that he delayed his marriage or gave it up entirely, we cannot assume that this is the meaning of 1 Cor 7:8. Only a minority did so, and they were considered abnormal by their contemporaries. Such a decision required a high degree of self-confidence based on past achievements and the understanding of sympathetic friends. We cannot assume this situation for a Diaspora immigrant like Paul. The proudly competitive tone of Galatians 1:14 (“surpassing most of my contemporaries and my own people in my overflowing zeal...”), on the contrary, betrays the foreigner who ardently sought to integrate into Jewish Jerusalem by blindly conforming to the norm. It is therefore far more likely that Paul joyfully submitted to the expectation that young men would marry in their early twenties.

If Paul was married, why is his wife never mentioned? It is possible that he divorced and subsequently remained single, but it is more likely that he was a widower, and a widowhood that may have occurred under dramatic circumstances. To understand this, we must first consider Paul the persecutor of Christians. We too often take this phase of Paul's life for granted without asking the question: why? We often attribute this aggressiveness to his Pharisaic side. But one would search in vain for evidence showing the Pharisees in open conflict with other groups. In the New Testament, the attack against the early Christians is the work of the Sadducees; they executed James (Acts 12:2).

Such a direct attack on the Christians would therefore not have been an initiative of the Pharisees, but a personal one. Why? The following hypothesis is possible. Let us recall that Jerusalem is located in an earthquake zone. It is not impossible that his wife and children perished in such a disaster or during a plague epidemic. As a Pharisee, Paul believed in Providence and in God's hand in the events of life. Consequently, we can imagine a man torn: one part of his theology would logically have led him to blame God, but another part of his religious perspective, which prescribed total submission to the divine will, forbade him from doing so. If his pain and anger could not be directed against God, they had to find another target. He had to rationalize an outlet for his repressed desire for vengeance. The rise of the Christian sect may have been the perfect scapegoat, as it threatened Jewish unity while Rome could intervene at any moment. It would therefore be a painful past that lies at the root of Paul's silence regarding his wife.

D. Persecutor of the Church

Luke provides us with several details about Paul's persecution of Christians.

Then they dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him, and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul (Acts 7:58)

And Saul approved of their killing him (Acts 8:1)

But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison (Acts 8:3)

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2)

And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme, and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:10-11)

Luke's account raises a number of issues. First, neither the high priest nor the Sanhedrin had judicial authority outside the eleven districts of Judea proper. Their moral authority might have been binding, but they could not authorize Paul to make arrests, particularly within the territory of a Roman province. Second, Luke's mention that Paul cast his vote to put Christians to death presupposes that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. Even while acknowledging that Pharisees were certainly members of the Sanhedrin in the first century, and admitting that Paul may have been a member, it is surprising that Paul never mentioned this in his letters, particularly in Phil 3:5 and 2 Cor 11:22, where Paul boasts of being a true Jew and defends his attachment to his roots.

Since the most striking passages concerning Paul's pre-Christian activities always appear as an introduction to the accounts of his conversion, it becomes evident that Luke, for artistic effect, sought to exaggerate certain negative traits of Paul the persecutor in order to further highlight the miracle of his conversion and the success of his apostolate. The transformation of the quintessential persecutor into the ideal apostle reinforced the dramatic impact of his book.

Where Luke and Paul are in perfect agreement is regarding Paul's role as a persecutor: "in terms of zeal, a persecutor of the Church" (Phil 3:6); "For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor 15:9); "For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism: with excess (*kath' hyperbolēn*) I persecuted the church of God and sought to destroy it" (Gal 1:13); "simply, they had heard it said: 'The one who formerly persecuted us is now proclaiming the faith he once destroyed'" (Gal 1:23). The expression "with great zeal" (Gal 1:13) conveys the intensity of Paul's commitment, and his reference to the faith he was destroying (Gal 1:23) confirms his awareness of having caused real harm. But in all this, nothing presents him as acting as an official representative of judicial authority. Rather, he seems to have acted on his own initiative.

When Paul admits that he persecuted the Church, what does he mean to express concretely? In a number of passages, he alludes to the fact that he himself was persecuted: "When we are reviled, we bless; we are persecuted, we endure" (1 Cor 4:12); "hunted, but not caught; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:9); "Therefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and distresses for Christ!" (2 Cor 12:10); "As for me, brothers, if I still preach circumcision, why am I then persecuted?" (Gal 5:11). Thus, Paul mentions having been reviled, slandered, and insulted, in addition to unspecified trials and calamities. But his action against the Christians could not have consisted of acts such as flogging, which only the competent authorities could administer and which did not fall within the scope of an individual's initiative. One imagines rather an action such as denunciation. There were in Jerusalem a number of different synagogues where Jews gathered, particularly to study the Law. He would therefore have entered these synagogues, and to use Luke's words in Acts 26:11, he intensified his persecution of Jewish Christians to force them to blaspheme—that is, to swear an oath to a formula denying Jesus' faithfulness to God and declaring that the Messiah had not yet come. It is possible that excommunication from the synagogue followed, with all its social consequences.

From this perspective, in which Paul appears as a zealot taking personal initiative. Thus, the idea that he might have been commissioned to go to Damascus, as Luke asserts, seems unlikely. Unless we admit that we do not know why Paul went to Damascus, we must assume a private journey with an unknown purpose.

Chapter 4: Conversion and its Consequences p. 71-101

While Luke provides us with three accounts (Acts 9:1–19; 22:4–16; 26:9–18) of Paul's conversion, the apostle himself is surprisingly reticent on the subject. At most, we can glean a few allusions in his letters:

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? (1 Cor 9:1)

Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me (1 Cor 15:8)

for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:12)

to reveal his Son to me,[c] so that I might proclaim him among the gentiles, I did not confer with any human (Gal 1:16)

It should be noted that these last two references emphasize the proclamation of the good news, and the purpose of this proclamation is to preach the good news; conversion and the call to mission are inseparable.

A. Conversion

Paul's two references in 1 Corinthians to his conversion state that Paul "saw the Lord," the same verb used in John 20:14 regarding Mary Magdalene's experience of "seeing the Lord." We are in the context of the post-Easter appearances.

a. Recognition Appearances

The accounts of appearances can be divided into two categories: recognition appearances, in which people recognize that Jesus, who had died, is now alive (see Mt 28:8–10; Lk 24:13–42; Jn 20:11–16, 24–29) and mission appearances (Mt 28:16–20; Jn 20:19–23).

Recognition appearances, despite their variations, follow a certain pattern that includes four elements.

1. The disciples acknowledge that with Jesus' death, it is all over. Mary weeps at the tomb (Jn 20:11), Cleopas expresses his disappointment (Lk 24:21), frightened disciples hide (Jn 20:19), Thomas scoffs (Jn 20:25).
2. Jesus intervenes. He calls Mary (Jn 20:16), he joins Cleopas (Lk 24:15), he appears to the disciples (Jn 20:19, 26).
3. Jesus gives a sign of his identity. He shows his hands and his side (Jn 20:20, 27) or his hands and his feet (Lk 24:40); he breaks the bread (Lk 24:30).
4. Jesus is recognized. The disciples fall on their faces (Matt 28:9), Mary says, "Rabboni" (John 20:16), and Thomas says, "My Lord and my God"; their eyes were opened and they recognized him (Luke 24:3); they saw the Lord (John 20:20).

The mention of the initial disappointment is important, for it contradicts the idea that the disciples might have invented the resurrection of Jesus in their enthusiasm for his continued life. It is Jesus' initiative that leads them to believe in this resurrection. And a sign of his identity is necessary, so great is the difference between the risen Jesus and the earthly Jesus. And even then, faith is not automatic (Lk 24:41; Mt 28:17).

b. A Pharisee's Knowledge of Jesus

What did Paul know about Jesus of Nazareth before his conversion? For it is certain that Paul had some knowledge of Jesus, since he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:16b: "If we once knew Christ in a human way, we no longer know him in that way." So let us ask ourselves: what knowledge could a first-century Jew, particularly a Pharisee, have had about Jesus?

The Jewish historian Josephus has left us two references to Jesus. First, we have this passage:

This younger Ananus took the highpriesthood. He was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed. When, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity to exercise his authority. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others. And when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned (*Antiquities of the Jews* 20.199-200).

Thus, the high priest Ananias took advantage of the power vacuum left by the absence of human authority before the arrival of the new procurator to assert his authority in a brutal manner. Josephus's aim was to explain why Ananias was subsequently deposed by the Roman authorities. But note that in his account, he must specify which James he is referring to ("the brother of Jesus"), as it was a very common name—just as it was for Jesus, who was referred to as "the Christ," the title that circulated about him, even among those who rejected him.

The second reference to Jesus in Flavius Josephus is known as the *Testimonium Flavianum* and has sparked considerable debate due to the intervention of a Christian scribe who altered the text he was copying to express his faith. Here is the text, with the scribe's probable interpolations in italics:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, *if it be lawful to call him a man*, for he was a doer of wonderful works (*paradoxōn ergōn*), a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure (*hēdonē talēthē*). He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. *He was the Christ*. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that love him at first did not forsake him; *for he appeared to them alive again at the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him*. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.63-64).

Without the scribe's additions, we have a text consistent with the ideas of a non-Christian Jew. First, note that Josephus describes Jesus' works with the attribute: *paradoxos*, which means: contrary to expectation or common opinion, extraordinary; the adjective can have a negative connotation in the sense of: strange, bizarre, paradoxical, and therefore hard to believe, or a positive connotation in the sense of: extraordinary, marvelous. To clarify the meaning Josephus intends to convey, we must consider his description of Jesus's audience: men who joyfully receive the truth: lit. men who receive the truth (*talēthē*, a crasis of *tē alēthē*) with pleasure (*hēdonē*). What does Josephus mean? One cannot dismiss the idea of an ironic undertone in the sentence, implying: these are naive people who have been taken in. For to say that Jesus's audience consists of truth-seekers might suggest that Jesus was preaching the truth, which would be implausible on Josephus's part. A suggestion has been made that would better fit the context of "pleasure" (*hēdonē*): to change *talēthē* to *ta aēthē* (novelties, unusual or strange things); Jesus's audience would consist of people who embrace with pleasure novelties or things out of the ordinary.

In short, Jesus earned a place in Josephus's history simply because, against all odds, he gathered disciples who outlived him. When we compare the statement that "he converted many Jews and Greeks" with the Gospels, it becomes clear that Josephus is projecting onto Jesus's lifetime a truth that only came to pass much later, in the first century. In reality, Jesus converted few Jews and even fewer Greeks. It was only after Easter that they formed "a

community of Christians.” This term should be translated as “Messianists” in order to convey its full meaning to a person of Jewish origin. It should be remembered that Josephus was aware that Jesus’ disciples regarded him as the Messiah. Thus, we can safely assume that Paul knew (1) that Jesus had been a teacher to whom miracles were attributed; (2) that he had been crucified under Pontius Pilate following Jewish accusations; and (3) that his disciples regarded him as the Messiah.

But it is impossible that Paul, as a Pharisee, knew only these rudimentary facts. For Jesus was a teacher, which led him into controversies with the Pharisees, particularly regarding the Sabbath. Recall that according to the Mishnah (Tractate *Shabbat* 7:2), there were 39 activities prohibited on the Sabbath. The Gospels present several controversies surrounding the Sabbath (Mk 2:23–28; 3:1–6; Lk 6:6–11; 14:1–6; Jn 9:1–40), especially the act of healing on that day when there is no threat to a person’s life. Jesus would therefore have been perceived as someone who relativized the Sabbath, thereby challenging the notion that the Law was the sole and definitive authority, and thus claiming an authority that surpassed that of the Law. Finally, by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Christians were asserting that God validated Jesus’ mission and guaranteed his teaching. All of this struck a nerve with the Pharisees, who, too, believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Paul must have been somewhat familiar with Christian claims. In his eyes, it must have been absurd to claim that God had intervened to raise a false prophet whose blasphemous claim to be the expected Messiah was accompanied by a deliberate subversion of the authority of the Law. It is therefore easier to understand why Paul strove to turn Christians away from their beliefs: they had been seriously misled.

c. Recognizing the Risen Lord

On the eve of his conversion, Paul was undoubtedly convinced that Jesus had been put to death justly, and that the only possible path for Jewish Christians was to return to the fold of authentic Judaism. His conversion was an unexpected event and can only be attributed to Jesus’s initiative. We must therefore interpret his account in 1 Cor 15:8 correctly: “Last of all, he appeared (*ōphthē*) to me, the least of all.” The verb *ōphthē* can be either in the passive voice, in which case it should be translated as “he was seen by me,” or in the middle voice, in which case it should be translated as “he appeared to me” or “he showed himself to me.” In the first case, the initiative lies with Paul; in the other, with Jesus. Which should we choose? Acts 26:16 can guide us: “But rise, stand on your feet! For this is why I have appeared (*ōphthēn*) to you,” as well as Acts 7:2: “The God of glory appeared (*ōphthē*) to our father Abraham,” which echoes Gen 12:7 LXX: “And the Lord appeared (*ōphthē*) to Abram,” which translates the Hebrew: *wayyera’ Yahweh ‘el Abram*, where the particle *‘el* conveys the idea of movement or direction. For Paul, this encounter is an initiative and an action on the part of Jesus. This is what he will say in different words in Galatians 1:16: “But when he who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace saw fit to reveal (*apokalypsaī*) his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles.”

The account of Jesus’ encounter with Paul poses a problem. Among the elements in our framework for appearance narratives was Jesus’ presentation of a sign of his identity and the recognition of Jesus based on that sign. How is this possible with Paul, since he never met Jesus during his lifetime? We must admit that we are faced with a mystery, unless we accept Luke’s account where Jesus identifies himself by giving his name (Acts 9:5; 22:8; 26:15).

But the important thing is that Paul’s world was suddenly turned upside down, his value system completely overturned. Paul now knew, with the unshakable conviction of his direct experience, that Jesus, crucified under Pontius Pilate, was alive. The resurrection he had rejected with contempt was a fact, as undeniable as his own reality. He knew that Jesus now existed on another plane. This realization was all that was necessary for his conversion, for it radically transformed his value system. If one of the associations that the name of Jesus evoked in his Pharisaic mind was true (namely, the resurrection), then the others had to be viewed from a completely different perspective. They were no longer the blasphemous claims of a madman and his dupes, but the absolute truth. Jesus must therefore be precisely what he implicitly claimed, and what his disciples explicitly claimed, namely, the Messiah. Likewise, Jesus’ attitude toward the Law must be correct; the Law was not the definitive expression of God’s will. What the Law set forth as prerequisites for salvation no longer held any validity. Since grace had been granted to Paul, despite his efforts to thwart the divine plan of salvation revealed in Jesus, it could also be made accessible to those whom the Law had excluded. Only by admitting that Paul’s conversion consisted essentially of a reevaluation of his own ideas does it become possible to understand how he can write: “Brothers, I want you to know this: the Gospel I preach is not of human origin, for I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it by any man, but I was taught it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Gal 1:11–12; cf. 1:1).

Thus, Paul’s encounter with Christ revealed to him the truth of what he had once held to be false, compelling him to reconsider what became the Christological and soteriological pillars of his Gospel. Christ was the new Adam, the embodiment of authentic humanity. The Law was no longer an obstacle to the salvation of the Gentiles; they could be saved without converting to Judaism.

d. Apostle of the Gentiles

In Paul’s own words, his conversion coincided with a call to mission among the Gentiles:

But when God, who set me apart *from my mother’s womb* and *called me* by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might proclaim him among *the nations* (Gal 1:15–16a).

These words of Paul evoke two passages from the Septuagint:

From *my mother's womb*, the Lord *called* my name... And he said to me: "I have chosen you to be a covenant for the peoples, a light to *the nations*, the salvation of all, to the ends of the earth (Is 49:1,6)

Before I formed you in *the womb*, I knew you, and before you came forth *from your mother's womb*, I had set you apart; and I appointed you as a prophet to *the nations* (Jer 1:5)

Thus, Paul perceives his conversion as the fulfillment of God's plan to bring the good news to those who did not belong to the Jewish people. Thus, the passages in Galatians 1:11–12 and 1:15–16 indicate unambiguously that Paul's mission to the Gentiles was not a later development, nor a mere extension of a supposed initiative by the Hellenists in Jerusalem.

B. Arabia

Where was Arabia? Strabo gives the geographers' answer, 'Arabia Felix is bounded by the whole extent of the Arabian Gulf [= Red Sea] and the Persian Gulf.' What image did a first-century Jew have of Arabia?

a. Location and Mission

The city of Petra (in present-day Jordan) was the royal seat of Arabia and the capital of the Nabataeans, hence the name: Nabataean Arabia. It was therefore to the territory of the Nabataeans that Paul set out—a territory that spans both banks of the Gulf of Aqaba, which flows into the Red Sea. Why this visit?

It has been suggested that Paul went there because, after his conversion, he needed a period of silence and reflection. But the fact that he provoked the anger of the Nabataeans to the point of having to leave the region suggests something else: Paul tried to convert people. All of this is consistent with the way Paul understood his conversion: a mission to the Gentiles.

b. Nabataeans and Jews

Let us recall the turbulent relations between the Jews and the Nabataeans. The Jew Antipater of Idumea (113 B.C. – 43 A.), the father of Herod the Great, sealed an alliance between Hyrcanus II (110–30 BC), high priest and ethnarch of Judea, and the Nabatean king Aretas III by marrying Cypros, a member of a prominent Nabatean family and the future mother of Herod the Great. Against his will, in 32–31 BC, Herod was forced to wage war against the Nabataeans, whom he defeated, and again in 9 BC. It is therefore not surprising that upon his death in 4 BC, when the Jewish people revolted following this authoritarian reign, the Nabataeans joined forces with the Roman governor of Syria to brutally suppress the revolt. To ease tensions between the Jews and the Nabateans, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and king of Galilee, married the daughter of the Nabatean king Aretas IV. Over time, however, Antipas grew tired of her and divorced her to marry Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. This marriage likely took place in the year 23. John the Baptist's criticism of this union is recorded by both the Gospels and Flavius Josephus. Their divergent perspectives—moral for the former, political for the latter—are in fact complementary and provide a satisfactory explanation for John the Baptist's arrest and imprisonment in Machaerus, likely around the year 28. Herod Antipas had moved there from Galilee to prepare for an attack by Aretas, in retaliation for the insult to his daughter. Aretas, in fact, used a disputed area on his northern border as a pretext for war. During the battle, likely around the year 29, Antipas's troops were routed.

c. The Situation when Paul Arrived

It was during the reign of Aretas IV (reigned 9 BC–40 AD) that Paul arrived in Arabia. Because of Roman sensitivity whenever peace was threatened, this king lived in constant anxiety, particularly due to past experiences. About 40 years before Paul's arrival, he had been involved in a conflict with Herod the Great, who had entered his territory to arrest criminals, and news of the skirmish with his soldiers had reached Emperor Augustus. The breach of peace in the eastern part of the empire displeased him, and Herod lost his title as a friend and became a subject. It was only after multiple diplomatic missions that he regained the emperor's favor. Meanwhile, Aretas IV was going through an uncertain period, having succeeded Obodas III to the throne without seeking Rome's approval, even as Augustus planned to entrust Arabia to Herod. It was only after Herod's refusal that Aretas was confirmed in his position, though not without a reprimand for his haste.

Thus, Aretas knew from experience that Rome had little patience for any bellicose action. By the time Paul arrived in Arabia, Emperor Tiberius was on the throne in Rome. Although he had retired to the island of Capri in the year 26, he remained nonetheless vigilant regarding security along the empire's eastern borders. For example, upon the death of Herod Philip, tetrarch of Iturea, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Batanea, and Auranitis, in the year 34, Tiberius intervened immediately to annex these territories to the Roman province of Syria.

Aretas therefore knew that at the slightest misstep he would have to face the four legions of the governor of Syria. Moreover, his relations with the Jews had been strained since the wars with Herod the Great. It was in this context that Paul arrived in Arabia in the year 33. It was certainly not the right time for a Jew to begin preaching what, to a

foreigner, was merely a new form of Judaism. In the eyes of the Nabateans, the recipients of his ministry, this could only appear as an attempt at infiltration, division, and weakening. What they considered an incitement to treason would have provoked an immediate and violent reaction. This would explain why, later on in Damascus, King Aretas's ethnarch had the city guarded to arrest Paul, who had to flee at night through a window (cf. 2 Cor 11:32–33).

It is unlikely that Paul ventured deep into Arabia. He may not even have reached Bosra (Syria); there were three Nabataean cities further north (now in Syria): Philippopolis (Shahba), Kanatha (Qanawat), and Suweida. If Aretas was planning armed resistance against Rome, he would certainly have deployed troops in the region, and Paul would have aroused suspicion as soon as he spoke. This makes a prolonged stay unlikely.

C. Damascus

Paul tells us nothing about the three years he spent in Damascus. According to Luke, Paul's ministry was devoted to the Jews in the synagogue. But such a claim is incompatible with Paul's conviction that his mission was directed toward the Gentiles (2 Cor 11:32–33).

a. Learning a Trade

Before exploring Paul's stay in Damascus further, let us ask ourselves: How did Paul support himself? It is unlikely that the church provided for new converts, just as it is unlikely that Paul was financially independent; it seems Paul had to provide for himself.

Paul himself writes that he had to work with his own hands day and night to support himself (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7–9; 1 Cor 4:12). And he alludes to this indirectly when he speaks of the unjust trials of his life (1 Cor 4:12; 2 Cor 6:5; 11:23, 27) and describes it as "servile" (1 Cor 9:19) and "humiliating" (2 Cor 11:7). Some Jewish texts state that the rabbis practiced a trade, but all these texts date from the period after the year 70, when conditions in Jerusalem had radically deteriorated; necessity had then been turned into a virtue. But there is no evidence to suggest that Paul, then a student in Jerusalem, needed to learn a trade; his intense commitment to his studies (Gal 1:14) prevented him from being distracted by other interests, and even if he received nothing from his family (which seems unlikely), he would not have starved, for many sought to gain favor through almsgiving.

But following his conversion, Paul could no longer rely on this institutionalized charity. It was during his stay in Damascus, and perhaps also thanks to his travels in Arabia, that Paul likely became aware of the need to be self-reliant and independent. His mission required great mobility in order to reach out to the entire pagan world. Only financial independence could offer him such freedom, and this was impossible without a trade. According to Luke, Paul became a tentmaker (Acts 18:3), which is entirely plausible. For this skill was in demand throughout the Roman Empire and allowed him to come into contact with all strata of the population. Moreover, he could easily carry his tools with him on his travels, and it was a job that could be done while seated, thus allowing him to work and preach to people at the same time.

In Rome, in the 1st century, several inscriptions attest to the existence of an organization called the "Association of Tentmakers." Pliny the Elder describes their activity as follows:

Linen canvases served as covers for theaters, an idea initially conceived by Quintus Catulus during the dedication of the Capitol. ... Subsequently, even in the absence of games, Marcellus, son of Octavia, sister of Augustus, had canvas awnings installed in the Forum as early as August 1 during his term as aedile in his uncle's 11th consulate, so that people involved in lawsuits could attend under healthier conditions. What a change from the strict customs of Cato the Elder, the censor, who had believed that the Forum should be paved with sharp stones [to keep away onlookers!]. Even more recently, sky-blue awnings studded with stars were strung up with ropes, even in Emperor Nero's amphitheaters. Red awnings are used in the inner courtyards of houses to protect the moss growing there from the sun (Natural History 19, 23–24)

Tent makers did not produce awnings alone. They also produced tents to house people when inns were no longer sufficient during special events, as Suetonius reports (Caesar 39.4) regarding the celebration of one of Caesar's victories. These tents could be made of lightweight linen, like summer beach pavilions, designed to provide shade without blocking the breeze, or much thicker linen used for sails and street vendors' stalls. There were also much sturdier tents made of leather. Thus, Paul could practice his trade year-round. All he needed was an awl to pierce a hole in a folded seam of canvas, as in leather, and in both cases, a curved needle that is slipped in before the hole closes, a crescent-shaped knife, needles, and waxed thread. He could thus reinforce a sail and mend the tents that served as shelter for passengers and crew on deck and as overnight lodging ashore. He could repair the canvas of a wagon or the harnesses of draft animals. He could stitch a seam or two on any of the wide variety of leather items used by travelers: sandals, gaiters, belts, coats, and water bottles. Since every town of any size held its own festival, for which stalls and tents were essential, Paul could always find customers if he chose the right moment. In Corinth, for example, Paul found work with Prisca and Aquila (Acts 18:3), who met the constant need for awnings but also benefited from the fact that the Isthmian Games, held every two years, ensured a steady stream of work for the repair and manufacture of tents.

This is how Paul was able to support himself by working day and night (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:9). But he could not become wealthy, for he was constantly on the move and thus could not secure a stable clientele. This is why he sometimes had to rely on financial support from local communities (Phil 4:15–16; 2 Cor 11:9). On the other hand, the downside of Paul's choice was that it stigmatized him as belonging to a group despised by the elite. In a letter addressed to his son, then a student in Athens, Cicero writes that "The means of subsistence of all wage laborers whom we pay for mere manual labor, and not for artistic talent, are likewise unworthy of a man of good character and vulgar; for, in their case, the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery... All artisans practice vulgar trades, for no workshop can truly be considered liberal" (*De Officiis* 150-151). Despite these prejudices, Paul managed to make friends even among the elite, as seen in Corinth where his first converts had homes large enough to accommodate the community.

b. Ministry of Gentiles

Damascus was a strongly Hellenized pagan city, although there must have been a significant Jewish community there. It was a prosperous city and an important crossroads on the trade routes leading from Anatolia to Babylon in the east and to Egypt in the south. One can imagine that Paul had no difficulty finding a place to minister there while learning his trade. The very fact that he stayed there for three years suggests that he found plenty of work there. He must have been very disappointed when the Nabataeans took control of the city at the end of 37 AD, forcing him to flee.

D. Jerusalem

So Paul left Damascus, never to return. He traveled to Jerusalem, a journey of about a week. Why? Paul writes: "I went up to Jerusalem to *historēsai* Cephas and stayed with him for fifteen days" (Gal 1:18). There are two possible translations of *historēsai*: either a) to visit or to get to know; or b) to question or to obtain information from. Most biblical scholars opt for the first translation, since Paul had always asserted his independence from Peter and the other apostles. But it is also possible that Paul deliberately chose an ambiguous term.

a. Knowledge of the Historical Jesus

Given Christ's central role in Paul's conversion and theology, and the curiosity aroused by the bits of information he had gathered during his time in the Christian community in Damascus, it is therefore highly unlikely that Paul did not make the most of Peter's knowledge of the historical Jesus. Since Peter had been preaching for more than seven years, it is reasonable to assume that his accounts had taken the form of short gospels. Thus, during those two weeks with Peter, Paul was able to learn a great deal about the historical Jesus.

Certain details in Paul's letters confirm this conclusion. The historical Jesus is fundamental to his theology. The author of the Letter to the Ephesians grasped this point very well: "Provided that you have heard of him [Christ] and have been taught by him, in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21). For Paul, one cannot separate the Lord in glory from the crucified Jesus (1 Cor 2:6). That is why he condemns all those who preach a Jesus different from the one he preaches (2 Cor 11:4).

There are two explicit references to Jesus' words:

To those who are married I give this command—not I, but the Lord—that a wife must not separate from her husband; and if she does, she must not remarry, but remain single or be reconciled to her husband; and a husband must not divorce his wife (1 Cor 7:10–11)

Likewise, the Lord has commanded those who preach the Gospel to live by the Gospel (1 Cor 9:14)

While these two references are explicit, the fact remains that the teaching of the historical Jesus certainly permeated his thinking to the point that it was difficult to distinguish whether he was quoting tradition or expressing his own thoughts. Paul must have known not only Jesus' words but also their context. For example, the reference to the pastor who must live by the Gospel is also found in Luke 10:7 ("Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages"), which is situated in a similar missionary context. We also note that Paul uses a surprisingly high proportion of metaphors reflecting the rural world and agrarian culture, even though he himself was a city dweller; this is an indication that Paul was familiar with the language of Jesus' parables.

Nevertheless, when we try to gather from his writings everything Paul knew about the historical Jesus, we come up with a rather meager harvest: he was a Jew (Rom 9:4–5), of the line of David (Rom 1:3), who had a mother (Gal 4:4), who was betrayed (1 Cor 11:23) and was crucified (1 Cor 2:2), and subsequently died and was buried (1 Cor 15:3–4). This raises the question: Why didn't Paul share all his knowledge about the historical Jesus? All of this stems from his Christology, as we shall see.

b. A Missionary Agreement

From the moment of his conversion, Paul always viewed it as a calling to minister to the Gentiles. And that is indeed how he acted, whether in Arabia or in Damascus. What was already a fact was only formalized later. This is what this

passage from the Letter to the Galatians reveals, a passage that has been the subject of much debate among biblical scholars:

6 And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those leaders contributed nothing to me. 7 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised (Gal 2:6-9)

Paul refers to his stay in Jerusalem. But verses 7b–8 do not seem to belong to the same context as verse 9. For in 7b–8 Paul uses the name “Peter” and seems to refer to an agreement between himself and Peter alone during his first visit to Jerusalem, thereby confirming, as it were, a de facto situation in which God sent him to the Gentiles just as he sent Peter to the Jews; but in v. 9 and throughout the rest of this chapter he uses the name “Cephas,” and this name is associated with James and John, as was the case during his second visit to Jerusalem. Paul would thus be combining two different stays in Jerusalem here. Why would he have made this amalgamation? First, by separating the mention of his first stay in Jerusalem (Gal 1:18) from the details of that stay (Gal 2:7–8), he avoids giving the impression that his missionary work following his conversion was carried out under the auspices of the Jerusalem Council; thus he can emphasize his independence and present his stay in Jerusalem as a simple desire to get to know Peter. Next, by juxtaposing the accounts of the two stays in Jerusalem, he could imply that the equality between Peter and himself during the second encounter also applied during the first encounter, even though Paul did not have the same authority in the Church as Peter.

The basis of Paul’s entire argument was pragmatic: the observation of God’s action through Peter and through him (Gal 2:8: “For the one who worked through Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked through me for the Gentiles”). Each ministry was authenticated in the same way, namely through the effectiveness of grace, the power of God made visible.

E. The Missing Years

a. A Gap in the Record

According to Galatians 1:21, Paul left Jerusalem during his first visit in the year 37 to travel to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. We can infer from this that he visited Antioch on the Orontes, the capital of the Roman province of Syria, and his hometown of Tarsus. But from this point on, there is a lack of information until the beginning of the year 46, when his letters provide us with some details. The Acts of the Apostles fills this gap with an account of a mission by Paul and Barnabas to Cyprus and southern Asia Minor (Acts 13–14). 2 Timothy 3:11 confirms this information with references to Antioch (in Pisidia), Iconium, and Lystra. Furthermore, Paul’s letters confirm that he worked with Barnabas for some time. He mentions him at the Jerusalem Council as the representative of the mission to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:1). He mentions him again in 1 Cor 9:6 when discussing his financial situation, noting that he had to work with his hands to support himself, suggesting that Barnabas adopted the same approach under similar circumstances. The incident in Antioch recounted in Gal 2:11–21 also suggests that he and Barnabas were members of that community. When reading Paul’s letters, one gets the impression that his first missionary journeys were undertaken as an emissary of the Antioch community, just as Luke writes (Acts 13:1–3). Moreover, the fact that in his two letters to the Thessalonians Paul does not need to justify his intervention implies that he was acting with a missionary mandate from Antioch.

In short, when we consider Paul’s letters as a whole, we see that he considered himself solely responsible for the communities he had founded during the great journey that began no later than the year 46. He did not feel the same responsibility toward the other converts he had made previously and to whom he had not written. Why? Clearly, responsibility for the earlier missions during the years 37 to 46 lay with someone else, most likely Barnabas.

We thus arrive at this picture for the period from 37 to 46. Paul first joined the community in Antioch, from where he was sent as Barnabas’s assistant to evangelize southern Asia Minor, notably the cities of Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, and Lystra. This mission was perfectly in line with his conception of his responsibility toward the Gentiles. But it probably lasted no more than two years. What did he do the rest of the time? We may never know.

b. Dangers on the Road

Paul traveled extensively and was therefore often on the road. He describes it this way:

Journeys on foot, often; dangers from rivers; dangers from bandits; dangers from my own people; dangers from the Gentiles; dangers in the city; dangers in the wilderness; dangers at sea; dangers from false brothers! (2 Cor 11:26)

The context of these journeys would shape his theology. What is striking about his description of these journeys is not their difficulty, but the list of dangers. These dangers were not so great on the major Roman roads, which

featured paved paths, bridges, and some protection from the army. But the situation was different on the secondary roads, and especially in the eastern Roman provinces: for example, these roads were built for the long dry season, when riverbeds were nearly dry; in the spring, the melting of winter rains turned the passages into dangerous fords.

On the other hand, bandits posed a threat year-round. In the senatorial provinces, the proconsul traveled with auxiliary units and presided over courts of justice in various cities, but his presence was felt only in certain localities, and most small towns and villages were left to fend for themselves. And the poor had no recourse. Apuleius paints this picture through a letter from a friend to Lucius of Hypata (now Ipati) in Thessaly:

Don't linger too long at the party. Come back as soon as possible, for in the early hours of the day, Hypata is terrorized by a gang of young thugs who take pleasure in murdering anyone who passes by and littering the streets with corpses. They belong to the city's leading families, and the Roman barracks are so far away that it is impossible to put an end to these troubles (*The Metamorphoses* 2, 18).

The situation was worse in the countryside. Poverty could drive many to banditry. Those who had to travel alone did so trembling with fear. Moreover, there was the danger of wild animals. Apuleius mentions the danger of bears, wild boars, and wolves.

The authorities warned us not to continue our journey that night, nor even the following morning, for the region was infested with packs of gigantic wolves, which had grown so bold that they behaved like highwaymen, attacking travelers on the roads or raiding farms, showing no more respect for the armed occupants than for their defenseless herds. We were warned that the road we wished to take was littered with half-devoured corpses and stripped skeletons, and that we must proceed with the utmost caution, traveling only in broad daylight—the higher the sun, the less aggressive the wolves—and in a tight group, without spreading out (*Metamorphoses* 8, 15).

People therefore traveled in groups as much as possible. One can imagine that some carried a large stick for self-defense. But this action sometimes had certain consequences, as Apuleius tells us again.

When we arrived in a small village, the inhabitants naturally took us for a band of brigands. Seized by panic, they unleashed a pack of large mastiffs—which they kept as guard dogs—ferocious beasts, worse than any wolf or bear—and set them upon us, howling, cackling, and uttering discordant shouts (*Metamorphoses* 8, 17).

Thus, inevitably, every stranger was the object of suspicion, and this suspicion was inversely proportional to the size of the settlement. It was not a matter of xenophobia, but the result of hard experience.

Properties were not safe. A momentary absence from a cottage carried the risk of theft, and those who attempted to defend their meager possessions put their lives in danger. Despite their walls, their sturdy doors, and the presence of numerous slaves, armed in case of emergency, the great mansions were not safe. Thieves employed all sorts of tricks to gain entry, both to locate valuables and to open doors for their accomplices. Inns were even less secure. Throughout the Roman province of Asia, they were spaced a day's walk apart (25 Roman miles, or 35 km), with a small station where couriers could change horses halfway between two inns. The rooms were grouped around an inner courtyard, with common areas on the ground floor and bedrooms upstairs. The wealthier could afford a private room, but those of more modest means had to share their room with strangers; the number of people depended on how many beds the innkeeper could fit in the room, or on his attitude toward guests sleeping on the floor. Unless they wanted to carry their luggage with them, guests had to leave it unattended when they went to the baths and the restaurant. Needless to say, theft was commonplace.

In such an environment, one can imagine the tensions Paul experienced during his many journeys. On the one hand, having become a disciple of Jesus, who loved to the point of giving his life, Paul made Jesus his model. But on the other hand, every road he traveled forced him to worry about his safety. Every inn where he stopped forced him to view others as potential thieves, at least to the extent that he had to take measures to protect the precious tools on which his livelihood depended. Circumstances relentlessly placed the self at the center of his consciousness, even as he longed to focus entirely on others. His life had become a perpetual struggle against the insidious miasma of self-centeredness.

In this tension experienced by Paul, we can find the origin of his concept of "sin." When he writes, "All, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin" (Rom 3:9), he is not referring to personal faults, but to the condition of a world where individuals are compelled to be other than they wish to be; their true nature was alienated by their environment (Rom 7:20). Through his own experience as an itinerant missionary, Paul learned that selfishness was not a choice, but a necessity for survival. Behaviors are dictated by irresistible social pressures and are subject to a force beyond their control: the value system inherent to their society. Paul became fully aware of the power of this system as he struggled to remain faithful to the example of Jesus (1 Cor 11:1).

Chapter 5: Learning with the Thessalonians p. 102-129

We have already dated Paul's ministry in Macedonia to between September of AD 48 and April of AD 50, a two-year period divided equally between Philippi and Thessalonica. These two communities were probably the ones that brought him the

greatest joy. The quality of their community life became a model for Macedonia and Achaia and a source of pride for Paul (1 Thess 1:6–8; Phil 2:14–16). For this to be the case, Paul must have spent a considerable amount of time with these communities so that they could fully assimilate his teaching, which contradicts Luke’s statement that Paul stayed there only three weeks before being expelled by agitators (Acts 17:2–10). The deep affection and trust expressed in 1 Thess 2:13–4:2 point to a prolonged stay. This is confirmed by Phil 4:16, where Paul expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for their financial support on several occasions after he left them to go to Thessalonica.

The cities of Philippi and Thessalonica were connected by the Via Egnatia, a Roman road that ran from the Adriatic Sea to the Bosphorus. They were 150 km apart, a distance covered in three days with stops at two inns along the way, which meant daily walks of 46, 48, and 56 km.

Why did Paul leave Thessalonica in April of the year 50? Here, we cannot rely on Luke, who states that Paul had to flee the city at night because the Jews had stirred up the people against him (Acts 17:1–10). We should recall his earlier account of Paul’s departure from Damascus because of the Jews (Acts 9:23–25), an account contradicted by Paul himself, who attributes the cause to the Nabateans (2 Cor 11:32–33). For in Thessalonica, the only hostility toward him documented by Paul himself came from the pagans. Moreover, it was a city with a pagan majority (1 Thess 1:9), and the persecutions experienced by the Christians came from their fellow citizens (1 Thess 2:14). The hostility toward Paul must have begun before his departure, and this was undoubtedly the main reason for leaving the city.

It is not impossible that Paul’s plan was to follow the Via Egnatia westward to the Adriatic, and from there travel to Rome by ship. But it would have been imprudent to remain on the main road where he might have encountered Roman cohorts, since he had been declared *persona non grata*. This is likely why he headed toward the coast to take a ship southward, toward another Roman province. It is probably such a memory that Acts 17:14 evokes, where Paul, fleeing Berea, heads toward the coast. Paul thus went to Athens (1 Thess 3:1; Acts 17:15), where he was able to take time to catch his breath and reflect on the situation of his converts in Thessalonica.

A. Contacts with Thessalonica

The New Testament contains two letters to the Thessalonians. Among biblical scholars, there is a debate in which some argue that only one letter was sent to the Thessalonians, while others go so far as to suggest there were four. Each of Paul’s letters typically includes a salutation and a prayer of thanksgiving that gently introduces the theme the apostle intends to develop. However, what is surprising in 1 Thessalonians is the presence of two expressions of thanksgiving: one in 1:1–10 and the other in 2:13–14. Similarly, there are two conclusions: one from 3:11 to 4:2 and the other from 5:23–28. Thus, we would be dealing with two independent letters: on the one hand, 2:13–4:2, and on the other, 1:1–2:12, followed by 4:3–5:8; one has been inserted into the middle of the other; 1 Thessalonians would therefore be a compilation of two letters. This phenomenon is not unique, because, for example, the letter to the Philippians comprises three letters, and 2 Corinthians two letters.

When two letters are combined, certain parts are inevitably truncated, with the introduction and conclusion sometimes becoming superfluous. This is why the section from 2:13 to 4:2 has neither a normal address nor a normal conclusion, such as wishes for peace, greetings, and a final blessing. But then why was 2:13–4:2 inserted right in the middle of the letter that runs from 1:1 to 2:12, and then from 4:3 to 5:8, rather than at the end, as the letter 2 Cor 10–13 was added to the end of 2 Cor 1–9? It is likely that the final instructions (4:1–2) of the inserted letter fit well with those in 4:3–12 of the other letter. This allowed for harmonization, giving the impression of a single letter.

If we have two letters, which one was written first? Although the choice remains subjective, there are reasons to believe that 2:13–4:2 was written first, and we will refer to it as Letter A.

a. Letter A

This letter is imbued with a deep sense of relief. Paul was deeply concerned (2:17) that persecution (2:14) might force the Thessalonians to renounce Christianity (3:2–5, 6, 7). He would have liked to come to their aid in person, but had been prevented from doing so (2:17). He therefore sent Timothy (3:2), and the good news that Timothy brought him regarding the steadfastness of the Thessalonians (3:6) was the source of the joy Paul was feeling at that time (3:9), and the occasion for this letter. The general tone of Letter A suggests that this was Paul’s first communication with the Thessalonians since his flight. It arose from his own need and was not a response to any communication from the Thessalonians. The persecution, which had begun before Paul’s departure, remained his primary concern. His uncertainty about the outcome is the only explanation for the emotionally charged language in virtually every verse. Letter A is precisely the kind of letter one might have expected Paul to write in response to Timothy’s good news, whereas 1 Thessalonians, in its present form, certainly is not. Finally, the euphoric optimism of this letter stands in striking contrast not only to the tone of Letter B, but also to the ethical directives in 4:3–8, which presuppose that all is not well in the community.

What time interval should we assume between Paul’s departure from Thessalonica and this first letter? Recall that Paul is in Athens, and the distance from there to Thessalonica is 500 km. Including Timothy’s round trip and the fact that Paul traveled slightly south before reaching Athens, we must calculate a total of 1,500 km of travel, which amounts to about 60 days of walking at a rate of 25 km per day. In total, therefore, we must allow for a minimum of ten weeks.

In the meantime, Paul preached in Athens. His silence regarding converts in that city betrays his lack of success, which Luke confirms in Acts 17. It is not impossible that his anxiety while awaiting news from Timothy hindered his zeal in preaching.

b. The Move to Corinth

Paul headed for Corinth after being joined by Timothy (2 Cor 1:19; Acts 18:1), which places Silvanus, Timothy, and Paul—the co-authors of Letter B—in that city at the time of its founding. Why Corinth? Perhaps Corinth had advantages that Athens lacked in Paul's missionary planning. As he continually moved westward, he likely intended to quickly establish communities and move on, leaving their development and direction to the Holy Spirit. But the experience in Thessalonica made him realize the need for prolonged contact. From then on, the strategy was to establish a base that met two conditions: it must be easy to establish a community there, and communications with the surrounding area must be excellent.

Within the framework of such a strategy, Athens had to be ruled out and Corinth chosen. Indeed, the city of Athens was but a shadow of its former self. Weakened by the wars against Mithridates in the 1st century BC, it was no longer productive or creative. Having become a mediocre university town, it limited itself to preserving its heritage and tradition, viewing any innovation as a threat. Even as a center of learning, it was now surpassed by Tarsus. The poverty of its economy was evident in the absence of new buildings. By contrast, Corinth was a booming city, open to the world, much like San Francisco during the Gold Rush. Julius Caesar's decision in 44 BC to refound the city—which his predecessors had sacked a century earlier—was motivated by the legendary reputation for “wealth” that the city enjoyed. The new colony quickly lived up to expectations, and within two generations, it had become the most important commercial center in the eastern Mediterranean. All its wealth was fresh money. Even those who, in Paul's time, had inherited wealth were close enough to their origins to know where it came from. In contrast to Athens' complacency, Corinth questioned everything. It was still a city of self-made men, living for the future. New ideas were guaranteed to be heard, not necessarily out of intellectual curiosity, but because profit could be found in the most unexpected places.

Thus, the city of Corinth met one of the criteria of its strategy: having excellent means of communication. For it was one of the great crossroads of the ancient world, and even setting aside the flowery language, the praise that Aelius Aristides lavishes on Corinth contains a great deal of truth:

[Corinth] welcomes all cities and sends them on their way, and it is a common refuge for all, like a sort of road or passageway for all humanity, whatever the destination, and it is a city common to all Greeks, indeed, as if it were a sort of metropolis and mother in this regard (*Orations* 46, 24)

Traffic entering, leaving, and passing through the city was intense. It was situated on the land bridge connecting Greece to the Peloponnese. Ships shuttled back and forth between Asia and Europe. Paul had the opportunity to influence people from a wide variety of different regions, and converts could bring the Gospel back to their own people. Travelers heading in all directions provided a measure of security for Paul's messengers.

Paul tells us nothing about his founding visit to Corinth, except that he was accompanied by Silvanus and Timothy (2 Cor 1:19). And it was there that he wrote his Second Letter to the Thessalonians, while staying with Prisca and Aquila.

c. Letter B

In this letter, which spans 1:1–2:12 and 4:3–5:28 of 1 Thessalonians—where a calm tone has replaced the fervor of Letter A—Paul is sparing with his praise. His primary focus is on how his missionary work has been perceived and on defending the authenticity of his motives. Then, when his focus turns to the Thessalonians, he details what constitutes the behavior of a true Christian, before addressing the question of those who have died before Christ's return. It should be noted that at no point in this letter does Paul express a desire to see the Thessalonians again. This is easy to understand given that Paul's attention is absorbed by the fledgling community in Corinth, even though he still feels responsible for the community in Thessalonica.

The emotional distance between Letter A and Letter B implies that a considerable amount of time separates the two. This hypothesis is confirmed by indications in Letter B that contacts existed between the churches of Thessalonica and Corinth, independent of Paul: the fact that the community life in Thessalonica had become known to the Corinthians, as mentioned in 1 Thess 1:7–8, implies that some Corinthians had traveled north and reported to Paul how much he was still appreciated in Thessalonica (1:9; cf. 3:6). It was likely these same individuals who also conveyed to him the information he elaborates on in the body of the letter.

d. 2 Thessalonians

The authenticity of 2 Thessalonians is a matter of debate among biblical scholars. Some argue that this letter was not written by Paul, but by one of his disciples toward the end of the first century, based on its style and vocabulary. It has even been suggested that this disciple borrowed the structure and language of 1 Thessalonians, a typical sign of a forgery. When used objectively, however, such evidence proves that 2 Thessalonians is more at home in the Pauline corpus than 1 Thessalonians or 1 Corinthians. The similarity between 1 and 2 Thessalonians was also

mentioned as evidence that the latter was a forgery. But when we compare, for example, 2 Thessalonians with Letter B, the similarities are in fact limited to the reference to the Lord's return (2 Thess 2:1–12 || 1 Thess 5:1–11), followed by an ethical exhortation (2 Thess 3:6–15 || 1 Thess 5:12–22). This argument is so weak that it is better to accept the traditional attribution of 2 Thessalonians to Paul. The similarities with the preceding letters can be explained by the need to revisit the same topics, which implies the same language: doctrinal points followed by exhortations.

Now comes the question: when was this letter written? In 2 Thess 2:15, Paul writes: "So then, brothers, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter." Paul is referring to a previous letter. It cannot be Letter A, which contains nothing regarding traditions. It must therefore be Letter B. This is confirmed by 2 Cor 3:17: "The greeting is in my own hand, Paul's. I sign every letter this way: this is my handwriting"; the Thessalonians had therefore previously received at least one letter from Paul. But why this new letter? In 2 Thessalonians 2:2, Paul writes: "Do not be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed by any prophecy, word, or letter supposedly from us, claiming that the day of the Lord has already come." Some have interpreted this statement by Paul as an allusion to forgers who had fabricated a letter purported to be from Paul. But it is more likely that Paul was referring to a previous letter that had been misinterpreted. And in fact, we can identify two passages in Letter B that could be misunderstood. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:2: "You yourselves know perfectly well: the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night." While Paul is certainly referring to a future time, some have interpreted the present tense "comes" as asserting that the Lord is already here, but in secret, and that the absence of persecution is a sign of his presence. Similarly, in 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10, Paul writes: "For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him." Some Thessalonians may have concluded from this passage that their salvation was guaranteed, and that therefore their moral conduct no longer mattered. It is therefore understandable that Paul could not let these misinterpretations of what he had written go unchallenged; he had to clarify the nature of the eschatological signs that must precede the parousia and refute the idea of a parousia that was already present, hence this letter known as 2 Thessalonians.

In summary, Paul wrote three letters to the Thessalonians. The first, Letter A, was written from Athens, about ten weeks after his flight from Thessalonica, thus in the spring of the year 50. Letter B was written next, but from Corinth. The interval between these two letters is difficult to calculate, as one must take into account the time required for the converted Corinthians to travel to Thessalonica and back. This may have occurred during the summer of AD 50. It is impossible to determine how and when the news of the misinterpretation of Letter B—which necessitated the sending of a third letter, the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians—reached Paul, but there is no indication that a long interval separated them. The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians may therefore have been written in late summer or early fall of the year 50, or at the latest the following spring.

B. Thessalonica and its Christians

Thessaloniki owes its name to Thessalonike, the half-sister of Alexander the Great. Her husband, Cassander, founded the city in 316 BC by uniting several villages around the finest natural harbor in northern Greece, at the mouth of the Thermaic Gulf. Rome conquered Macedonia in 167 BC. It became a Roman province in 146 BC, with Thessaloniki as its capital. Its economic prosperity grew considerably in 130 BC with the construction of the Via Egnatia, which connected it to Neapolis to the east and the Adriatic Sea to the west. Strabo, the Greek geographer, described Thessaloniki as the "mother city of what is now Macedonia" due to its larger population.

a. The Ethos of the City

From the spring of 49 BC until August of 48 BC, the city was regarded as a second Rome.

For not only the consuls, even before their departure, but also Pompey, in his capacity as proconsul, had ordered all the senators to accompany him to Thessalonica, on the pretext that the capital was in enemy hands and that they themselves, constituting the Senate, would maintain the form of government wherever they might be. This is why most of the senators and equestrians joined them, some immediately, others later, as did all the cities that had not been subdued by Caesar's armed forces (Dion Cassius, History 41, 18, 4–5)

Julius Caesar put an end to such ambitions just as effectively as his own had been crushed by Brutus and Cassius. The latter, in turn, fell to the blows of Octavian and Antony. Thessalonica admired Antony so much that its leaders instituted a new era in his honor. But Antony was defeated by Octavian at Actium in 31 BC. However, Octavian harbored no grudge, and the honors bestowed upon him by the city were rewarded with the recognition of Thessaloniki's status as a free city.

The city's vitality repaired the damage caused by the civil wars. Octavian-Augustus accelerated the process by establishing Roman colonies there. This development could only benefit Thessaloniki, given its port at Neapolis and its location on the Via Egnatia. The city of Thessaloniki wielded such influence in Rome that in the year 15 it succeeded in changing the system of proconsular government to one directly under the emperor, thereby putting an end to the rapacious governors who had enriched themselves through taxes. In the year 44, Emperor Claudius once again granted Macedonia its independence, separating it from Moesia and placing it under senatorial control.

This special relationship between Thessalonica and Rome is illustrated by the acceptance of Julius Caesar's divinity and the construction of a temple to Caesar, whose priest reported directly to the emperor. At the beginning of the 1st century, Roman benefactors were honored by the clergy and were perceived as the channel of the goddess Roma. A hierarchy could be discerned within this entire cultic structure: first the priest of Augustus, then the priests of the city's various gods, and finally the cult of Roma. The preeminence of Roman-inspired cults clearly indicates that civic life was dominated by those whom the city's native inhabitants regarded as foreigners.

Although the Romans exercised political and ideological control, they constituted only one component of the city's elite. A municipal cult of the Egyptian gods was also practiced there, and its officials had established a dinner club resembling a prestigious social circle, under the patronage of Anubis. If Thessalonica maintained such contacts with Egypt, one can assume that it maintained equally close relations with the other merchant cities of the eastern Mediterranean, whose pantheons are well represented. Profit was the unifying factor of a merchant class whose members came from everywhere except the city where they earned their living. The native population was thus excluded from the decision-making process by foreigners and cut off from the sources of true wealth, in which it participated as wage laborers or, even more indirectly, as slaves.

b. Converting the Proletariat

According to the letters to the Thessalonians, the Christians in that community came from the working class (1 Thess 4:1: "Make it your aim to lead a quiet life... and to work with your hands"). This point is confirmed by 2 Thess 3:12 when Paul addresses those who have stopped working in anticipation of the Parousia: "Let them work in peace and eat the bread they have earned themselves." This great poverty of the community would explain why Paul had to work with his own hands "with toil and hardship, night and day" (2 Thess 3:8; see also 1 Thess 2:9) so as not to be a burden to them; moreover, financial support was also needed from the community in Philippi (Phil 4:16). We note the absence of a wealthy patron who could host the community in his villa, as seen, for example, in Corinth. Thus, when the community gathers, everyone must contribute to the communal meal; this leads Paul to say that if anyone refuses to work, they should be denied food at these gatherings (2 Thess 3:10).

Thus, the workshop where Paul worked was his place of ministry. We assume there was a good demand for tents or leather goods in the city, where many traveling merchants passed through. This workshop must have been located on a busy street or in the marketplace. But we do not know whether Paul was employed by someone else, self-employed, or had assistants. On the other hand, we know that a craftsman typically worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for an income that barely provided for his own and his family's subsistence.

In this context, how was Paul able to win converts? He likely filled a spiritual void among this working class. Recall that the cult of the Cabiri, a mystery religion, was very popular in Thessalonica. A legendary tale of this cult recounted that a young man, killed by his two brothers, would return to come to the aid of the powerless in Thessalonica. Symbolized by the hammer, he was invoked to bless manual labor, and gave this working class a sense of security and freedom. But in the time of Augustus, the elite took control of this cult and incorporated it into the city's official religion. All of this left the working class orphaned, all the more so since the elite were regarded as a foreign group. And not only did they deny the indigenous population the democratic equality that the Greeks considered their inalienable right, but they monopolized the sources of profit and, now, they have deprived the poor of their only traditional divine friend.

One can imagine the impact of Paul's preaching, which speaks of a young man put to death, then resurrected, and who now has the power to fill the world with his blessings. While such preaching was well received, the same could not be said of the municipal authorities. For the mention of a new "god," capable of radically transforming the fate of the most destitute, was perceived as subversive. Had the movement taken root and grown, it would have threatened the social fabric. As ridiculous as the crucified Jesus of Nazareth might have seemed as a "god" in the eyes of the Romans or the refined Greeks, the ruling class was politically astute enough to recognize the danger posed by an uncontrollable "god" who eluded the structures of civic religion. He could serve as a rallying point for a proletariat that was, by definition, dissatisfied. His message could amplify thwarted ambitions. Under his impetus, the beginnings of discontent could turn into revolutionary action.

The impact of the authorities' hostility must have surprised the Christians, who expected that their new situation under the protection of the risen Christ would exempt them from the endemic violence of the past. Their reaction was not one of fear or cowardice, but of incomprehension. The awareness of the potentially disastrous consequences of such disorientation—namely, a disappointment so profound that it leads to the abandonment of the faith—explains why Paul was so concerned about the steadfastness of the Thessalonians. If they felt they had been deceived, all was lost.

C. Maintenance Differs from Mission

Letter A expresses Paul's relief after Timothy informed him that the community, though shaken by recent events, had remained faithful. Unfortunately, this letter tells us nothing else about the community's situation. It is only in Letter B that we learn more. How did Paul handle this situation at this stage of his ministry?

a. Remembering his own Experience as a New Convert

We know that when someone joins a new group, whether religious or social, they first experience a period of upheaval and disruption that can lead to feelings of confusion, despondency, or discouragement. This sense of rupture is all the more significant because it involves a break from traditional religion and customs, as well as from family and friends, and because this rupture invites public criticism. It is therefore important for the group or sect to define its identity and its approach to integrating new members. Paul must have been aware of all this. Even though, through his education, he knew of the existence of philosophical groups and their recruitment techniques, it was likely based on his own experience that Paul understood what the Thessalonian community was going through. Let us not forget that Paul underwent two conversion experiences: first by becoming a Pharisee, and then by becoming a Christian. Thus, when he tells the Thessalonians that they received “the Word in the midst of great distress, with the joy of the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:6), he may be referring to his own ambivalence—first the sense of losing a world he must leave behind, and at the same time the satisfaction of doing God’s will.

What enables one to get through such a difficult period? Community support. This is what Paul experienced when he became a Pharisee, and later when he became a Christian and joined the community in Damascus. Thus, he presents himself to the Thessalonians as a “father” (1 Thess 2:11) and as a mother nursing her children (1 Thess 2:7), and emphasizes the fraternal bonds that unite them in order to convey a sense of security. Likewise, he knows from experience the importance of having a role model. For this choice of a new life is not the result of logical reasoning, but of a leap of faith driven by a mysterious impulse. This leap is justified by the example of lives that demonstrate the fruits of this new direction, but embody what it entails. Thus, Paul was fully aware of his responsibility to be a role model for the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:6, 2:9; 2 Thess 3:7, 9).

If Paul sought to be a role model for the community, why was he attacked? One would search in vain for the details of the criticisms in the two letters to the Thessalonians. The tension between the sweeping defence and the passionless tone in these letters suggests that Paul had become aware that he was the object of criticism, but knew none of the details. Only this explains his concern to refute all possible accusations without giving weight to any one in particular. His insistence in response to what must have been a hint rather than a report betrays a sensitivity to criticism, which is rather curious in a man of 50 who has been an active missionary for over ten years. This may have been a personality trait, but it was also the other side of his identification with his message. If he exemplified the gospel (2 Cor 4: 10–11), then any attack on him was an affront to the word of God, which justified—necessitated?—a response.

b. Learning on the Job

The most likely source of the Thessalonians’ criticism of Paul concerns his teaching on the end times, eschatology. Letter B makes no sense unless Paul taught them a fulfilled eschatology. Of course, they heard what they wanted to hear. And one can imagine that if they were so receptive to Paul’s preaching, it was because there was a connection between that preaching and their deepest desires, even if their interpretation of what he said was partly distorted. And Paul himself, with his impetuous temperament, may have used ambiguous language and exaggerated certain points.

The possibility of misinterpretation can be illustrated by this passage from 1 Thess 1:9b–10, which reflects the substance of his preaching and consists of two stanzas, each with three lines:

you turned to God from idols
to serve a living and true God
and to wait for his Son from heaven,
whom he raised from the dead
Jesus, who rescues us
from the coming wrath.

At first glance, the meaning of this passage seems clear. But it all depends on where we place the emphasis. If we emphasize “wait for his Son from heaven,” we are in the context of a future eschatology. But if we emphasize “rescues us from wrath,” we are in the context of a fulfilled eschatology. One might even argue that the second stanza interprets the first, and thus that the dominant theme is the liberation already brought by the risen Jesus, present in the world. This is what the Thessalonians may have understood, guided by Paul’s enthusiasm.

Similarly, the death of some members of the community who had been promised a glorious assumption must have created an intolerable problem for the members left behind (1 Thess 4:13); this was not what had been anticipated. Then, the feeling of living in the last days led others to abandon their normal lives, perhaps indulging in sexual excesses, and certainly ceasing to work (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:6–12). It was therefore important for Paul to prevent the community from losing its reputation and to direct attention toward what was yet to come, to insist that the Christian creed does not necessarily imply a realized eschatology. Thus, Letter B contains a series of allusions to a future Parousia (1 Thess 1:10; 5:2, 23) in which Paul reassures his readers that their departed loved ones will not be forgotten and will be reunited with the living (1 Thess 4:13–18). Paul’s corrections, however, take place within a context where people were convinced that the Parousia would occur within the present generation. All of this made his task easier in his call to “wait.”

But the fact remains that Paul did not realize to what extent the Thessalonians were steeped in a realized eschatology, which they regarded as his message. Their reaction was to bring the near future—to which the apostle

now wished to draw their attention—into the present (2 Thess 2:2). Another letter—the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians—thus became necessary, in which Paul is compelled to set forth the signs that will precede the coming of the last days (2 Thess 2:3–12). Contrary to what he had stated in 1 Thessalonians 5:2–3, the Day of the Lord will come neither suddenly nor quietly; it will be preceded by major social upheavals.

c. Exemplary Behaviour

From his very first visit, Paul taught about the conduct expected within the community. And this conduct was essential to the apostolic mission, regardless of how long the Parousia might be delayed. For the word of God is not merely fine rhetoric, but a powerful word, a transforming word: it is manifested through renewed conduct. Thus, by asking the Thessalonians to imitate him, Paul hopes that the community will be an extension of his missionary work (1 Thess 1:6). It is called to be a model (1 Thess 1:7) and a demonstration of the power of the Spirit in their lives (1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 1:4, 11).

In his Letter A, Paul assumes that the Thessalonians have fully understood his instructions. In his Letter B, he is less optimistic and must issue a reminder summarized in the section 1 Thess 4:3–7, where he contrasts the behavior of believers with that of pagans.

3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid immorality (*porneia*); 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. 7 For God did not call us to be impure (*akatharsia*), but to live a holy life.

The believer's way of life is thus described as a state of sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3, 7). The term does not primarily have a moral connotation, but refers to the fact of having been set apart by God and thus having a life dedicated to God. The alternative to sanctification is designated by two terms, *porneia* (immorality) and *akatharsia* (impurity). The latter term does not have a sexual meaning, but a cultic one. Together, these two terms refer, for a Jew, to the pagan world, a disordered world. For Paul, unbelievers are not their own masters, but are manipulated by the social and economic forces of their environment, so that they are under the power of Sin (see Rom 3:9) and slaves to Sin (see Rom 6:17). The believer lives in a different environment expressed by the word "brother" (1 Thess 4:6), an environment where lust has no hold.

The guidelines given in 1 Thess 4:3–7 remain very general: they provide direction without imposing specific obligations. It is up to the Corinthians to discover the lifestyle appropriate to their new being in Christ. Thus, in Letter B, Paul neither imposes nor prohibits any specific act. Even more significantly, his list of commandments includes the essential injunction to "test everything" (1 Thess 5:21a), which places the responsibility for their moral choices back on the Thessalonians. Ultimately, it is their judgment that counts. The implication that the Thessalonians themselves are responsible for managing their own community is also significant. Paul did not consider it his place to dictate their conduct.

This liberal approach to morality came under heavy pressure when it became evident that some members of the community continued to lead disorderly lives. Note that the adjective "disorderly" and the verb "to instruct" appear more frequently in the Second Letter to the Thessalonians. Paul clearly indicates the course of action he wishes the community to take: to ostracize the unruly. He thus unequivocally shows to outsiders that true Christians do not behave in a reprehensible manner. However, this restraint fades at the very end of the letter. The correlation between the imperative infinitive "do not associate with them" and "if anyone does not obey" in 2 Thessalonians 3:14 clearly indicates that Paul expects them to do exactly what he asks. Imposing a moral decision regarding the effective exclusion of a member of the community constitutes a clear departure from Paul's practice as it appears in the two preceding letters.

The fact that Paul does not appoint a representative in Thessalonica to report to him and ensure the execution of his will testifies to his understanding of the nature of his authority and how it should be exercised. This underscores his recognition of the autonomy of the local church, which is accountable to itself. Consequently, it must develop its own leaders.

At most, Paul can suggest the qualities he deems necessary in these leaders. The Thessalonians must "recognize those who labor among you, who take the initiative to serve you in the Lord and to exhort you" (1 Thess 5:12). Such total devotion to the good of others can only be the fruit of love. Therefore, the only appropriate response is love (1 Thess 5:13). The leaders Paul hopes to see emerge are distinguished neither by their social status nor by particular skills, and the relationship they maintain with others is not based on obedience or deference. Here we see another indication of Paul's awareness of the radically different nature of the Christian church compared to any secular group. His perception of its true identity will become more refined. At this stage of his ministry, it is clear only that it is a community of love that radiates love (1 Thess 3:12; 4:9–10).

d. The Paul of the First Letters

The issues surrounding eschatology in Corinth reveal certain aspects of Paul's character, foremost among them his difficulty in understanding what goes on in people's minds. He probably didn't have time to develop a deep understanding of the Thessalonians' mindset. It's possible that the joy he felt at the reception of his initial preaching prevented him from fully realizing the impression he was making. It is therefore not surprising that he was stunned to learn of the impact of his preaching and deeply hurt by the reaction to his attempt to correct the situation. His first attempt to qualify the vision of eschatology held by the Thessalonians was not a success. For the alternative perspective on the future dimension of eschatology was not presented with sufficient vigor and clarity. To avoid completely changing his message, he contented himself with hinting at the new perspective through a parenthetical allusion to the Parousia (1 Thess 1:10; 3:13; 5:2, 23), while giving the Thessalonians leeway to persist in their error with phrases such as: "As for the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have them written to you" (1 Thess 5:1).

Paul's naivety in interpersonal relations is highlighted by his astonishment at the Thessalonians' lack of response to what he considered his invitation—both gentle and firm—formulated in Letter B. He had, however, learned a lesson from this, and his discourse in 2 Thessalonians is clearer and far more convincing. But to extricate himself from a delicate situation, he had to resort to an apocalyptic scenario (2 Thess 2:1–12) as an *ad hominem* argument.

The confidence of his moral teaching, on the other hand, is remarkable and reveals a clear vision of the nature of the Christian community. Clearly, he was far more concerned with the community's actions than with its thoughts, and had devised a strategy in advance. From the very beginning, he understood that for the Church in Thessalonica to bear witness to its mission in a way that would strengthen and extend it, its members had to adopt an exemplary and freely chosen way of life. This intuition was soon reinforced by the conviction that imposing binding precepts would amount to recreating the Mosaic Law for believers, something he absolutely did not want.

Chapter 6: Meetings and Meals: Jerusalem and Antioch p. 130-157

We do not hear from the Thessalonians again until four years later, when Paul plans to travel to Corinth once more from Ephesus via Macedonia (1 Cor 16:5). What happened in the meantime?

Paul is thought to have stayed in Corinth for 18 months, a plausible figure given the nature of his relationship with the Corinthians. From Corinth, he is believed to have set sail for Syria and, after landing at Caesarea Maritima, traveled to Jerusalem. This sea voyage must be dated to the end of the summer of 51, since his earlier encounter with Gallio (Acts 18:12) could only have taken place in the middle of the summer, and Luke gives the impression that the voyage occurred before the closure of the shipping season in September. Paul himself tells us that he returned to Jerusalem 14 years after his first visit (Gal 2:1). We must therefore conclude that the visit to Jerusalem mentioned by Luke and the one mentioned by Paul are the same.

During this journey, Prisca and Aquila accompanied Paul, who left them in Ephesus. It should be noted that Prisca and Aquila appear almost always with Paul, first in Corinth, then later in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), and they will precede him to Rome (Rom 16:3–4). In other words, Prisca and Aquila appear in the same cities as Paul and in the same order. If, as seems likely, their role in Rome was to prepare for Paul's arrival, is it not plausible that he sent them to Ephesus for the same reason?

A. The Jerusalem Conference

a. From Antioch to Jerusalem

When Paul left Ephesus, did he go directly to Jerusalem after stopping in Caesarea by the Sea? That is what Luke states (Acts 18:22). But Luke is bound by his theological framework, which links Paul's mission to the Gentiles in Europe to a mandate from the church in Jerusalem, issued during the conference held there; and therefore, this conference must have taken place before Paul's mission to Europe. But in reality, the mission to Europe precedes his second visit to Jerusalem, and his letter to the Galatians clearly states that he was never an emissary of the church in Jerusalem. And when he wrote his two letters to the Thessalonians, his missionary work was carried out under the auspices of the Church of Antioch. His relationship with this church continued until the incident he describes in Galatians 2:11–14. We must therefore assume that Paul, after leaving Ephesus, went to Antioch, his home base, and not to Jerusalem.

Our hypothesis is confirmed by the fact that Barnabas was with Paul at the Jerusalem conference (Gal 2:1). But Paul never mentions that Barnabas accompanied him during the founding of the churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth. And Luke himself reveals that Paul and Barnabas quarreled over Mark before this missionary journey to Europe, and each went his own way (Acts 15:36–41). If Barnabas did not accompany Paul on this journey to Europe, where did they meet? The most plausible hypothesis is in Antioch, which was the home base for both Barnabas and Paul (see Acts 13:1–3; Gal 2:11–14).

b. The Occasion of the Conference

It will become clear that Barnabas and Paul went to Jerusalem as delegates of the church in Antioch. In Galatians 2:2, however, Paul insists that he went there following a revelation. It is possible that Paul invoked this reason to refute his opponents' accusation that by going there he was acknowledging the superiority of the apostles in Jerusalem,

and thus implicitly that he was subject to them. But practically speaking, there must have been very serious reasons for two missionaries to put their work on hold to attend this meeting.

Why, then, did Paul go to Jerusalem? The reason can be found in the somewhat confusing text of Galatians 2:4–5, which addresses the question of the obligation of circumcision for converts from paganism: “It was because of the false brothers, intruders who, having slipped in, were spying on our freedom—the freedom we have in Christ Jesus—in order to enslave us. We did not yield to them, not even for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you.” Paul likely had in mind the proponents of circumcision among the Christians in Jerusalem who had come to Antioch to disrupt a community to which they did not belong. The debate was therefore transferred to Jerusalem, where the proponents of circumcision presented their arguments. On this point, Luke’s account is to be preferred over Paul’s.

Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders (Acts 15:1-2)

Barnabas and Paul were therefore chosen by the community in Antioch to serve as delegates to Jerusalem. Paul’s account in Galatians 2:2 may be due to his desire to distance himself from both the church in Antioch and the one in Jerusalem, especially after his conflict with Peter. Paul also insists that the presence of Law-observing missionaries, who attacked his preaching in Antioch and later in Galatia, Macedonia, and Corinth, was motivated by less-than-praiseworthy reasons. But he does not specify these reasons. What is clear is that he considered this to be a threat to his life’s work. This danger was all the greater because Paul clearly perceived that their theology was not without foundation.

What is this theology? For a Jew, including Paul, salvation is linked to belonging to the chosen people, who honor a single God and to whom God has sent his Messiah. The question regarding the Gentiles thus became: how to integrate them into God’s messianic people? Paul’s opponents could point out that Jesus had obeyed the Law—for example, by making his annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem—that he himself had proclaimed the eternal value of the Law (Mt 5:18–19), and that he had recommended obedience to it (Mk 1:40–45). It was therefore natural that those converting to Christianity should do the same as those converting to Judaism. This view is expressed in the Jewish-Christian pseudepigraph The Letter of Peter to James:

Some from among the Gentiles have rejected my [Peter’s] lawful preaching and have preferred a lawless and absurd doctrine of the man who is my enemy [Paul]. And indeed some have attempted, while I am still alive, to distort my words by interpretations of many sorts, as if I taught the dissolution of the law and, although I was of this opinion, did not express it openly. But that may God forbid! For to do such a thing means to act contrary to the law of God which was made known by Moses and was confirmed by our Lord in its everlasting continuance. For he said, ‘The heavens and the earth will pass away, but one jot or one tittle shall not pass away from the law’ (2:3-5).

Given the intense eschatological atmosphere of the Jesus movement, it is unlikely that the first generation of Christians would have questioned Jerusalem’s central role, especially since, with the Parousia imminent, there was not enough time to convert all the Gentiles. Such a perspective failed to take into account the extraordinary appeal of the Gospel to the Gentiles, especially in Antioch, where conversion required only faith in Jesus Christ. All of this clashed head-on with the vision of observant Jewish Christians, for whom the church was meant to be the full fulfillment of Judaism. And if Gentiles were allowed to enter the community without becoming Jewish, this would imply that they themselves would become a minority within an institution whose only ties to Judaism would be that (1) the founders and the first generations were Jewish, and (2) the recognition of the Old Testament’s role as a testimony to God’s preparatory work for the coming of Jesus Christ. For many Jewish Christians who observed the Law, this could not be allowed.

For these Jewish Christians, there were two possible and non-mutually exclusive paths: to challenge the validity of the Pauline approach and to convert Gentiles who agreed to be circumcised. This latter aspect is reflected in the apocryphal work Recognitions of Pseudo-Clement:

It was necessary that the Gentiles should be called into the place of those [Jews] who did not believe [in Jesus as the Messiah], so that the number might be filled up which had been shown [by God] to Abraham. Thus the preaching of the blessed Kingdom of God is sent into all the world (1:42:1)

The reference to Abraham alludes to Genesis 12:3, where Yahweh promises that through Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed—a promise that Ben Sirah (44:21) interprets as a pledge to bless all nations through his descendants. Thus, Law-observant Jewish Christians viewed this promise as sufficient justification for a mission among non-Jews. The coming of the Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth marked the providential moment when the privileges of election and the covenant were to be extended to the Gentiles, but obviously under the same conditions that governed their enjoyment by the Jews, namely, observance of the Law. Thus arose among Jewish Christians a movement aimed at inviting non-Jews to a Jewish way of life rooted in faith in Jesus.

c. The Meeting in Jerusalem

What was likely a long, complicated, and stormy encounter is summarized by Paul in two verses:

I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek (Ga 2, 2-3)

Paul briefly outlines the problem and the solution.

1. The problem

"the gospel that I proclaim among the gentiles". This gospel boils down to faith in Jesus Christ as the sole condition for salvation. Paul does not say that obedience to the Law is wrong, but that it is not necessary. It is unclear whether there were two meetings—one with the entire community, followed by another with the group of decision-makers identified as James, Cephas, and John (Gal 2:2)—or only the latter group. In any case, it was this latter group that made the decision on behalf of the community.

By writing "I laid before them...", Paul implicitly acknowledges the authority of the church in Jerusalem, even as he downplays the authority of the decision-makers by calling them "acknowledged leaders". He must therefore await their verdict, even though the stakes are very high for him: even if he was convinced he was right based on the call he received from Christ at his conversion, a negative decision from the three could destroy everything he had accomplished and block his future ministry; emissaries could then be sent to the communities founded by Paul to inform them that Paul was acting on his own, an outsider who did not represent the Church, since the true disciples of Jesus observed the Law.

2. The solution

"But even Titus, my companion, a Greek, was not compelled to be circumcised." This means that circumcision is not necessary for salvation. Some biblical scholars have wondered whether Titus might not have been circumcised even though he was not required to, since this is what Luke states in Acts 16:3, where Paul had Titus circumcised under pressure from the Jews. Furthermore, in some manuscripts of Galatians 2:5, "To these people we did not (*oude*) yield, not even for a moment," the negative particle *oude* is missing, so that Paul would appear to be saying, "To these people we yielded." But textual criticism has shown that the absence of *oude* in certain manuscripts stems from the scribe's effort to harmonize this verse with Acts 16:3. And so the consensus is to maintain that Titus was never circumcised.

B. Why Did James Agree with Paul on Circumcision

We must rule out from the outset the possibility that James held a favorable bias, given his subsequent activities in Antioch, where he supported the observance of Jewish traditions. Furthermore, he must have remained open to the argument of the pro-circumcision faction, which saw circumcision as a sign of belonging to the people of the covenant—the divine channel accepted by all Christians as the path to salvation. Similarly, it is unlikely that James, while acknowledging that the Law had been given solely to Israel, would have concluded that it did not apply to converts from paganism; the pro-circumcision faction's attack on Paul would then be inexplicable.

If religious reasons cannot explain James's change of course, then we must look for political reasons. In the first half of the 1st century, relations between the Roman authorities and the Jewish people were fragile. The Jews enjoyed certain privileges clearly and precisely defined by law. But these privileges depended on the emperor's goodwill and could be revoked at any time. Thus, in the year 19, Tiberius expelled the Jews from Rome on charges of fraud. Similarly, Caligula's weakness allowed an anti-Semitic movement to arise in Alexandria, Egypt, in the year 38, which massacred Jews and burned synagogues. In the year 40, Caligula sought to erect his own statue in the form of Jupiter in the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem, and this project was abandoned after his assassination in the year 41. His successor, Claudius, closed a synagogue in Rome and expelled its members due to the turmoil caused by discussions surrounding Jesus as the Messiah. In the spring of 45, the Roman procurator Cuspius Fadus locked away the high priest's liturgical garments following a movement centered on a false messiah. Under the procurator Cumanus (48–52), various provocations initiated by Roman soldiers were recorded. All these incidents fostered a sense of insecurity: the Romans could not be trusted, and the Jewish people could rely only on themselves for defense. This is what happened in the year 51 when Cumanus refused to punish the Samaritans who had massacred Galileans on their way to Jerusalem: their friends and other Jews took revenge on the Samaritans. In short, if the Jews had to rely solely on themselves, it was vital that they remain united to survive.

In this context, a Jewish Christian was first and foremost a Jew, and secondarily a Christian. The only difference from other Jews was their acceptance of Jesus as the expected Messiah. Even without pressure from their fellow Jews, their instinct would have dictated that the early 50s was the time to affirm, not weaken, Jewish identity. What purpose would the circumcision of non-Jewish converts have served? Clearly the latter. Circumcising these converts amounted to publicly accepting them as Jews, even though they had no attachment to Judaism; they were disciples of Christ, not of Moses. What loyalty to the Jewish people could be expected from such individuals when hostile pressures began to

mount? In a time of crisis, could a Jewish nationalist truly trust them? Would these nominal Jews be willing to sacrifice their lives for the temple and the Law?

It is plausible that James asked himself these questions. As leader of the church in Jerusalem, he was influenced not by theological considerations, but by very practical and historical ones: the dilution of Jewish identity. All of this may have led him to be receptive to Paul's personality and arguments. Just as he had been fourteen years earlier, he could not doubt Paul's sincerity when he explained the implications of his conversion. Nor could he deny the grace manifested by the number of Gentiles who had accepted Paul's Gospel. A similar success was likely achieved by Barnabas elsewhere. Such signs of the Holy Spirit's presence demonstrated the divine will that Gentiles be admitted into the Church as Gentiles. But this perspective had a corollary: to strengthen Jewish identity among Christians of Jewish origin by insisting on strict observance of the Law.

C. The Agreement

Paul summarizes the Jerusalem Agreement as follows:

and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised. (Gal 2:9)

The inclusion of Barnabas in the agreement implies two things: first, Paul is just one of several missionaries sent to the Gentiles; second, the exemption from circumcision granted to his converts applied to all the others as well.

But this agreement did not prevent the Judaizers from disrupting Paul's mission in Galatia and Corinth. Undoubtedly, the agreement was not without ambiguity. In fact, some biblical scholars have wondered whether the terms of the agreement were primarily geographical, i.e., Paul received the mandate for territories considered pagan, while Peter and the apostles received that for Jewish territories. But this perspective is untenable, as it would imply that Paul and Barnabas were given the mandate for nearly the entire Roman Empire. Other biblical scholars have interpreted the agreement from an ethnic perspective: Paul and Barnabas could only address Gentiles, while the missionaries from Jerusalem could only address Jews. First, it is hard to imagine that the Judaizers would have thus left the field open to Paul among all the Gentiles—that is, the majority of potential listeners to the Gospel—and second, this would imply a ban on Paul entering a synagogue, which no evidence supports; on the contrary, the communities founded by Paul included Jews.

To fully understand the terms of this agreement, we must return to the issue that was raised: it is not a question of the legitimacy of the mission to the Gentiles, but of the conditions required for the admission of new members into the Church. Jerusalem would therefore have agreed that Paul should require nothing more of new converts than faith in Jesus Christ, which implied that it was not necessary to circumcise them. This implied that other missionaries were free to circumcise their converts. Thus, the focus of the agreement was neither geographical nor ethnic, but a missionary practice.

In short, Paul and Barnabas were free to accept converts from either paganism or Judaism, just like all the other missionaries. All of this led to mixed communities. Jewish converts were therefore free to continue observing the Law and, if they wished, to circumcise their children. These communities were truly heterogeneous and inherently unstable, as their members followed different rules. Often, what was important to one part of the community was of no importance to the other. If they achieved true unity, it was only as a result of conscious concessions on both sides. Such arrangements were a constant source of tension, as they were constantly subject to renegotiation, as illustrated by the case of the Church of Antioch.

D. The Collection

Paul concluded the Jerusalem Council as follows:

They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do (Gal 2:10)

What is the meaning of this request? Should "poor" be understood in a spiritual sense? In Paul's writings, the terms "poor" (2 Cor 6:10; Gal 4:9) and "poverty" (2 Cor 8:3) almost always refer to material poverty. This socio-economic meaning is confirmed by the reference to "the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" in Rom 15:26. Thus, a number of Christians were in need. How many? Perhaps a large proportion of the Jerusalem community. Here is what J. Jeremias writes about social conditions in Jerusalem in the 1st century:

Jerusalem in the time of Jesus was already a centre for mendicancy; it was encouraged because almsgiving was regarded as particularly meritorious when done in the Holy City.... Jerusalem had already in Jesus' time become a city of idlers, and the considerable proletariat living on the religious importance of the city was one of its most outstanding peculiarities (*Jerusalem in the time of Jesus*, p. 116)

The fact that a number of Christians belonged to this category is attested by the passage in the Acts of the Apostles stating that the wealthier members of the community sold their lands and houses to provide for the needs of the less

fortunate (Acts 2:45; 4:34–35). Without a steady influx of new wealthy members, this system could only lead to one outcome: the community would run out of money. Since Christians were being persecuted by at least some Jews (Gal 1:22–23), the hope of obtaining aid from traditional Jewish sources was gradually fading. All that remained, therefore, were the rapidly growing churches of Christians of pagan origin, whose members, though not wealthy, were almost certainly better off than the majority of the Jerusalem community.

In Paul's statement in Galatians 2:10, note the shift from the plural ("we ought to remember...") to the singular ("what I took great care..."). The fundamental agreement was between churches: Jerusalem had made a significant concession to the church in Antioch, and it hoped to receive something in return. As a mere emissary from Antioch, Paul bore no personal responsibility for the fundraising. And after his break with the church in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14), he was no longer officially involved. But his conscience dictated otherwise. He knew the social situation in Jerusalem from experience, having lived there for several years, and perhaps he had even hoped that the Jews of the diaspora would do more for the holy city. Now that he had the opportunity to invite those who owed their conversion to him to come to the aid of their brothers in Jerusalem, he likely felt morally obligated to do so. The idea of heaping burning coals on the heads (see Rom 12:20) of those who had put obstacles in his way in Jerusalem may not have been absent.

With the meeting over, Paul no longer needed to linger in Jerusalem. Strengthened by the confirmation he had received, he was eager to set out and explore new mission territories. Autumn was already well advanced in the year, and it was too late for ships to still be at sea. In any case, the crossing to Europe was always an extremely slow and arduous undertaking. The prevailing wind blew from the west, and the ships of that era were not designed to sail efficiently against the wind. They had to drop anchor when the wind was against them, then struggle to take advantage of the slightest favorable breeze. The decision to travel north by land was inevitable, even though Paul was not required to return to Antioch with Barnabas to report on the conclusions of the Jerusalem conference. By November, the first snows had already fallen on the Anatolian plateau, and crossing the Cilician Gates, while not impossible, was extremely perilous. Consequently, we must assume that Paul and Barnabas spent the winter of 51–52 in Antioch.

E. Antioch and its Jews

a. The City of Antioch

During the period in question, the city was known as Antioch on the Orontes to distinguish it from the fifteen other cities bearing the same name, all of which were founded by Seleucus I Nicator (311–281 BC). It was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire after Rome and Alexandria. The construction of the port of Seleucia in Pieria at the mouth of the Orontes, 32 km west of the city, encouraged the use of the river for trade routes leading to the Fertile Crescent. Its population was an artificial mix of Macedonians, Athenians, and Jews, who joined the local Syrians, who were considered second-class citizens. In the first century, the population numbered at least 100,000. In 64 BC, Pompey made it the capital of the Roman province of Syria. Emperors and kings competed to contribute to its splendor. Thus, Herod the Great commissioned the marble paving of the wide central street and its sidewalks over a length of 3.2 km.

According to Flavius Josephus (*The Jewish War*, 7:43–45), there were many Jews in Syria, concentrated in Antioch. But it is difficult to verify this information. Some must have become citizens of the city. As a group, they were considered resident foreigners, forming part of a specific administrative unit within the city. This granted them an official status in the city, though without a say in its affairs. Nevertheless, they remained masters of their own affairs, endowed with clearly defined rights, which in Antioch were publicly inscribed on bronze tablets.

b. The Foundation of the Church of Antioch

Paul tells us nothing about its founding. Luke writes: "Some of them, however, who were from Cyprus and Cyrene, when they arrived in Antioch, began to preach the Good News of the Lord Jesus to the Greeks as well" (Acts 11:20). What is certain is that a mixed church existed there by the late 30s. It was in this community that Paul and Barnabas ministered for a year. According to Luke, Barnabas came to Antioch from Jerusalem and subsequently went to Tarsus to recruit Paul (cf. Gal 1:21).

Luke writes: "And it was in Antioch that the name 'Christians' was first applied to the disciples" (Acts 11:26). What is the significance of this designation coming from the mouths of non-believers? In first-century non-Christian sources, the names "Christ" and "Christians" are invariably associated with public disturbances and crimes. This phenomenon can be linked to three incidents that took place in Antioch in 39–40. First, the Greek chronicler John Malalas recounts that several Jews were killed in a pogrom, the unlikely cause of which was a dispute between two circus factions. Next, a pogrom, similar to the one in Alexandria under the prefect Flaccus of Egypt, occurred when Gaius Caligula planned to install his statue in the temple. Finally, there is a mention in Eusebius's *Chronicle* that the founder(s) of the Church of Antioch had to leave the city for Rome. All these events share a common thread: the disciples of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch in connection with unrest among the city's Jewish population during the third year of Gaius Caligula's reign (39–40), and this unrest was linked to the preaching of the Gospel and the early days of the church in Antioch. Christian missionaries preached Jesus as the Messiah, which could be interpreted politically as a call for liberation. In the extremely tense climate created by the announcement of Gaius Caligula's plan to desecrate the temple, Jewish extremists used this as a pretext to stir up opposition to Rome. In doing so, they alienated the people of Antioch, who rose up against them and massacred many residents. When Petronius managed to put an end to the violence, he sought out the instigators. Realizing they would likely be

held responsible, the founders of the Church left, leaving behind converts who found themselves branded as troublemakers prone to sedition.

All of this helps us understand why the Jerusalem community sent Barnabas to Antioch to assist a community that had been severely weakened after its leaders' departure for Rome: a demoralized community needed to be stabilized. Luke takes the trouble to explain the meaning of his name: "the man of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). In this context, Barnabas' recruitment of Saul proved to be a masterstroke. For a persecuted community, the symbolic value of a converted persecutor was inestimable. Saul's presence among the believers in Antioch, weighed down by distress, confirmed the power of the grace promised in the Gospel. God was all-powerful. Hope was reborn.

F. The Problem of a Mixed Community

According to the account in the Acts of the Apostles, the Christian community in Antioch was thriving and vibrant. Given that it was composed of a mix of converts from Judaism and paganism, such an achievement is no small feat.

a. Meeting places and shared meals

Unlike the Jews, whose synagogues were legally recognized as public gathering places, Christians had to make do with the hospitality offered by the wealthier members of the community. There is no evidence that there were any patricians with large mansions. It is likely that a space problem arose as the community grew. In Antioch, it is estimated that the community consisted of at least 50 people. No ordinary house could accommodate such a number. Moreover, Paul rarely speaks of a gathering of the *entire* church (Rom 16:23; 1 Cor 14:23). There must therefore have been a number of subgroups, "the church in the house of X" (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Philem 2). Thus, we must assume that in Antioch, for purely practical reasons, the Christian community consisted of a number of house churches. This offered new converts the advantage of choosing the group they wished to join. Furthermore, it would be unrealistic to think that these groups were composed of both Jews and non-Jews: the tendency was surely toward the creation of house churches of Christians of pagan origin and those of Jewish origin. But there must have been regular and strong ties between these groups.

An important aspect of these ties was shared meals. In the Near East, a formal shared meal was the basic social event, as sharing food strengthened social bonds and supported ongoing commitment and deep ethical obligations. This means that among Christians, during the Eucharistic ritual, there was also a shared table. This aspect of social life was very prominent in Judaism. Recall that in Pharisaic legislation dating from before the year 70, 229 of a total of 341 rules concern dietary matters. We can assume that all Jews observed certain basic rules, such as the distinction between clean and unclean foods, and the requirement that meat be drained of all its blood. And when Jews and non-Jews were brought together at the same table, there was no problem as long as the Jews brought their own meat and wine.

What was the situation in Antioch? How could a semblance of unity be maintained? The most likely hypothesis is as follows. When non-Jewish believers dined at the homes of Jews, they accepted the food offered to them, even if the kosher meat did not necessarily suit them. When Jews dined at the homes of non-Jews, they trusted their fellow believers to offer them Jewish food and drink. From the Jewish perspective, such trust constituted a significant concession. Most, if not all, of the meat available outside Jerusalem came from pagan sacrifices, and it was generally assumed that non-Jews would defile Jewish food and drink at the slightest opportunity (Mishnah, *Abodah Zarah* 5:5). This is why Jews regularly brought their own food when dining at the homes of non-Jews. Furthermore, among the non-Jews were a number of God-fearing people—that is, people who had adopted certain Jewish practices—and meeting Jewish requirements represented only minor concessions. In practice, all they had to do was shop at a Jewish store when hosting Jewish guests and accept the extra cost. Indeed, not only had tithes to be paid on these products to comply with the Law, but it is common knowledge that any product required to meet higher standards than those of the market is inevitably more expensive.

b. Outside Interference

According to Galatians 2:12, the delicate balance of this mixed community was disrupted by a delegation from Jerusalem, "people sent by James." Before their arrival, Peter had no problem eating in the house-churches of non-Jewish Christians. He seems to have continued doing so for a while before stopping completely, "and the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray" (Gal 2:13). There was now a barrier between the house-churches.

What must James's delegates have insisted on? They likely declared that Jewish Christians should not assume that non-Jewish Christians would offer them Jewish food. This declaration was certainly very hurtful to the non-Jews, especially since some were willing to give them full control of their kitchens. But why such a radical stance on James's part? It was the same nationalist rationale that led to exempting non-Jewish Christians from circumcision: it is the only way to fully preserve Jewish identity and prevent it from being diluted; a clear separation is required.

In this context, Peter had to take a public stand. He chose his Jewish roots. This is understandable, since at the Jerusalem Council he was made responsible for the mission to the Jews (Gal 2:8). For Paul, Peter's motives are unworthy, for it was out of fear of the Jews that he acted (Gal 2:12). But it is possible that Peter's decision was motivated by a desire to focus on those who needed him most. For the Gentile church was strong and had two

dynamic leaders in Paul and Barnabas. In contrast, the Jewish church was facing difficulties that might have escalated with the departure of such a revered figure.

Peter's decision strengthened the authority of the delegation from Jerusalem, and of course, the Jewish Christians followed his lead. But what surprised and deeply pained Paul was Barnabas's decision to do the same. Why? Paul, by using the verb "was persuaded," suggests that Barnabas's reasons were emotional: the nationalist appeal likely touched the heart of the Jew within him and made him forget the consequences for the church in Antioch. For him, as for James, social interaction between Jews and non-Jews among Christians was not important.

G. The Law a Rival to Christ

This conflict, which erupted right before his eyes, proved providential in forcing him to rethink his vision of mixed communities in house churches in two respects. On the one hand, what had been a concrete practice had to be articulated as a principle: faith in Christ was the foundation, but to be a Christian one had to live out the truth of love, and a community of believers must be united by the bonds of love. On the other hand, community members could no longer be allowed to observe the Law: if even the slightest space is left for it in the local church, it will eventually take over entirely, as happened in Antioch. Paul was on the path to discovering the incompatibility between the Law and Christ.

Galatians 2:14–21 contains the seeds of what Paul would later develop. Paul's reasoning defies our logic to some extent. For the delegation from Jerusalem, even if non-Jewish Christians were "in Christ," they remained sinners, for to a Jew, being non-Jewish and being a sinner are one and the same. In that case, Christ's death was in vain (Gal 2:21b). Furthermore, if Jewish Christians are also "in Christ," then this fellowship with non-Jews has made them sinners, and thus Christ has become the agent of sin. All of this is, of course, absurd. Therefore, if non-Jewish Christians are justified, it is not because they have observed the Law, but because of their faith in Christ. And what applies to non-Jews also applies to Jews (Gal 2:21).

Giving the Law absolute authority, as Paul did as a Pharisee and as the Jews do, amounts to rejecting Christ, the true source of authentic life (Gal 2:20). From now on, it is Christ alone who speaks of God, and no longer the Law. Moreover, the Law has become a dangerous rival to Christ. This is what he observed in Antioch. It was not until five years later, in his letter to the Romans, that he would spell out his critique of the Law in detail. But already in his conduct and in the pastoral instructions he gave to his communities, he had come to the conviction not only that nothing in the Law was binding on believers, but also that the Law as such is no longer valid for the Christian.

H. Pastoral Instruction

Paul's ethical guidelines to the Thessalonians focus on behavior that is freely chosen. He refrains from imposing specific rules on them. It is only when he has no other choice that he asks them not to associate with the unruly (2 Thess 3:1–4), in order to ensure that the church has a positive influence on its surroundings.

But after the incident in Antioch, Paul could not impose coercive precepts after having denied the Law any authority, especially after stating that obeying the Law made the Christian a transgressor (Gal 2:18). Yet Paul cites two of Jesus' commandments. The first concerns the prohibition against divorce (1 Cor 7:10), which Paul accepts in a specific case (1 Cor 7:11), not because he feels bound by Jesus' requirement, but because he disagrees with the reasons given for the divorce; but in another case, he does not feel bound by this commandment and permits divorce (1 Cor 7:15). The second example concerns the commandment that "those who preach the gospel should live by the gospel" (1 Cor 9:14), a commandment that requires the missionary to accept financial support, a commandment that Paul himself will not follow, and so he will continue to provide for his own needs (1 Cor 9:15–18). Thus, despite all his respect for the Lord's commandments, Paul's practice shows that he does not consider them to impose an obligation.

Nevertheless, Paul sometimes demands that things be done. But immediately afterward, he may introduce a correction, just as he may maintain his position. We can distinguish between the two situations. For example, he speaks in the imperative regarding marital relations (1 Cor 7:5) and generosity toward the poor in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:7), but in both cases, he immediately adds: "I am not saying this as a command." On the other hand, the points on which he does not correct himself concern the change in social status after conversion (1 Cor 7:17), the questions raised by the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:34), and the procedures for collecting offerings for Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1). In other words, Paul takes care to avoid any strictly moral judgment, but does not hesitate to make administrative decisions. The latter concern purely practical matters, while the former touch on interpersonal relationships, which are at the heart of Christian life. On fundamental moral issues, Paul limits himself to giving advice: "I say this for your own good, not to impose a constraint on you" (1 Cor 7:35).

Thus, Paul refuses to compel anyone to contribute to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor 9:7). He does the same with Philemon when he asks him to take back his runaway slave Onesimus: "Although I have full authority in Christ to command you to do what is right, I prefer to appeal to you out of love" (Philemon 1:8–9a); then he adds: "but I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that this act of kindness might not appear to be forced, but might come from your own free will" (Philemon 1:14). For Paul, acting under compulsion is not acting freely.

We now understand Paul's radical anti-Law stance. He does not want his converts to become slaves to the Law. While he tells them what he expects of them, it is through persuasion and his personal example that he seeks to win their support. It would have been much easier for him to impose the behavior he desired by force. But his experience in Antioch had taught him that acting through binding precepts would inevitably bring him and his converts back under the yoke of the Law. For Paul, there is only "the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2), an expression that means: the law that is Christ. Thus, it is no longer the Jewish Law that embodies God's will, but the life of Christ, the example and model for all humanity; in other words, the only requirement is that of love, which is fundamentally the fulfillment of the entire Law (Gal 5:14) and the summary of the Christian life (1 Thess 4:9; 1 Cor 13:2).

Chapter 7: The Years in Ephesus p. 158-184

Paul does not tell us who prevailed in his dispute with Peter in Antioch. But his silence reveals that it was not him. For if he had won, he would certainly have mentioned it to the Galatians, and the fact that Peter would then have sided with him would have been a powerful argument against the Judaizing tendencies in the Galatian church. But, conversely, the very fact that Barnabas sided with the delegation from Jerusalem left him completely isolated. He no longer felt at home in Antioch, for he could not identify with this church that was creating a division between Jewish and non-Jewish Christians—a church that no longer centered on Christ but on Jewish nationalism. Drawing on his experience as a Pharisee, he could clearly foresee that community life would henceforth be marked by a certain legalism. Therefore, in good conscience, he could no longer be its representative, as he had been in his previous mission. At the same time, he could not deny the call to mission he had received at his conversion: he was an "apostle—not from men nor through any man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father" (Gal 1:1). So, sometime in the spring of the year 52, when the passes of the Taurus Mountains, known as the Gates of Cilicia, were passable and most of the snow had melted on the plateau, Paul left Antioch, never to return.

A. Two Journeys through Asia Minor to the West

Paul had already crossed Asia Minor at least once, during the journey from Antioch, in AD 46, that had taken him to the Aegean coast, which he crossed to land at Neapolis, the port of Philippi. At that time, there was no need to calculate the time and route, since the distances were similar. But that is not the case here, since we need to determine where Paul might have stopped.

a. Galatia and Galatians

Fig.: Map of Asia Minor in the time of Saint Paul



Where do the Galatians live? Paul gives us only the following information:

and all the members of God's family who are with me, to the churches of Galatia (Gal 1:2)

Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia (1 Cor 16:1)

You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! (Gal 3:1)

You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you (Gal 4:13)

In the 3rd century BCE, Celtic tribes from the Pyrenees settled in Anatolia. In 25 BCE, upon the death of the last Celtic chieftain, Amyntas of Galatia, Emperor Augustus merged Galatia with Lycaonia and part of Pamphylia to form a province under a Roman governor. This means that the four cities evangelized by Paul on his first missionary journey according to Luke (Acts 13:13–14:28)—Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—belonged to the province of Galatia. But they were located in the southern part of Galatia. Does the Letter to the Galatians refer to the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia or to the tribal territory north of Galatia? In principle, the term "Galatians" can refer to a group of communities anywhere within the Roman province. But it is unlikely that the Galatians Paul speaks of are those in the southern part of the Roman province. On the one hand, the four cities he had already visited are scattered and represent different worlds, and it would make little sense for him to address a joint letter to them. On the other hand, in Galatians 4:13, Paul reveals that it was an illness that brought him to the Galatians, but in 2 Timothy 3:11, when he speaks of the trials he endured in the cities of southern Galatia, he never mentions this illness.

We must therefore rule out southern Galatia. In Acts 18:23, Luke tells us that Paul, after leaving Antioch, "traveled through the region of Galatia and Phrygia," which resembles his previous journey when Luke wrote: "Paul and Silas traveled through Phrygia and the region of Galatia" (Acts 16:6). The very fact that Luke can reverse the order of the two regions implies that they refer to roughly the same area, which corresponds perfectly to the territory where Pisidian Antioch and Iconium were located, but it is unlikely that this is what Luke had in mind. Paul must have reached Pisidian Antioch, the last major city in Galatia, when he realized he could not cross into Asia. He then chose to travel through the Phrygian-Galatian territory, that is, the border zone between Asia and Galatia north of Pisidian Antioch, which would bring them to a point east of Mysia and south of Bithynia (Acts 16:7: "When they reached the border of Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them to do so"). But why did Paul find himself east of Mysia and close to south of Bithynia, when the normal route to Troas in the west would have been through Phrygia? Why such a detour so far east? Moreover, it was only southeast of Pessinus (modern-day Balahisar) that it would have been easy to make a detour eastward, which would have taken him into Galatian territory. Some event must have forced Paul to temporarily abandon his plan to bypass Asia. The illness he mentions (Gal 4:13) could explain this change. It therefore seems highly likely that the Galatians to whom Paul was writing lived in the northeastern corner of Galatia, that nearly square territory bordered on three sides by the immense meander of the Sangarios River (modern-day Sakarya).

b. From Galatia to Troas

After Galatia, Paul set out to preach the Gospel in Macedonia. But how did he get there? He gives us no clues. Luke simply writes: "They then passed through Mysia and went down to Troas." Three routes are possible. Starting from Cotiaenum (see map), there is first the northern route that reaches the Sea of Marmara east of the city of Cyzicus, then one can travel westward via various ports; but Paul may have avoided this route due to a shortage of ships or because of headwinds. The other route, one that Paul likely did not take, runs through the interior from Cotiaenum, passing through Hadrianotherae and Scepsis before reaching the coast: it is difficult terrain and known for its bandits. Finally, there is the southern route, which seems the best, passing through the city of Aezani and the upper reaches of the Maeander River to reach the city of Adramyttium, or even Assos, and from there one can take the sea to Troas in the north. The city of Troas was the usual transit point for those wishing to travel to Europe and reach the city of Neapolis, where the Via Egnatia began, or conversely, for those wishing to reach Asia from Europe.

Since Paul left us no letters addressed to the people of Mysia, we can hypothesize that Paul passed through the region without stopping to preach. This means that upon leaving Galatia, he had decided to go to Troas to cross over to Europe.

c. Maintenance not Mission

The churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were well established. Paul had high hopes for his new churches around Pessinus. In his view, the faith was firmly rooted in Galatia, the central province of Asia, from where it could spread in all directions. The best course of action for him, therefore, was to head west, beyond the missionary reach of the Galatian churches. Let us recall his strategy in Greece: he founded the churches in Philippi and Thessalonica to the north, and Corinth to the south, but he made no attempt to evangelize Thessaly; in his view, central Greece fell under the missionary responsibility of the churches flanking it to the north and south.

Furthermore, Paul's experience with the challenges of the Thessalonica church's growth had made him realize that simply founding churches was not enough. They needed to be nurtured to grow. New converts needed time to

mature, and in this process, proclamation had to be complemented by teaching. What had happened in Antioch on the Orontes had made it even clearer to him that the development of a church could not be taken for granted. Thus, when he traveled through Asia Minor for the second time, strengthening the faith had become more important than evangelism, at least initially.

From the letters, we know that Paul traveled through Galatia at least twice (Gal 4:13) before writing the Epistle to the Galatians. He founded churches there before the Council of Jerusalem (Gal 2:5) and subsequently organized the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, as decided at that council (1 Cor 16:1). And it is highly likely that he personally invited the Galatians to participate in the collection. Then, according to 1 Cor 16:1, 8, upon leaving Galatia, Paul planned to go to Ephesus. He most likely reached this city by taking the mountainous route around the Cayster River. And to take this route, he had to depart from the vicinity of Pessinus.

B. Ephesus

1st Century Ephesus

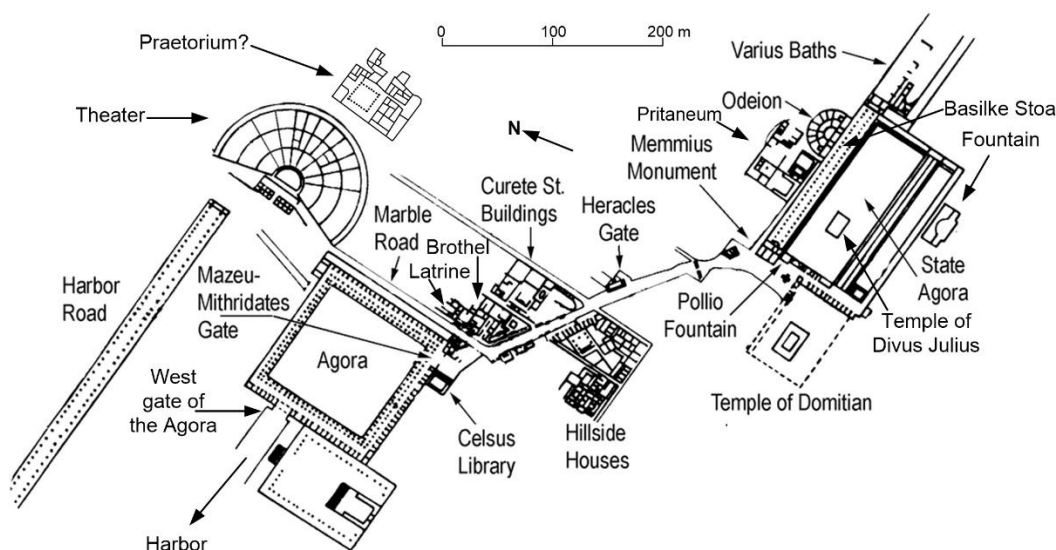


Fig.: Map based on the book by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, Paul, A Critical Life.

Paul's choice of Ephesus was a wise one, as the city lies equidistant as the crow flies from Thessalonica and Galatia (about 480 km), as well as from Corinth (400 km), Philippi (445 km), and Antioch in Pisidia (330 km). According to Luke, Paul stayed there for two years and three months (Acts 19:8–10).

The oldest remains date back to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. According to Pausanias, the city was named after Ephesos, who was considered the son of the river Cayster. Around 286 BC, it was relocated to its current site by Lysimachus (360–281 BC), a companion and successor of Alexander the Great. The move further west was intended to counteract the silting up of the Cayster's mouth, which necessitated periodic dredging of the harbor. In 133 BC, Rome acquired the kingdom of Pergamon, which then became the province of Asia. Although Pergamon remained the capital, Ephesus became the most important city. Emperor Augustus made it the seat of the proconsul and ensured the city's prosperity by commissioning magnificent buildings that marked the era of Paul. Thus, in the southern part stood the city hall (Prytaneum), the Temple of Julius Caesar, and the 200-meter-long open-air basilica, which adjoined the north side of the State Agora. Three new aqueducts were added to the Sextilius Pollio Aqueduct to improve the quality of life and accommodate population growth, along with the presence of baths and gymnasiums. The theater seated 25,000 people. It was rivaled only by the Temple of Artemis, built just outside the city to the east and considered at the time one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Erected in the 7th century BC, it was rebuilt several times. It measured 115 × 55 m, and the 98 columns of the double row surrounding it reached a height of 17.65 m. The pilgrims it attracted to Ephesus were an important factor in the local economy. It stood until the 3rd century CE.

Excavations carried out in the neighborhood of terraced houses on the rocky slope, south of the street connecting the Square Agora to the State Agora, revealed a residential complex dating from the 1st century BCE. The quality of construction was such that it was still in use 600 years later, even though the house had undergone several renovations. The ground floor of the eastern part of the complex covered 3,000 m² and housed a single very wealthy family. In contrast, the more modest houses in the western complex likely better represent those who could host Christian assemblies, such as one of the seven two-story dwellings.

Ground Floor of House A

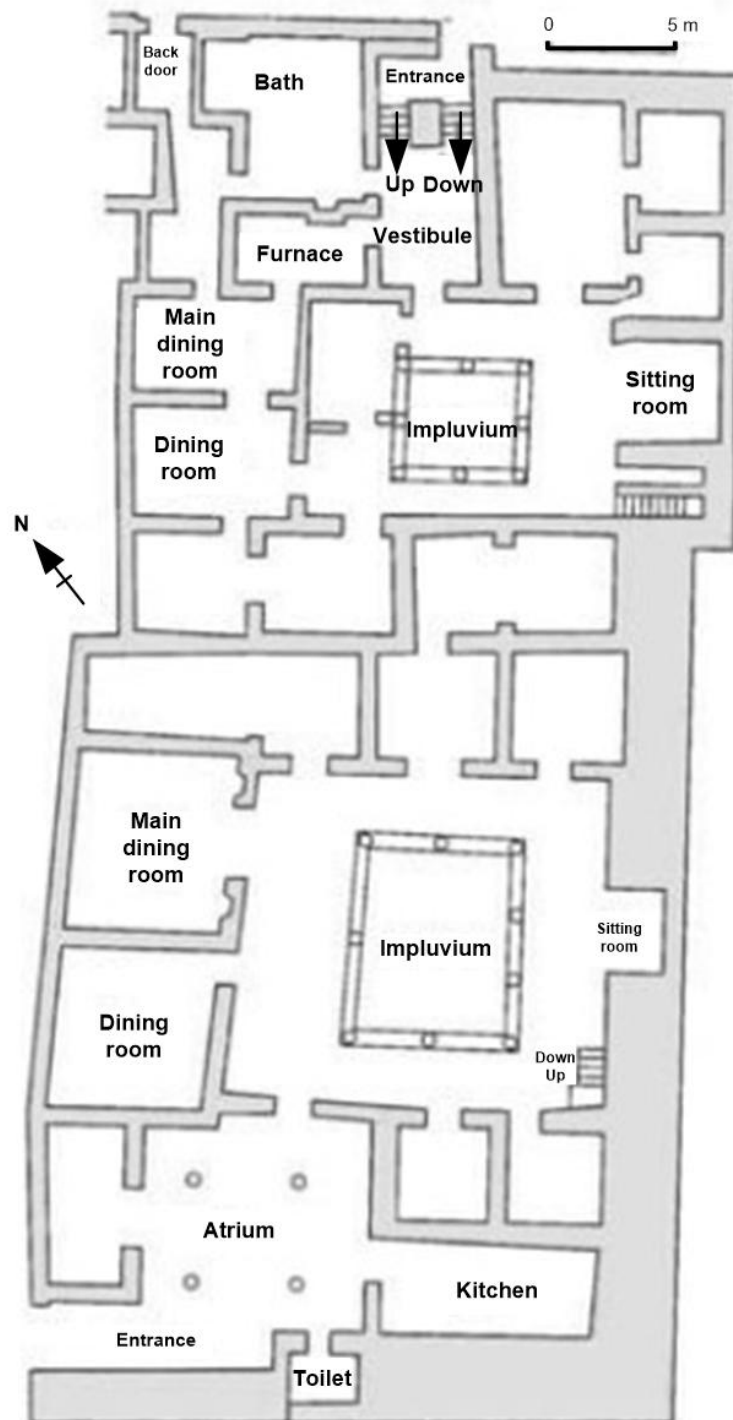


Fig.: Plan copied from Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's book, [Paul: A Critical Life](#).

The ground floor of House A covers an area of 380 m². To the right of the vestibule, a door leads to the Roman baths, which also served to heat the house. Opposite is the atrium (7.5 × 5 m) with its impluvium (3 × 3.75 m). A small side room provides access to the dining room (3 × 5.5 m); the kitchen is nearby. A much larger room (6.5 × 4.25 m) is

accessible directly from the other side of the atrium through a large arched doorway. These were the public rooms; the rest of the house was off-limits to casual visitors. The size of the rooms meant that, as soon as the Christian community reached a certain size, complications were inevitable. When it became impossible to gather everyone in a single room, the risk of creating first- and second-class members arose, which indeed occurred in Corinth (1 Cor 11:17–34). Inevitably, there was a tendency to gather in small groups, such as the house church that met at Prisca and Aquila's home (1 Cor 16:19). The diversity of Ephesus's population is undeniable. As the gateway to the West for the Anatolian hinterland, it was also the opening to Asia for Greece and Rome. Ephesus was a true melting pot of cultures, much like Rome itself. Its population is estimated at a quarter of a million. Citizens in the strict sense (that is, those with the right to vote) may have accounted for a quarter of that number.

C. The Founding of the Church

a. Prisca and Aquila

Paul went to Ephesus during the summer of AD 52. It was not his first visit. Recall that, according to Luke, Paul made a brief stop there on his way from Corinth to Palestine (Acts 18:19). Furthermore, he left Prisca and Aquila there to prepare for his return (Acts 18:24–28), just as they had provided him with a foothold in Corinth (Acts 18:2–3). This means that by the time Paul returned, after the Jerusalem conference, they had been in Ephesus for a year. It is highly unlikely that during this time they limited their activities to their tent-making business. Just as they were Paul's partners in evangelizing Corinth, we can assume they did the same in Ephesus; they are, in a sense, the true founders of the church in Ephesus. The information provided by Luke is all the more reliable because it is somewhat embarrassing for him that Paul, his hero, was not the one who laid the foundations of this church. We sense this embarrassment when he is keen to add in Acts 18:19 that, during his brief stop, Paul went to the synagogue to preach to the Jews: it was absolutely essential for him that Paul be the first to speak in Ephesus. Paul's letters confirm our hypothesis. The greetings in 1 Cor 16:19 reveal that Prisca and Aquila are with Paul: "The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca send you many greetings in the Lord, as does the church that meets in their home"; for him, the role of this couple is so important that he names them personally and mentions the church that meets in their home.

b. Those who had received the Baptism of John

When the mission began in Ephesus, an unusual phenomenon was encountered, as mentioned by Luke in Acts 18:24–19:7: people who knew Jesus but had received only the baptism of John the Baptist, of whom Apollos was an example. How can this phenomenon be explained? It is the evangelist John who provides the answer by stating that Jesus was first a disciple of John the Baptist, whom he baptized (John 3:22), and that he enjoyed great success, so much so that many people went to him to be baptized (John 3:26). These were therefore people who became disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, the associate of John the Baptist, and accepted his baptism of conversion, but without knowing anything about his passion and resurrection. We can assume that Prisca and Aquila invited them to become full believers and to receive Christian baptism. Luke presents this scene as a new Pentecost (Acts 19:5–7). One of them was Apollos, a highly educated Jew from Alexandria.

Aside from this particular group, we know nothing specific about this church. Given that the city resembled Corinth in many respects, we can assume with some certainty that the two communities were comparable in size and composition (1 Cor 1:26–29). Each was a city in miniature: a few relatively wealthy members, a majority of merchants and slaves, and perhaps more women than men.

D. Missionary Expansion

In 1 Corinthians 16:19, Paul mentions "the churches of Asia" in his greetings to Corinth. We must therefore assume that there were other Christian communities established around Ephesus in this Roman province. The only ones known to us, because they are mentioned by Paul, are Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Col 4:13). But it is highly likely that this list is not exhaustive. However, Paul did not found these churches in the Lycus Valley. In fact, in Col 1:7, Paul refers to the teaching the community received from Epaphras, a native of that community, whom he presents as his companion and minister of Christ, and in Col 4:13 as the one who also works hard for the Christians in Laodicea and Hierapolis. We can infer from all this that he is the founder of the three churches.

Did Epaphras act on his own or as Paul's delegate? The fact that in Col 1:7 Paul presents him as a faithful minister of Christ suggests that he acted as an authorized missionary, sent by Paul (see the expression "minister of Christ" in 2 Cor 11:23). This is confirmed by the use of the expression "beloved fellow-servant" to refer to Epaphras (Col 1:7), an expression he also uses for Tychicus (Col 4:7). And the very fact that he was imprisoned with Paul (Philemon 1:23) means that the authorities clearly understood that he was Paul's agent. Thus, he represents the typical missionary sent to the province of Asia.

The fact that Paul did not go to the Lycus Valley himself confirms his commitment to strengthening the existing communities. However, if the demands of his stay in Ephesus and the restrictions on his freedom of movement prevented him from traveling to continue his mission, he could entrust others with preaching in his name. Paul had finally realized that he could not do everything. It is unlikely that Epaphras was the only missionary sent from Ephesus, and it is highly probable that most, if not all, of the churches in Western Asia were established as part of the evangelization plan of the Ephesian community, guided by Paul. If Ephesus and Laodicea, two of the seven churches of

Revelation (Rev 2:1–3:22), were Pauline foundations (the latter at least indirectly through Epaphras), then there is no reason not to attribute the establishment of the communities of Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia to the missionary initiative of Ephesus. We could also add Magnesia and Tralles, to whom Ignatius of Antioch addresses his letters. All these cities lie within a 192-kilometer radius of Ephesus and are connected by major roads. Colossae is the farthest city, but can be reached easily within a week.

But apart from Colossae, why do we have no letter from Paul addressed to these communities, since they are considered the result of Paul's mission? The simplest answer is that Paul adopted a policy of delegation. He therefore trusted the missionary in charge of a church to resolve any problems that might arise. The exception of Colossae can be explained by the fact that when Epaphras went to Ephesus to inform Paul of the problem of false teaching being spread by some and to discuss a strategy to address it, he found Paul in prison and was himself imprisoned (Col 4:10, 18). The defection of a member of the local leadership team made it imperative to resolve the situation quickly. And none of Paul's associates possessed the necessary authority. A letter was therefore the only solution, and Paul wrote it to give it as much weight as possible.

E. Imprisonment

The scenario just outlined assumes that Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus. However, according to Luke, Paul's stay in Ephesus was peaceful, with the exception of the silversmiths' riot (Acts 19:23–40); the only imprisonments he mentions are those in Philippi (Acts 16:23), Caesarea (Acts 23:23–26:32), and Rome (Acts 28:16). But according to Paul himself, he had to "fight against wild beasts" in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32). We must therefore choose between Ephesus and Rome as the place where Paul wrote his prison letters.

The letters to the Colossians and to Philemon seem to have been written under similar circumstances to overlapping groups of people.

- Paul is a prisoner (Col 4:10–18; Phil 1:1, 9, 23)
- Timothy is with him (Col 1:1; Philem 1:1)
- Epaphras is also with him (Col 4:12; Philem 1:23)
- Aristarchus is also with him (Col 4:10; Philem 1:24)
- Mark is also with him (Col 4:10; Philem 1:24)
- Luke is also with him (Col 4:14; Philem 1:24)
- Demas is also with him (Col 4:14; Philem 1:24)
- Onesimus also accompanies him (Col 4:9; Philem 1:10–12)
- Archippus appears to be the recipient (Col 4:17; Philem 1:2)

Three facts indicate that Philemon's house church was in Colossae.

- i. Epaphras, a native of Colossae, knows the recipients well enough to send his greetings (Philemon 1:23)
- ii. Onesimus was from Colossae (Philemon 1:23)
- iii. Archippus is one of the recipients of both letters

According to the prevailing interpretation of the letter to Philemon, Onesimus, one of the bearers of the Epistle to the Colossians, was a runaway slave who, after meeting Paul in the city where the latter was imprisoned, was sent back to Colossae. But where had he taken refuge during his escape? Some biblical scholars have hypothesized Rome. But this is unlikely, given the distance—which would have required two boat trips—making it a very costly escape. It wasn't necessary to go that far to remain unnoticed: unless the master was a man of influence and had distributed a wanted notice everywhere, the slave could have gone to the large city of Ephesus and gone unnoticed. But what brought him to Paul? A provision of Roman law allowed a slave facing punishment to seek the help of a friend of his master in order to restore good relations. In this case, the slave was not considered a fugitive in the legal sense of the term.

If he went to a friend of his master, one could not presume that his intention was to run away. In a letter to Sabinianus, Pliny the Younger recounts a similar situation:

The freedman whom you met and with whom you said you were angry came to see me, threw himself at my feet, and clung to me as if I were you. He begged for my help, weeping bitterly, while leaving out many details; in short, he convinced me of his sincere repentance. I believe he has reformed, for he has understood his mistake. I know you are angry, and I also know that your anger was justified, but mercy is most praiseworthy when there has been just cause for anger. (Letters 9:21)

According to Philemon 1:18, Onesimus caused Philemon some serious harm. He therefore needs someone who would have great influence over his master. Even though he is a Gentile, he seems aware that Paul is this person of great influence. This would explain why he went to Ephesus rather than seeking out a friend of Philemon's in Colossae. This scenario presupposes that the people of Colossae knew that Paul was not very far away, in Ephesus, and not a prisoner in Rome. And Onesimus's situation needed to be resolved quickly.

It is therefore only under the assumption of imprisonment in Ephesus that Paul's plan to go to Colossae—made concrete by a request for lodging (Philemon 1:22)—makes full sense. Nothing is more natural than his desire to see for himself the impact of his letter on the communities, which were being disrupted by false teachings of Jewish origin. The churches in the Lycus Valley were not quite halfway between Ephesus and Galatia. If they had shown a preference for Jewish-inspired doctrine, might they not have fallen under the influence of the Judaizers, whom he had had to combat in

Galatia? Similarly, the letter to the Colossians was written in the same prison as the letter to Philemon. Furthermore, at least two of the three letters that were combined to create what is known as the Letter to the Philippians—namely, Letter A (Phil 4:10–20) and Letter B (Phil 1:1–3:1; 4:2–9)—are believed to have been written in Ephesus. The reference to the praetorium in Phil 1:13 corresponds to Ephesus, which, as a proconsular city, had a praetorium. The same applies to the reference to the house of Caesar (Phil 4:22), since the large imperial estates in Asia required the presence of members of the house of Caesar, a fact confirmed in Ephesus by inscriptions. Finally, the frequent contacts between Paul and Philippi suggest a place of imprisonment closer than Rome. And as soon as he regained his freedom, Paul planned to go to Philippi (Phil 1:26; 2:24). This can only refer to the visit mentioned in 1 Cor 16:5–9, written in Ephesus. Phil 1:26, 30 give the impression that this visit would be the first since the founding of the church in Philippi. Roman law at that time did not provide for imprisonment; detention was not used as a punishment. Individuals were removed from society for varying lengths of time through exile. They were placed in detention in two situations: either during the investigation, or after the death sentence was pronounced and while awaiting its execution. Other penalties (for example, flogging, fines) were carried out immediately. In practice, of course, detention could be prolonged indefinitely. The Acts of the Apostles illustrates this practice. Thus, in Acts 16:19–35, after the magistrates had accepted the charges against Paul and Silas, they were punished immediately by being beaten with rods, then thrown into prison to be expelled the next day. Similarly, in Acts 21:33–23:22, Paul remains in prison awaiting his trial. In none of his letters is there any indication that Paul was awaiting execution. On the contrary, he hopes to be released soon (Phil 2:24; Philemon 1:22). We must assume that imprisonment lasted only for the duration of the investigation.

F. The Date of Galatians

To establish this date, we have some reference points: the letter was written after the Jerusalem Council in the fall of AD 51, and before the Letter to the Romans, written during the winter of AD 55–56, for which it served as a first draft containing somewhat fragmented and personal arguments, before arriving at a systematic treatment and a general approach in the latter. In Galatians 1:6, Paul writes: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ.” He is stunned by the fact that resistance to the Judaizers was so short-lived. In Galatians 5:7 he writes: “You were running well.” So little time elapsed between the “you were running well” and the “turning away.” But when did Paul observe that the Galatians were “running well”? The only plausible answer is that Paul learned of the situation of the churches in Galatia during his visit to that region, where he preached the collection for the poor in Jerusalem, en route to Ephesus—a journey we have dated to the spring and summer of the year 52. It is not impossible that the Judaizers followed Paul closely when he left Antioch, and thus arrived in Galatia shortly after his departure. We can assume that the Judaizers spent the winter in Galatia and that news of their misdeeds reached Paul in Ephesus only after the snow had melted and the roads had reopened to traffic. We can be certain that Paul reacted immediately; the use of the present participle “who are troubling you and who want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7) indicates that the troublemakers were still at work at the time he was writing and that they had not yet fully succeeded (cf. Gal 5:10). Consequently, the Epistle to the Galatians should be dated to the spring of the year 53.

G. An Ephesian Chronology

We have already established that Paul arrived in Ephesus in August 52 and left in October 54, making for a stay of 27 months. His first year seems to have passed without any specific problems. After informing the churches in Macedonia and Achaia of where they could find him, he was able to devote his energy to the growth of the local church. Paul’s period of imprisonment must have occurred between the writing of the **Letter to the Galatians** in the spring of 53—in which there is no indication of imprisonment—and the **First Letter to the Corinthians**, written in May 54, where he is free to plan his journey to Corinth via Macedonia.

The sending of two sections of what constitutes the **Letter to the Philippians** must have taken place between the spring and fall of 53. Let us first consider Paul’s relationship with the Philippians. Since the prevailing winds came from the north, it was easy to travel by boat from Philippi to Ephesus via Troas, which could take about nine days, depending on the weather and the stop in Troas. On the other hand, for the return journey, due to the wind direction, it was better to travel on foot from Ephesus to Troas (about 350 km), a two-week journey. Then, the crossing to Neapolis could take two days, followed by the walk to Philippi (15 km) taking another day. The round trip would therefore take about a month. Thus, if the Letter to the Galatians was written in April or May of the year 53, Epaphroditus arrived in Ephesus in the summer of 53 with gifts for Paul from the church in Philippi (Phil 4:18). But while staying in Ephesus, Epaphroditus fell ill (Phil 2:26). Paul therefore had to find another messenger to express his gratitude to the Philippians (**Letter A**: Phil 4:10–20). It is not certain that Paul was in prison at this time. His arrest was likely linked to the arrival of the new proconsul on July 1, 53 (Phil 1:13) and to the proconsul’s zeal to assert his authority against subversive groups. Paul was likely released before the end of the summer. Due to travel restrictions in winter, **Letter B** (1:1–3:1; 4:2–9) to the Philippians, as well as the **Letter to the Colossians** and the **Letter to Philemon**, were most likely written before the end of the summer of 53. Once released, did Paul make the promised visit to the Lycus Valley? We do not know.

According to Acts 19:1, Apollos had left Ephesus for Corinth by the time Paul arrived in Ephesus. This seems to be confirmed by Paul in 1 Cor 3:6. But Apollos certainly returned to Ephesus before Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, since he was with him at that time in May of the year 54. However, since the letter from the Corinthians—which is the source of Paul’s response in his first letter to the Corinthians—asks for Apollos’s return (1 Cor 16:12), we must assume that Apollos had been in Ephesus since the summer of 53. He is likely the one who brought the letter that prompted Paul to write this **previous lost letter** (1 Cor 5:9). The following chronology can be established:

Summer 52	Paul in Galatia
	Apollos to Corinth.
September 52	Paul arrives in Ephesus.
	Judaizers arrive in Galatia.
Winter 52-53	Consolidation of the church Ephesus and beginning of its missionary outreach to Asia
Spring 53	Epaphras begins his mission in the Lycus valley
	Bad news from Galatia.
	Paul writes <i>Galatians</i> (April – May)
Summer 53	Gift from Philippians
	Paul writes <i>Letter A</i> to the Philippian.
	Paul and his collaborators arrested
	Epaphras returns to Ephesus
	From prison Paul writes <i>Letter B</i> to Philippians, <i>Colossians</i> , and <i>Philemon</i>
	Apollos returns to Ephesus
	Paul writes the <i>Previous Letter</i> to Corinth
Autumn 53	Paul travels to the Lycus valley?
Winter 53-54	Paul winters in Ephesus
Spring-Summer 54	Intense contacts with Corinth
	First Letter to Corinthians (may)
October 54	Paul departs from Ephesus

Chapter 8: Conflict in Galatia p. 185-210

So far, we have established two points: the Galatians we are discussing were members of Celtic tribes in the region around the city of Pessinus (modern-day Balahissar), and the Letter to the Galatians was likely written in the spring of AD 53. We must now examine the new problem they raised, which compelled Paul to further develop his thinking.

A. Galatia: Land and People

Epigraphic studies conducted in Central Anatolia, a region colonized by the Galatians, reveal the presence of Celtic, Greek, Roman, and Phrygian names within the same family. It would be difficult to find a more striking illustration of the ethnic diversity of the congregations in the churches of Galatia. The Celts or Galatians who migrated to Asia Minor in 278 BC were a particular type of mercenary, with only half of the 20,000 who crossed the Bosphorus being warriors. They came with spouses, children, and elderly parents, in search of a new home. Here is what Strabo writes:

The Galatians were situated south of the Paphlagonians. ... This country was occupied by the Galatians after a long period of wandering and the conquest of territories subject to the Attalid and Bithynian kings, until they received, by voluntary cession, present-day Galatia, or Gallo-Greece ([Geography](#) 12.5.1).

This settlement took place around 232 BC, during the reign of Attalus I of Pergamon, and the Galatians then concentrated in the region of Ancyra (present-day Ankara). After the death of this powerful king in 197 BC, the Galatians resumed their incursions westward into Asia. They were decimated during the violent Roman repression of 189 BC, but their lands were not confiscated, and they subsequently became loyal allies of Rome. Some 25 years later, they had peacefully entered the region of the future city of Pessinus.

As conquerors, the Galatians belonged to an aristocratic caste, but this did not isolate them from their surroundings. The extent of intermarriage with the local population is underscored by Livy's description of the Galatians as "a mixed race." They adopted the local Phrygian religion. Not only was it wiser to appease the local gods, but the Celtic nobility gained local power through their membership in the extremely influential clergy of Pessinus. In addition to Celtic, which continued to be spoken until the Byzantine era, Greek was adopted as a second language. It was the indispensable means of communication throughout the region, and anyone who traveled had to be bilingual. Nevertheless, the Galatians themselves were not Hellenized. Around 50 CE, Galatia was essentially non-Hellenized, and tribal structures continued to be maintained.

The names of the three administrative regions established by Augustus in 22 or 21 BC were Sebastini Tolistobogii Pessinuntii, Sebastini Textosages Ancyranii, and Sebastini Trocmi Tavianii. The population of the three Galatian tribes was considered identical to that of the three villages elevated to city status by imperial decree. The territory of Pessinus

extended from Mount Dindymus (present-day Günyüzü Dag) to the source of the Sangarios River. Elsewhere in the tribal territory, there were only unfortified villages.

The Greeks of the province of Asia looked down on the peoples of central Asia Minor with contempt. The Galatians, for their part, were regarded as large, unpredictable, and simple-minded men, fierce and extremely dangerous when angry, but lacking in endurance and easy to deceive. They were the very archetype of barbarians. It would be hard to find a more lenient comment on the mixture of Galatians and Phrygians than that of Livy, who describes them as a “degenerate and bastard race.”

Here is a description of the territory by the biblical scholar W.M. Ramsey

It consists of a vast series of bare, bleak up-lands and sloping hillsides. It is almost devoid of trees, except, perhaps, in some places on the north frontiers; and the want of shade makes the heat of summer more trying, while the climate in winter is severe. The hills often reach a considerable altitude, but have never the character of mountains. They are commonly clad with a slight growth of grass to the summit on at least one side. The scenery is uninteresting. There are hardly any striking features; and one part is singularly like another. The cities are far from one another, separated by long stretches of the same fatiguing country, dusty and hot and arid in summer, covered with snow in winter.... In ancient times the aspect of most of the land away from the few great cities was much the same as it is at the present day—bleak stretches of pastoral country, few villages, sparse population, little evidence of civilization. (A Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, p. 12-14.)

Heavy rains and winter snowfall generally begin in November and last until April. Temperatures can drop as low as -20 °C, and long periods of frost are common. The ground remains soft and muddy until June, when the hot, dry season begins. Roman roads certainly crossed Galatia in Paul's time, even though the major construction projects that provided Asia Minor with its 9,000 km of paved roads date from between the years 80 and 122. Galatia's main products are revealed by its unique art: carved tombstones. The most common motif is that of the distaff and spindle, highlighting the importance of wool in the province's economy. Strabo noted: “Although the country is arid, it is remarkably productive in sheep; but the wool is coarse, and yet some have amassed a very great fortune from it alone. Amyntas owned more than three hundred flocks in this region” (Geography 12.6.1). Strabo's assessment of the wool's quality was contested by Pliny, who considered it among the finest in the world. On many tombstones, the distaff and spindle are depicted alongside a pickaxe and pruning shears. The importance of viticulture is suggested by the presence of vines or bunches of grapes. Wine may have made life more bearable in this desolate region, but it is unlikely that it contributed as much to the economy as the cultivation of cereals. Ears of wheat and a team of oxen pulling a plow appear on many tombs.

B. Paul's Ministry in Galatia

Paul addresses his letter “to the churches of Galatia” without any further qualification such as “in Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:2). What is the significance of this plural form and the absence of any qualification? Perhaps Paul is thinking of house churches in a well-defined area. But it is more likely that, due to his disappointment, Paul decided to treat the Christian communities as mere secular assemblies.

How did Paul end up in Pessinus in AD 46? Since he felt ill on the way, after leaving Antioch in Pisidia, he must have sought out an urban environment where he could receive proper care. The best route to reach the Sangarios River, a distance of 40 kilometers, with the least effort was to travel by boat, first along the Ak Tsha'yr, which joins the Alander River, a tributary of the Sangarios. From there, only 12 kilometers separated him from Pessinus. Strabo writes:

Pessinus is the greatest commercial centre in that part of the world, containing a temple of the Mother of the gods, which is an object of great veneration. They call her Agdistis. The priests were in ancient times powerful and reaped the fruits of a great priesthood, but at present their prerogatives have been much reduced, though the market still endures. The sacred precinct was built up by the Attalid kings in a manner befitting a holy place, with a sanctuary and also with porticoes of white marble. The Romans made the temple famous when, in accordance with oracles of the Sibyl, they sent for the statue of the goddess there, just as they did in the case of that of Asclepius at Epidaurus. (Geography 12.5.3).

Agdistis is better known as Cybele, the Great Mother, whose cult was officially recognized by Rome in 204 BC. She was the supreme deity of Phrygia, and the male god, Attis, was merely her companion and subordinate servant. Unsurprisingly, women favored this cult. Cybele was responsible for all aspects of the people's well-being, ensuring their fertility and healing, offering oracles, and protecting her followers. One of the hallmarks of the religious practice involved states of ecstasy in which the person became insensitive to pain or uttered prophecies. Paul must have begun his ministry with simple conversations with those who were generous enough to offer him hospitality, pagans (Gal 4:8) who did not know the God of the Jews. The fact that it was a place of pilgrimage to Cybele is perhaps what led Paul to stay in Pessinus after regaining his health: he saw in these visitors the opportunity to reach the vast, remote regions he could never otherwise explore, and they could carry his message to places beyond his reach. This may be why the letter's address is so vague.

C. The Cause of the Crisis

The unrest was caused by outsiders who were trying to persuade the Galatians to adopt a view of Christianity that was radically different from Paul's.

a. Who were the Intruders?

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul clearly distinguishes between his converts, whom he addresses as "you" (Gal 3:1–5), and others, whom he dismissively refers to as "some people" (Gal 1:7), "someone" (Gal 1:9), "they, those people" (Gal 4:17; 6:13). The clear indication that these are outsiders is provided by the verbs "disturb," "upset," and "sow confusion" (Gal 1:7; 5:10), which belong to the political language of the time and describe the work of agitators seeking to destroy a formerly peaceful situation. These people are not pagan philosophers or Jews, but Christians of Jewish origin, either by birth or by conversion; they belong to the "circumcision" (Gal 6:13) and regard their message to the Galatians as "the gospel" (Gal 1:6).

Where do these people come from? They probably come from Antioch. Let us recall that during his first mission, when he founded the churches in Galatia, Paul was the delegate of the church in Antioch. But following pressure from Jerusalem, the church in Antioch opted for a Judaization of Christianity, which Paul refused to accept (Gal 2:11–21). Unable to accept this vision of the Christian faith, Paul severed ties with that church. Faced with this reality, the leaders of the church in Antioch felt it was their duty to ensure that the daughter churches—that is, the churches founded by Paul and Barnabas—remained in communion with them, and not with Paul. We can therefore imagine that they sent delegates everywhere Paul had gone to ensure this Judaization of the Christian faith. Thus, to Paul, these people were intruders interfering with his converts, but to the representatives from Antioch, Paul had forfeited his rights over the churches in Galatia. They harbored no personal animosity toward Paul, but they considered that Paul had disqualified himself by taking a different path from that of the mother church and behaving as if he alone possessed the truth; for them, it was necessary to intervene in the interest of the converts.

b. The Tactics of the Judaizers

When they arrived in Galatia, the Judaizers had two objectives: first, to undermine Paul's authority by discrediting him, and second, to propose their own alternative version of Christianity. Unfortunately, they left us no documents on which we could base our understanding of their thinking. Furthermore, Paul himself had no direct knowledge of their accusations; he learned of them from his supporters among the Galatians. They had had time to familiarize themselves with the Judaizers' ideas, since the Judaizers spent the winter of 52–53 in Galatia. But they likely lacked the theological training to respond to them and would have settled for passive resistance. However, with the arrival of spring, they would have hurried to Ephesus to inform Paul.

1. Discrediting Paul

Paul likely received specific information about the intruders' tactics. The biblical scholar F.F. Bruce summarizes the scholarly consensus by attributing these words to the Judaizers:

The Jerusalem leaders are the only persons with authority to say what the true gospel is, and this authority they received direct from Christ. Paul has no comparable authority: any commission he exercises was derived by him from the Jerusalem leaders, and if he differs from them on the content or implications of the gospel, he is acting and teaching quite arbitrarily. In fact Paul went up to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion and spent some time with the apostles there. They instructed him in the first principles of the gospel and, seeing that he was a man of uncommon intellect, magnanimously wiped out from their minds his record as a persecutor and authorized him to preach to others the gospel which he had learned from them. But when he left Jerusalem for Syria and Cilicia he began to adapt the gospel to make it palatable to Gentiles. The Jerusalem leaders practiced circumcision and observed the law and the customs, but Paul struck out on a line of his own, omitting circumcision and other ancient observances from the gospel he preached, and thus he betrayed his ancestral heritage. This law-free gospel has no authority but his own; he certainly did not receive it from the apostles, who disapproved of his course of action. Their disapproval was publicly shown on one occasion at Antioch, when there was a direct confrontation between Peter and him on the necessity of maintaining the Jewish food-laws. (The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, p. 26)

2. An Alternative Vision of Christianity

The first question Paul's followers needed to ask was this: what is meant by the "authentic gospel" or the "true gospel"? And how was it justified? The biblical scholar J. Louis Martyn offers the following reconstruction:

Listen now. It all began with Abraham. He was the first human being to discern that there is but one God. Because of that perception he turned from the service of dumb idols to the worship of the true God [Jub. 12]. There God made him the father of our great nation; but that was only the beginning, for God made to Abraham a solemn utterance which through our mission has begun to find its fulfillment in the present time. Speaking through a glorious angel, God said to Abraham:

In you shall all the nations of the world be blessed [Gen. 12: 3] ... for I shall multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven [Gen. 22: 17].... Come outside, and look toward heaven, and

number the stars, if you are able ... So shall your descendants be [Gen. 15: 5] ... for I speak this blessing to you and to your descendants.

What is the meaning of this blessing which God gave to Abraham? Pay attention to these things: Abraham was the first proselyte. As we have said, he discerned the true God and turned to him. God therefore made an unshakable covenant with Abraham [Gen. 17: 7], and as a sign of this covenant he gave to Abraham the commandment of circumcision [Gen. 17: 10]. He also revealed to Abraham the heavenly calendar, so that in his own lifetime our father was in fact obedient to the Law, not only keeping the commandment of circumcision [Gen. 17: 23], but also observing the holy feasts on the correct days [Jub. 15: 1-2].

Later, when God actually handed down the Law at Sinai, he spoke once again in the mouths of his glorious angels who pass the Law through the hand of the mediator, Moses (Galatians 3: 19). And now the Messiah has come, confirming for eternity God's blessed Law, revealed to Abraham and spoken through Moses (6: 2).

And what does this mean for you Gentiles? We know from the scriptures that Abraham had two sons: Isaac and Ishmael (4: 22). On the day of the feast of the first fruits Isaac was born of Sarah the freewoman [Gen. 21: 1-7], and through him have come we Jews, who are descendants of Abraham. Ishmael was born of Hagar the slave girl [Gen. 16], and through him have come you Gentiles. Thus you also are descendants of the patriarch. We are in fact brothers!

We also know from the scripture we have just quoted that God made his indelible promise to both Abraham and his descendants, saying 'In you shall all the nations be blessed. The inheritance of salvation is to your children's children! [Sir. 44: 21]'. That fact faces us all with the crucial question: Who is it who are the true and therefore blessed descendants of Abraham (3: 7, 29)? And the answer is equally clear from the scriptures: Abraham himself turned from idols to the observance of the Law, circumcising himself and Isaac. As we have said, he even kept the holy feasts at their precisely appointed times. And not least, by keeping God's commandments [Jub. 21: 2], he avoided walking in the power of the Evil Impulse (5: 16; cf. Genesis 6: 5). It follows that the true descendants are clearly those who are faithfully obedient to the Law with faithful Abraham (Galatians 3: 6-9). At the present holy time God has been pleased to extend this line of true descent through the community in Jerusalem, the community which lives by the Law of Christ (6: 2), the community of James, Cephas and John, and through the community which we represent (2: 1-10).

What are you to do, therefore, as Abraham's descendants through Ishmael, the child of Hagar, the slave-girl? The gate of conversion stands open (4: 17; 4: 9)! You are to cast off your enslavement to the Evil Impulse by turning in repentance and conversion to God's righteous Law as it is confirmed by his Christ. Follow Abraham in the holy and liberating rite of circumcision (6: 13); observe the feasts at their appointed times (4: 10); keep the sacred dietary requirements (2: 11-14); and abstain from idolatry and from the passions of the flesh (5: 19-21). Then you will be true descendants of Abraham, heirs of salvation according to the blessing which God solemnly uttered to Abraham and his descendants (3: 7, 8).

You say that you have already been converted by Paul? We say that you are still in a darkness entirely similar to the darkness in which not long ago you were serving the elements, supposing them, as Abraham once did, to be gods that rule the world (4: 3, 9). In fact the fights and contentions in your communities show that you have not really been converted, that Paul did not give you God's holy guidance. Paul left you, a group of sailors on the treacherous high seas in nothing more than a small and poorly equipped boat. He gave you no provisions for the trip, no map, no compass, no rudder, and no anchor. In a word, he failed to pass on to you God's greatest gift, the Law. But that is exactly the mission to which God has called us. Through our work the good news of God's Law is invading the world of Gentile sin. We adjure you, therefore, to claim the inheritance of the blessing of Abraham, and thus to escape the curse of the Evil Impulse and sin (5: 16). For, be assured, those who follow the path of the Evil Impulse and sin will not inherit the Kingdom of God (5: 21). It is entirely possible for you to be shut out (4: 17). You will do well to consider this possibility and to tremble with fear. For you will certainly be shut out unless you are truly incorporated into Abraham (3: 29) by observing the glorious and angelic Law of the Messiah. Turn therefore in true repentance, and come under the wings of the Divine Presence, so that with us you shall be saved as true descendants of our common father Abraham. (*A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, p. 321-323)

Even though this reconstruction of the Judaizers' preaching contains some fanciful elements, it helps us grasp the persuasive power of their message. And this struck a nerve with the Galatians. Indeed, when we look at Paul's approach to the Thessalonians, he limited himself to providing general guidelines intended to show the new converts that a new way of life was expected of them (1 Thess 4:1-12); but it was up to each individual to find the best way to put the Gospel teaching into practice. And most of his converts seem to have accepted this challenge. Paul intervened only when he observed unacceptable behavior. Unfortunately, the Galatians seem to have rejected this approach. To them, Paul's lack of concrete guidelines gave them the impression of being left in the dark: there was no specific law to tell them what was right and what was wrong, no ritual to atone for transgression. For people who were frightened by freedom and paralyzed by uncertainty, the Law seemed like a blessing. The 613 Jewish commandments made it possible to dispel the darkness completely. The pain of

circumcision and the burden of all the commandments were a small price to pay for the security offered by the Law.

D. Paul's Response

Up to that point, Paul had mainly converted pagans, and the further west he traveled on his missions, the less he encountered Jewish nationalism. He was therefore not concerned about the differing views of Christianity in Jerusalem and Antioch. So one can imagine the shock caused by the completely unexpected news of the Antiochians' plan to overturn the foundations he had established in Galatia, and of his converts' receptiveness to a different vision of the Christian faith. The sense of dismay (Gal 5:7), even despair (Gal 4:11), is clearly evident in his response, but the dominant emotion is a restrained anger. The contrast between the venomous virulence of 2 Cor 10–13 and the cold fury of the Epistle to the Galatians is striking. In both cases, the Judaizers are the problem, but Paul's deep disappointment with the Corinthians finds release in his rebukes, whereas in the Epistle to the Galatians, it is channeled into an argument of icy precision. For there was a real possibility that the Judaizers' influence would spread to the other churches he had founded. His credibility was at stake. His gospel was threatened, his future in danger.

a. A Complex Strategy

The situation was too serious for Paul to let his emotions get the better of him, as that would have been perceived as a sign of weakness and an admission of guilt. For his aim was not to reassure the Galatians that his gospel was the truth, but—since the Judaizers were still in Galatia—to persuade the intruders themselves that their gospel was less well-founded than they believed. Note that even though the letter is addressed to the Galatians, Paul assumes it will also be heard by the Judaizers, since letters were read in public (cf. Col 4:16); and in fact, Paul's strategy is to address the Judaizers directly. For he had to get to the root of the problem and develop a long-term solution. This was the only way to halt the advance of the Judaizers and undermine their convictions. Moreover, Paul could not expect the Galatians, converts from paganism (Gal 4:8), to grasp the force of arguments based on a deep knowledge of Jewish tradition. These carefully calculated attacks were intended to destabilize the intruders. Paul hoped that the ensuing consternation would be the most convincing argument in their eyes.

This approach presupposes that Paul had confidence in his rhetorical skill and literary talent. Of course, this approach would have been easier in person. If Paul did not choose this option, it was likely because a visit to Galatia was impossible for him, either because his imprisonment had begun or because specific problems in Ephesus required his presence there.

b. A Divine Commission

Even though Paul had been a delegate from the church in Antioch during his first mission, and a delegate from the same church at the meeting in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10), it was now imperative for him to assert his independence following the conflict in Antioch. It was a tactical error on the part of the Judaizers to insist on dependence on Jerusalem as the source of the authentic gospel, rather than on Paul's earlier connection to the church in Antioch. For Paul had very few ties to the church in Jerusalem. Instead, he emphasizes his early contacts with Christians even as he persecuted "the church of God" (Gal 1:13) and the "churches of Christ in Judea" (Gal 1:22); the name "Jerusalem" is not mentioned. After his conversion, he made only two brief visits to Jerusalem: first, three years later for 15 days to meet with Cephas and James (Gal 1:17–19), and then fourteen years later (Gal 2:1). Paul then mentions his mission in Syria and Cilicia, without giving any details. The Galatians knew that it was during this journey that he came among them, on his way westward. Speaking with confidence, Paul felt no need to say more, demonstrating his assurance and dispelling any sense of anxiety.

From the outset, Paul affirmed that his apostolic mandate did not come "from men or from any man" (Gal 1:1), or from any particular church or leader, but directly from Jesus Christ, whose authority is guaranteed by his resurrection. The implicit implication is that Jesus alone can judge the faithfulness of his messenger. The miraculous nature of his conversion was not something his opponents could question; the Galatians knew full well that Paul had been a persecutor of Christians (Gal 1:13). To refute the Judaizers' argument regarding the necessity of adhering to the Christian tradition over which Jerusalem had authority, Paul insists: "This gospel that I have preached to you is not of human origin; nor was it transmitted or taught to me by any human being, but through a revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11–12). Even if he had been exposed to Christian tradition during his stays in Damascus, Jerusalem, and Antioch, the core of his gospel—freed from the law—flows directly from the reconfiguration of his ideas following his encounter with the risen Jesus; the entire Christian tradition is viewed through the lens of this decisive encounter. Thus, whatever harmonizes with this perspective is integrated; the rest is rejected. For example, he initially had no objection to Jewish converts continuing to observe the Law, provided they did not impose it on converts from paganism. It was only later that he perceived the dangers of this concession, and it was only then that he repudiated it completely.

c. The Living Christ

In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul had not strayed from the traditional formulations regarding Jesus' saving death and his glorious return. In the Epistle to the Galatians, on the other hand, we find the first signs of his original Christology. The need to respond to the importance the Judaizers placed on Abraham compelled him to reflect more deeply on Jesus Christ. Thus, he had to explore the humanity of Jesus more deeply. The intruders accepted the

messianic nature of Jesus and the inauguration of the eschatological age, which justified the mission to the Gentiles, but by emphasizing the universal power of the messianic reign, they ascribed divine attributes to him. Therefore, Paul had to remind them that Jesus was born of a woman (Gal 4:4), a Hebrew expression for a member of the human race.

In exploring the humanity of Jesus, Paul emphasizes the faith of Jesus. There is some confusion regarding the expression *pistis Iēsou Christou* ("the faith of Jesus Christ," Gal 2:16; 3:22; cf. Rom 3:22), *pistis Christou* ("faith of Christ," Gal 2:16; cf. Phil 3:9), and *pistis tou hyiou tou theou* ("faith of the Son of God," Gal 3:26). For *pistis* can mean either belief or faithfulness/loyalty, and the genitive "of Jesus" can be either objective or subjective. Today, most biblical scholars have opted for the subjective meaning: the faith that is Jesus' own. This implies that Christ's faith/faithfulness is both the cause and the example of Christians' faith/faithfulness. Their active commitment is both made possible by Christ's and modeled on him. Thus, Paul can write: "I have been crucified with Christ; I live, yet it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. For the life I now live in the flesh, *I live by faith in the Son of God* who loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). Furthermore, Paul identifies Christ's *pistis* with love that goes so far as to sacrifice itself for others; it is "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). In short, Christ giving himself is the creative act, which is the essence of authentic humanity. Paul thus comes to the conclusion that the law is Christ: "Bear one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). Thus, putting on the mind of Christ is the true answer to the Galatians' question: how to know what to do.

Unlike the Judaizers, who saw the Messiah as one who confirmed and interpreted the Law—and thus submitted to it—Paul considered that the Law was subsumed in Christ. The perfection of his love (Gal 2:20) was all that the Law could demand. Rather than insisting on faith-obedience, which risked creating a new Law, he emphasized the conduct of Christ. From then on, it was up to each believer to discern how to embody this self-sacrificing love in the various circumstances of life. In this way, each member of the Christian community becomes an integral part of a living being (Gal 5:4), a being that Paul would later call "the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:12).

d. Faith and Law

The argument of the Judaizers was based on a view of salvation history that began with Abraham, then moved on to the covenant and circumcision, and culminated in the centrality of the Law. For Paul, the true history of salvation began with Christ; everything that came before was merely a long preface. His starting point for challenging his opponents' argument was the observation that the Galatians had received the gift of the Spirit and experienced the power of God simply by accepting Paul's preaching; the Law was of no help, and its demands only appeared after their conversion (Gal 3:1–5). This was also the case with Abraham, who first responded to God's word and was blessed for his response (Gal 3:6). Faith is fundamental, and the rest—the covenant, the requirements of circumcision—is secondary.

After establishing that faith, and not obedience to the Law, is what characterizes Abraham, Paul now addresses the question of his descendants, which is so important to the Judaizers. He relies on the fact that the text of Gen 13:15, when speaking of the recipient of the promise made to Abraham, uses the word "seed" in the singular: "The promises were made to Abraham and to his seed" (Gal 3:16). For Paul, this "seed" can only refer to Christ. Consequently, all those who are "in Christ" and embody his conduct through their lives truly belong to the descendants of Abraham. Paul's education and his Pharisaic training enabled him to employ this aggressive casuistry. By the very same token, he completely ignores the fact that Abraham was circumcised and diverts attention from this issue by speaking of the "circumcised" (Gal 2:7–9) to refer to the Jewish people: this serves to focus attention on the present, not the past, and to introduce a term that had a repugnant ring to it in the ears of the Greco-Romans.

As for the concept of the covenant that the Judaizers linked to the Law, Paul could not dismiss it, for it was part of Christian vocabulary, particularly used during the Eucharistic celebration. Did not Jer 31:33 speak of a new covenant? Paul's approach was to dissociate the Law from the covenant.

- First of all, he associated the covenant with freedom. Indeed, Christians are the children of the Jerusalem above (Gal 4:26), whom he identifies with Sarah, who belongs to the covenant of the free woman (Gal 4:31). This is the antithesis of the covenant of the slave woman associated with Mount Sinai and present-day Jerusalem (Gal 4:22–25). The covenant of Abraham is a covenant of freedom that is essentially a promise (Gal 3:16–18, 21; 4:28), not a set of laws.
- Furthermore, the covenant and the Law cannot be inseparably linked, for the Law was not part of God's original plan, since it came 430 years after the promise (Gal 3:17), and moreover, it was decreed not by God, but by angels (Gal 3:19). Added to this is the fact that it was given for a limited time (Gal 3:19). Therefore, its role ended when the promise to Abraham was fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:14).

In conclusion, believers can be partners in the new covenant without being bound by the Law.

e. Set Free for Freedom

A distinctive feature of Paul's vocabulary in the Letter to the Galatians is the frequent use of the word "slave" (Gal 1:10; 3:28; 4:1) and related terms: "to perform tasks as a slave" (Gal 4:8, 9, 25; 5:13), to enslave (Gal 4:3), slavery (4:24; 5:1). It is undoubtedly the awareness of the constraints imposed by the Law (Gal 2:23) that leads him to this vocabulary. The Law was not the only source of oppression. It served as a trigger, bringing to light Paul's experience as a traveler. Society itself imposed certain behaviors on its members, which Paul knew were incompatible with authentic human fulfillment. He remembered the times when he had been forced to act selfishly in order to survive and understood that the Galatians had faced the same pressures. To describe this situation, Paul uses the Greek phrase *stoicheia tou kosmou*, translated in various ways, including "the elements of the world." This is his way of conveying the idea that human beings live their lives under the influence or control of primordial and cosmic forces. For him, the very structure of society was oppressive. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul juxtaposes "the tradition of men" (Col 2:8) and "the elements of the world" (Col 2:20). In his letter to the Romans, he speaks instead of the power of Sin (Rom 3:9). In all cases, it is a matter of the total control exercised over individuals by society's system of false values.

One of these false values was the blind obedience that the Jews paid to the Law. Just as those who live in polluted environments have no choice but to inhale toxins, those born into this world are automatically contaminated by its attitudes and norms, its fundamental principles. They cannot resist it, any more than wood chips tossed into a fast-flowing river. Paul deliberately invokes slavery to emphasize that no resistance is possible. The echo of his own experience, both religious and secular, is undeniable. Thus, freedom becomes possible only in Christ, more precisely through the Christian community. For the victory of the spirit's desires over the desires of the flesh is only a victory in principle at the time of conversion. Only those who have in fact crucified the flesh with its passions belong to Christ (Gal 5:24). In other words, the Galatians have been set free to become free (Gal 5:1). It is now up to them to make the right choices between the selfishness of the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19–21)—and thereby return to slavery—and the service of others in love—and thereby become truly free (Gal 5:22–23).

For Paul, what contributes to the community brings about freedom. Thus, ultimately, freedom is a property of the community, not of an individual. Only those who belong to an authentic community are truly free. For this community protects them from the all-encompassing power of the system of false values. As we can see, the crisis with the Judaizers contributed to the development of Paul's thought by forcing him to explore more deeply the meaning of faith in Christ and its relationship to the Christian life, and to distinguish more clearly between life in the world and life in the Christian community. For the first time, he grasped the nature of authentic freedom.

Chapter 9: Partnership at Philippi p. 211-230

Philippi was the first European city to be evangelized by Paul. He arrived there in late summer or early fall of the year 48, after traveling through western Turkey from Galatia. His ship, having set sail from Troas, docked at Neapolis, now known as Kavala (Acts 16:11). According to Luke, Paul did not linger in this port city but continued on inland to Philippi (Acts 16:12). This is confirmed by Paul's own reference to the fact that his first converts came from Philippi (Phil 4:15).

A. Philippi

a. A Description of the City

Appian (95–165) gives us this description of Philippi:

Philippi is a city that was formerly called Datus, and before that Crenides, because there are many springs bubbling around a hill there. Philip [II of Macedon in 356 BC] fortified it because he considered it an excellent stronghold against the Thracians, and named it from himself, Philippi. It is situated on a precipitous hill and its size is exactly that of the summit of the hill. There are woods on the north through which Rhaseupolis led the army of Brutus and Cassius. On the south is a marsh extending to the sea. On the east are the gorges of the Sapaeans and Corpileans, and the west a very fertile and beautiful plain. ... The plain sloped downward so that movement is easy to those descending from Philippi, but toilsome to those going up from Amphipolis. There is another hill not far from Philippi which is called the Hill of Dionysus, in which are gold mines called the Asyla (Civil Wars 4.104-105)

This description serves as the backdrop for the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC, when Octavian and Antony defeated Brutus and Cassius. After this battle, the city expanded to accommodate the veterans of Mark Antony's army and was given the title: *Antoni Iussu Colonia Victrix Philippensium*. Subsequently, when Octavian defeated Antony in 31 BC, the city served as a refuge for the defeated army, as Cassius Dio writes: "By evicting those communities in Italy which had taken Antony's side, Octavian was able to settle his soldiers both in their cities and on the lands of his opponents. He compensated most of those who had been penalized in this way by allowing them to settle in Dyrrachium, Philippi, and elsewhere" (Roman History 51.4.6). Subsequently, the colony was renamed: *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philipp(i)ensis*. The settlers naturally retained their privileges as Roman citizens, and Philippi enjoyed the *Ius Italicum*. It was as if the city had been transferred to the soil of Italy; its residents were not subject to provincial land and personal taxes, and in theory at least were independent of the governor of the province of Macedonia. The city was the civic and administrative center of a vast territory and an important stop along the Via Egnatia, which connected the Adriatic Sea to Neapolis. Its expansion attracted non-Romans from Greece and the East.

Although Latin was the language of the city's ruling class and of the entire colony, the indigenous population continued to use Greek. All of this is reflected in Paul's use of the word *Philippēsiōi* (Phil 4:15), which is derived from the Latin *Philippenses*, rather than the Greek words *Philippēis* or *Philippēnoi*. Despite a Roman veneer, the population as a whole was essentially Eastern. When examining the inscriptions, one notices that half are in Greek and concern the worship of Egyptian gods who had a temple on the slopes of the Acropolis. The city also contained wooden shrines to the Roman deities Silvanus and Diana, as well as bas-reliefs of Magna Mater, Isis, Jupiter, and Minerva. The Roman state religion dominated the area south of the Via Egnatia. The emperor and the Capitoline triad were venerated there in addition to Diana and Mercury.

b. The Founding of the Church

While archaeological evidence of the religious preferences of the pagan population abounds, there is a lack of such evidence regarding a significant Jewish presence. In Acts 16:13, Luke mentions a place of prayer outside the city, along a river, where Paul and his companions went on the Sabbath. This place does not necessarily imply a building, though it does not rule one out. Paul encountered a group composed entirely of women (Acts 16:13), including Lydia, a God-fearer; she was originally from Thyatira. It is possible that this place of prayer primarily served travelers passing through on the Via Egnatia on the Sabbath. Lydia herself was traveling. In the absence of travelers, local God-fearing women may have gathered there, or perhaps Jewish women married to Gentiles. It is therefore among this group that Paul makes his first converts. This is confirmed by the mention of two women of Gentile origin, Euodia and Syntyche, in Phil 4:2.

Luke (Acts 16:13–40) gives us a detailed account of Paul's run-ins with the law and their consequences (beatings, imprisonment, apologies). These events are confirmed by 1 Thessalonians 2:2, where Paul mentions that he suffered and was insulted in Philippi. There is no doubt that Philippi was a place where Paul was imprisoned and beaten (2 Cor 11:23–25).

How long did Paul spend in Philippi? Luke tells us that when Paul was released from prison, he was ordered to leave the city (Acts 16:40). According to him, Paul and Silas were thrown into prison on the following charge: "These men are causing trouble in our city: they are Jews and are advocating rules of conduct that we Romans are not permitted to accept or follow" (Acts 16:20–21). This accusation presupposes a mission that lasted some time and was successful. All of this is corroborated by Paul's correspondence with the church in Philippi, which reveals a well-organized, generous community with the energy necessary to support Paul's missionary work in other regions (Phil 4:15–16). In no other letter does he mention women who labored with him in the service of the gospel (Phil 4:3). Nowhere else does he mention a community that "carried the word of life" (Phil 2:16) and shared in the gospel with him (Phil 1:5). Such a close relationship cannot be achieved after a brief visit. Consequently, we must assume that Paul spent the winter of 48–49 in Philippi and made a number of converts among the Gentiles there.

B. A Series of Letters

The New Testament contains only one canonical letter, addressed to the Philippians, but from the very beginning of critical New Testament scholarship, serious doubts have been raised regarding its integrity. Some commentators distinguish two letters, while the majority identify three. To cast doubt on the unity of a letter, one must demonstrate that certain passages are incompatible with the author's style and approach. In his letters, Paul generally begins with what concerns him most, for example, the apostasy of the Galatians (Gal 1:6) or the divisions in Corinth (1 Cor 1:10). In the Epistle to the Philippians, however, he approaches the subject in a diametrically opposite manner.

a. An Ambivalent Expression of Gratitude

Two things are striking at first glance. In Philippians 2:25–30, Paul mentions Epaphroditus's return to his family after his illness without expressing gratitude for the gifts received. Furthermore, in Philippians 4:10–20, Paul assumes that the Philippian community had been informed of Epaphroditus's illness, which would imply that the messengers previously sent by Paul with this information had not also conveyed his gratitude for the gifts received. All these difficulties disappear if we assume that Phil 4:10–20 was originally an independent letter, the first one addressed to the Philippians, which we call: Letter A.

The defensive tone of the letter allows us to date it. Indeed, Paul seems embarrassed by this gift from the Philippians, which is surprising, since this is not the first time the Philippians have supported him financially—first when he was in Thessalonica (Phil 4:16), then in Corinth (2 Cor 11:9). But this embarrassment becomes understandable if he had begun to preach a collection for the poor in Jerusalem; there was a risk of interpreting this personal gift as the misappropriation of funds for another purpose. It had therefore become important to emphasize that he had not solicited funds from the Philippians (Phil 4:17) and that he needed nothing more (Phil 4:18). Letter A must therefore be dated after the Jerusalem Council. However, it is not necessary to assume that he had begun his imprisonment. The Philippians were well aware that, despite all his efforts to be financially independent, Paul was not always able to provide for himself; therefore, whenever they had a surplus of money, they sent him funds no matter where he was.

The fact that the church in Philippi could send funds on a regular basis presupposes a minimum level of organization. This is indicated by the opening greeting of the letter to the Philippians, where Paul addresses the "episcopoi and deacons," i.e., the overseers and their assistants. These roles may have been of a financial nature. In

terms of its leadership structure, Philippi was identical to the other Pauline churches. Paul did not choose leaders; he expected them to emerge from the community, their talents manifesting themselves in service to others. What he tells the Philippians, “Follow the example of those who live this way, as you have seen in us” (Phil 3:17), echoes what he had written to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:12) and foreshadows what he will ask of the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:15–18). But if the various Pauline churches have roughly the same structure, why is the church in Philippi unique enough to take the initiative to support Paul financially? Did a church like that of Corinth not have far wealthier Christians? We cannot assume that they lived out brotherly love more than others or that they were more attached to Paul than others. The answer is probably that their apostolic spirit was more developed; Paul tells us that they actively participated in the evangelization of their city (Phil 1:5; see Phil 1:7; 4:3). They could understand from the inside the implications of missionary work and what Paul was going through. While they could rely on the income from stable employment and a network of relatives and friends, they knew that Paul, who traveled from city to city, did not enjoy these advantages. Drawing on their own experience, they understood the importance of supporting Paul in his mission.

As time went on and his work intensified, Paul knew he would have to rely more and more on financial help from Christians. But with his commitment to raising funds for the poor in Jerusalem, it became imperative to find a clear way to show that these funds were not for his personal needs. The task was all the more difficult because it was customary for a public official of that time to dip into public funds, as long as it remained reasonable and did not raise questions. So Paul, after careful consideration, arrived at this detailed proposal in 1 Cor 16:1–4:

Regarding the collection for the saints, you too are to follow the guidelines I gave to the churches in Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you should set aside at home whatever you have been able to save, so that we do not have to wait for my arrival to collect the offerings. When I am there, I will send those whom you have chosen, accompanied by letters, to carry your offerings to Jerusalem; if it is appropriate for me to go there myself, they will travel with me.

This strategy had several advantages.

- i. The weekly savings ensured a larger amount than anyone could have raised in the short term.
- ii. Paul was not responsible for managing the funds entrusted to him, and his mobility was therefore not affected.
- iii. Once the contributions were gathered, their management fell to the donors’ representatives.
- iv. Paul himself was involved in the delivery of the donation to Jerusalem only to the extent that the accompanying letter specified that this donation fulfilled his promise to the three pillars (Gal 2:10).

Despite these precautions, about a year later, rumors spread by his enemies tarnished his reputation in Corinth.

b. Two Further Letters

The text that remains after removing the Letter A—namely Phil 1:1–4, 9—does not form a coherent whole. It is divided into two parts, each imbued with a different atmosphere and concern. In Phil 1:28, Paul adopts an attitude of serene superiority in the face of the threat hanging over the Philippian community. He is clearly thinking of persecution by the pagans. But the sarcastic tone of the deliberately insulting remarks in Phil 3:2, 19 reveals a certain despair. Clearly, one danger is far more serious than the other. In the latter case, the community is threatened by Judaization; the allusions to mutilation (Phil 3:2) and to the stomach as the object of supreme concern (“their god is their belly,” Phil 3:19) unambiguously evoke circumcision and Jewish dietary laws, respectively. Faced with the Judaizers, here as elsewhere (e.g., Gal 3:1), Paul fears that his converts will be led astray from the true faith.

Furthermore, in the first part, specifically in Phil 1:7, 13, he mentions his imprisonment. But in Phil 3:8–11, when it would have been logical to mention the sufferings of his imprisonment, there is total silence, suggesting that he has been released from prison. If we call the section of the Epistle to the Philippians in which Paul, while imprisoned, appears complacent in the face of the effects of pagan persecution “Letter B,” and the section in which he fears Judaizing infiltration “Letter C,” where do the two begin and end? The key lies in Phil 3:1: “*Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.*” It costs me nothing to write the same things to you, and for you it is a source of strength.” Verse 1a resembles what is found in 2 Cor 13:11a: “*Finally, brothers, rejoice, strive for perfection, encourage one another, be of one mind,*” which serves as the conclusion to the letter comprising 2 Cor 10–13. Thus, Phil 3:1a constitutes the beginning of a conclusion to a letter. But what does v. 1b refer to, where Paul seems to say that he is repeating himself: “to write the same things to you”? This seems to introduce an exhortation. And this exhortation does not appear until Phil 4:2, when he repeats his call for unity from Phil 1:27 and Phil 2:3, but this time in reference to Euodia and Syntyche.

In short, Letter B comprises Phil 1:1–3:1 and 4:2–9, while Letter C consists of 3:2–4:1.

C. The Letter from Prison (Letter B)

The letter does not address any serious issues. The way Paul refers to his imprisonment (Phil. 1:7, 12) seems to indicate that the community is already aware of it. Instead, he emphasizes its impact on the church and on those who come into contact with him. We learn that he is under investigation in the “praetorium” (Phil 1:13), the official residence of the governor in Asia who exercised judicial functions. Note that the form of detention was at the magistrate’s discretion and

was determined not only by his personality and the nature of the case, but also by the degree of influence of the prisoners and their friends, or even their social class; the treatment reserved for the wealthy, especially in their own city, differed considerably from that inflicted on the poor and foreigners. The place of his detention indicates that Paul belonged to the latter category. Although Phil 1:13 uses the term “chains” in the sense of “imprisonment,” in accordance with the usage of the time, it is almost certain that it must be taken literally. Paul may have been chained to a soldier (cf. Acts 28:16, 20), to the wall of his cell, or forced to wear handcuffs or leg irons. On the other hand, he was not placed in solitary confinement. He was able to communicate with his co-workers, who were imprisoned with him (Phil 2:19; Philem 1:23; Col 4:10). One of them may have served as his secretary in drafting the letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, but the fact that outsiders, such as Epaphroditus, were able to visit him and receive instructions from him (Phil 2:25) suggests that he had access to a professional secretary.

a. Dealing with the Possibility of being Executed

Paul acknowledges that the possibility of his execution is very real (Phil 1:20–25), knowing that he has no way to resist the arbitrary power of the authorities. This prospect leads him to confess that death would be a gain for him, since it would allow him to be with Christ immediately. This idea is surprising, for in 1 Thess 4:16–17 Paul seems to say that this reunion with Christ would take place at his second coming. The inconsistency does not stem from a change of position, but from the fact that, while the human mind can envision its own annihilation, it cannot conceive of an interruption of its existence. Hence the paradox that, to benefit from the resurrection, one must continue to exist; otherwise, it would involve the creation of an entirely new being. In any case, despite his desire for union with Christ, Paul knows that the needs of the Philippians require him to choose to live and continue fighting; in a moral judgment, the ultimate criterion is what can help one’s neighbor.

It was probably this sense that he was still needed that sustained his conviction that divine providence would ensure his imminent release (Phil 2:24). At the same time, he was aware that all the people in the praetorium with whom he had contact were convinced that he was neither a revolutionary nor a criminal (Phil 1:13). As soon as he was released, Paul planned to go to Philippi (Phil 2:23–24). But at the same time, he had to prepare for the possibility of being expelled from the city of Ephesus, just as he had been previously from the city of Philippi, since he was not a citizen with guaranteed legal rights. As a Jew, he could only be represented in civil society by the *politeuma*, the guild that officially represented the Jewish community. A word from this guild, and Paul could be cast out by his own people.

b. Opposition at Ephesus

Finally, once released, Paul was permitted to remain in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8). He did not carry out his plan to go to Philippi. That city was still on his itinerary when he wrote 1 Cor 16:5, but a sudden deterioration of the situation in Corinth required his presence there. It was only on his return journey, while passing through Macedonia, that he finally returned to Philippi (2 Cor 1:16). Paul remained in Ephesus because of the difficult situation facing the local community. His imprisonment had divided the church into three factions (Phil 1:14–15). One group, terrified, remained silent. Its members were no doubt wondering whether it was wise to remain Christians. The majority, on the other hand, became even more active in missionary work. This group was not homogeneous. According to Paul, the preaching of one faction was inspired by envy, rivalry, selfish ambition, duplicity, a desire to harm Paul, and marked by hypocrisy. Yet he does not accuse them of preaching another Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 11:4). The preaching of the others, on the contrary, was based on kindness and love, and was characterized by truth.

Why was the preaching of one of the factions inspired by a desire to harm Paul? Let us recall that Prisca and Aquila had been at work in Ephesus for a year before Paul’s arrival. When Paul finally arrived, some likely perceived him as an intruder who had taken up too much space. His imprisonment provided an opportunity to make him feel that he was not necessary to community life and the church’s mission. We cannot accuse Prisca and Aquila of being the source of this resentment, since Paul would later praise them when he wrote his letter to the Romans (16:3–4). It is possible that the source of this resentment was the attention Paul had given to the church in Philippi during his stay in Ephesus. The Ephesians knew that Paul was seething with anxiety over the persecuted church in Philippi and that he desperately needed someone to go to Macedonia and report on the community’s situation. But they considered the problems in Philippi not serious enough to justify the presence of a mediator like Paul. Why, the believers in Ephesus argued, should they interrupt a fruitful missionary work in their own city simply to satisfy Paul’s desire for information? On the contrary, wasn’t it selfish of him to prioritize his own comfort over the spread of the Gospel? His outburst of anger betrayed a stubbornness that could not bear being thwarted. If other outbursts of this kind had occurred as he sought to establish his authority in Ephesus, the community’s natural reluctance to accept a newcomer would have intensified. The hostility Paul provoked was not solely due to his theological positions; his own character traits also played a significant role.

c. Tensions at Philippi

Paul’s openness about his personal experiences—to the point of revealing his feelings so candidly to his friends—is quite remarkable, yet understandable at this stage of his career. For Letter B was addressed to a church itself plagued by a conflict of personalities, particularly between Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2). These two women had participated in the spread of the Gospel alongside Paul (Phil 4:3), and of course, their talents and commitment had earned them positions of authority in the nascent church. And it is reasonable to assume that they had their

supporters, and perhaps each led a house church, like Phoebe in Cenchreae (Rom 16:1–2). Their competitive attitude endangered the unity of the young church.

Paul therefore issues a call to unity: “Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (Phil 2:3). One might wonder how the Philippians received this call, knowing how poorly Paul himself took it when people disagreed with him in Ephesus? Was he not contradicting himself when he wrote: “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice” (Phil 4:9)? Perhaps he downplayed these contradictions by telling himself: “The fact remains that, in any case, whether in *pretense* or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed. And I rejoice in this; indeed, I will continue to rejoice in it” (Phil 1:18). But this thought was at odds with his assertion that the effectiveness of gospel preaching required that it be embodied and reflected by the one who preaches it (1 Thess 1:6–8; Phil 2:14–16).

d. A Liturgical Hymn

Further evidence of Paul’s self-centeredness can be found in his citation of a magnificent Christological hymn, Philippians 2:6–11, which may constitute the most damning—albeit implicit—condemnation of his self-centered attitude. This hymn stands apart from its context and originates from a pre-existing document. Its elements can be grouped into three stanzas.

I	v. 6a v. 6b v. 7a v. 7b	Who being in the form of <u>God</u> Did not claim <u>godly</u> treatment But he emptied <i>himself</i> Taking the form of a servant.
II	v. 7c v. 8a v. 8b v. 8c	Being born in the likeness of <u>men</u> And being found in shape as a <u>man</u> He humbled <i>himself</i> Becoming obedient unto death.
III	v. 9a v. 9b v. 10a v. 11a	Therefore God super-exalted him And gave him the supreme name So that at Jesus’ name every knee should bow And every tongue confess ‘Jesus Christ is Lord’.

Such a perfect structure did not arise by accident. The beautiful balance of the first two stanzas is deliberate. The two mentions of God in the first stanza are paired with the two mentions of men in the second stanza. In the third line of both stanzas, the verb is followed by a reflexive pronoun, the meaning of which is explained in the fourth line. The humiliation of the first two stanzas leads to the exaltation of the third. In this stanza, the elevation in the first line corresponds to humanity’s submission in line three. The title given to Jesus in line two is proclaimed in line four.

In the current text, this unique arrangement is disrupted by the addition of a few words: “and death on the cross” (8c), “in heaven, on earth, and under the earth” (10b), and “for the glory of God the Father” (11b)—words that are not the original author’s. Who is responsible for these additions? Probably Paul himself. This hymn was likely composed by a charismatic believer in a community that Paul himself founded, as it reflects his theology. But at the same time, Paul felt the need to complete it, as he saw certain gaps in it. From a biographical perspective, the significance of this hymn is twofold. It informs us about how Paul interacted with his communities and reveals a crucial development in his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ.

e. The Teacher Learns: Paul’s Adoption of an Adamic Christology

Paul’s message has always been very simple: all one had to do was learn what Christ had done for us and act accordingly. From there, it was up to each community to decide what that meant in practice. Paul’s conviction that the local community should be self-governing in its development is underscored by his willingness to learn from it. This is the case with the hymn that provided him with a memorable formulation of his thought, which he acknowledges by quoting it publicly. For him, it is the tangible expression of the Spirit’s action in the community, and it contributes to his vision of the community as a spiritual temple (1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19), where God’s presence is felt through the diversity of gifts (1 Cor 12–14).

The hymn’s Christology must be understood against the backdrop of the Adam narrative as filtered through wisdom literature. Already, by introducing the figure of Abraham, the Judaizers had forced Paul to reflect on Christ’s place in salvation history. The hymn will take him even further, and this will have a major influence on his subsequent soteriology.

The hymn’s Christological vision can be summarized as follows. As the righteous person par excellence, Christ was the perfect image of God. He was what Adam should have been, the inspiring illustration of what God intended a human being to be. Christ’s sinlessness gave him the right to be treated as if he were a god, that is, to enjoy the incorruptibility in which Adam was created. This right, however, he did not use to his own advantage. On the contrary he gave himself over to the consequences of a mode of existence inaugurated by fallen Adam. He freely chose the life of a slave which involved suffering and death, the state which Adam experienced as punishment.

Although in his human nature Christ was identical with other members of the human race, he in fact differed from them because he had no need to be reconciled with God. It was this which enabled him to become their saviour through obedience and death. Therefore God exalted him above all the just who were promised a kingdom, and transferred to him the title and authority which previously had been God's alone. He became the Lord, whom every voice must confess and to whom every knee must bow.

Paul will elaborate on all these ideas later. Our present life is the consequence of Adam's sin. Salvation consists in regaining the Adamic identity as embodied by Jesus when he reveals that love is the defining and essential element of true humanity.

D. The Letter of Warning (Letter C)

The Letter C (Gal 3:2–4:1) begins with three warnings: "Watch out for the dogs! Watch out for the evil workers! Watch out for the false circumcisers!" Recall that the term "dog" was used by the Jews to refer to pagans. And of course, the "circumcised" refer to the Jews. Paul is thus issuing a warning against the Jews and their dietary laws by using their own vocabulary. It is to them again that Paul alludes in Phil 3:19: "Their end is destruction; their god is their belly, and their glory is in their shame, for they set their minds on earthly things": the "belly" alludes to dietary restrictions, and "shame" alludes to the organ of circumcision. The warning against "false teachers" in Phil 3:2 refers to the Judaizers and their relentless efforts to undermine Paul's work—an effort that began in Galatia and appears to be continuing. Paul regards them as "enemies of the cross of Christ" (Phil 3:18), for by presenting Christ as merely ushering in the end times, they end up denying the salvific value of the cross. His response closely resembles that offered in his letter to the Galatians. For example, in both letters, he introduces autobiographical elements (Phil 3:4–8 || Gal 1–2), although in the first case he emphasizes his observance of the Law before finding something better, whereas in the second case he seeks to demonstrate his independence from Jerusalem and Antioch. Similarly, in both letters he contrasts justification through obedience to the Law with that given by God through faith in Christ (Phil 3:9 || Gal 2:16). In both letters, there is an exhortation to fight the good fight to put salvation into practice in order to attain the final reward (Phil 3:10–16 || Gal 5–6). Finally, it should be noted that in both letters Paul exhorts his audience to imitate him (Phil 3:17 || Gal 4:12).

When did Paul become aware of the threat posed by the Judaizers in Philippi? It is highly likely that he was informed by his supporters from Galatia of the Judaizers' plan to also travel to Philippi and to the other churches he had founded. From that point on, he must have been monitoring the progress of their activities.

Chapter 10: Contemplation at Colossae p. 231-251

Paul's strategy during the two years and three months he spent in Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10) had two aspects. On the one hand, he remained in the city to devote himself to building up the community; on the other hand, he took the opportunity to maintain contact with the other churches he had founded. This strategy required the church to be apostolic by spreading the gospel throughout the surrounding area. He therefore relied on others to go out and preach beyond the urban centers, following the Roman roads that radiated out from this capital of Asia. Thus, some followed the northern roads leading to Smyrna and Pergamum ([see map](#)). Others took the northeastern route toward Philadelphia, Sardis, and Thyatira. Still others took the main eastward road that led them to Magnesia and Tralles. Someone like Epaphras went further, toward his hometown of Colossae, in the Lycus Valley. To get there, he took the Roman road built by Manius Aquillius, proconsul of Asia from 129 to 126 BC: it first follows the Meander River from Ephesus for 80 km, crosses it via a bridge at Antioch-on-the-Meander, continues along the south bank until it is blocked by the Lycus, then branches southward to Laodicea and on to Colossae.

A. The Lycus Valley

Near the point where the Lycus River joins the Meander River lies Hierapolis, where mineral-rich hot water flows down the slope. This city, along with its neighbor Laodicea (located 10 kilometers away, on the other side of the river), did not appear on the historical scene until the Hellenistic period. The oldest documented city in the valley is Colossae, located 18 kilometers upstream from Laodicea. The double "ss" in its name is thought to be a remnant of a pre-Greek language. Herodotus and Xenophon mention it in the 5th century BC as an important and prosperous city.

The virtual monopoly that Colossae enjoyed over the exploitation of the valley's natural resources was threatened in the 3rd century BC, when the Seleucid monarchs intervened to establish new commercial centers. Antiochus I Soter (281–261 BC) elevated Hierapolis to the status of a city, and his son Antiochus II Theos (261–246 BC) granted the same privilege to a settlement named Diospolis/Rhoas, which he renamed Laodicea in honor of his wife. In 220 BC, a man named Achaeus raised the banner of rebellion in Laodicea against Antiochus III the Great (233–187 BC). The uprising failed, but to prevent any recurrence, around 213 BC, Antiochus III settled 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon and its environs in Phrygia and Lydia. It would be highly surprising if a significant number of these settlers had not established themselves in the Lycus Valley. A century and a half later, the Jewish population was substantial. In 62 BC, the district of which Laodicea was the capital had at least 11,000 adult Jewish men. About twenty years later, the authorities in Laodicea assured the Roman authorities that the Jews would not be hindered in the practice of their religion. The presence of a Jewish community originating from Babylon is essential to understanding the problems Paul and Epaphras had to face.

Despite its age, Colossae did not enjoy certain advantages possessed by its younger rivals. Laodicea was the district capital, as well as a financial and tax center. Inevitably, its recreational infrastructure was superior to that of the surrounding area; gladiatorial combat was documented there. Hierapolis undoubtedly benefited from a share of this tourist market. The benefits of the natural thermal baths were enhanced tenfold by the medicinal properties of the water and attracted lovers of luxury and well-being from far and wide. Colossae's decline in prosperity is strikingly illustrated by the scarcity of visible remains, compared to the vast ruins of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Strabo wrote: "If there is one country prone to earthquakes, it is Laodicea" ([Geography](#) 12.8.16). We know that major earthquakes struck during the reign of Augustus, and again in 60 CE, as Tacitus reports: "In the province of Asia, one of its most famous cities, Laodicea, was destroyed by an earthquake that year and rebuilt by its own means, without any subsidy from Rome." The revival of Hierapolis is attested by the presence of a bishop in the early 2nd century AD, led by Papias. Colossae, on the other hand, fell into oblivion.

At their peak, these cities thrived on wool. The Lycus Valley was a vast pasture where numerous flocks grazed. Its inhabitants carved out a unique niche in the textile market thanks to the quality of their products. According to Strabo, "the region of Laodicea produces excellent sheep, not only for the softness of their wool, which even surpasses that of Miletus, but also for its raven-black color, so that the Laodiceans derive splendid income from them, just as the neighboring Colossians do thanks to the color that bears the same name" ([Geography](#) 12.8.6).

B. Missionary Strategy

When Paul traveled through Asia Minor for the second time, his destination was Ephesus, and he did not seek to establish new communities. Where, then, did he meet Epaphras, a native of Colossae (Col 4:12)? This meeting may have taken place along the way or in Ephesus, since Epaphras was involved in the textile trade. But regardless of where they met, Paul must have trained him in Ephesus, as was his custom when delegating the mission to other cities. For, from his own experience, he knew the difficulty of arriving in a foreign city where he knew no one. Moreover, he needed to find a job in a supportive environment that would allow him to preach. What he had experienced in Corinth—where he could count on the presence of Prisca and Aquila, who provided him with a base and a list of contacts—now guided his missionary strategy. That is why he had left them in Ephesus to prepare for his return from Jerusalem, and later he would send them to Rome to prepare for his arrival. And he did the same with others. And sending missionaries who were already familiar with the area had a great advantage. This was the case with Epaphras, a native of Colossae, who had come to the capital of Asia on business. Upon returning home, he found a network of acquaintances woven from long-standing family, social, and professional ties. He did not have to look for work. He was known and trustworthy. The respect he had earned ensured that he would always find a willing ear to listen to his first, hesitant sermons. The freedom Epaphras enjoyed to travel to Ephesus to seek Paul's counsel when problems arose in Colossae suggests that he was self-employed.

The events surrounding Colossae lead us to the question: How did the slave Onesimus, a Gentile (Philemon 1:10), learn of Paul's influence on his master and where he could find him in a place as far away as Ephesus? It was likely through Epaphras, who probably converted Philemon, his wife Apphia, and Archippus (Philemon 1:1). Together they became the core of a house church (Philemon 1:2), the first of a group that constituted "the church in Colossae." Philemon's social status is inferred from the fact that he owned at least one slave and possessed a house large enough to accommodate the community. According to Paul's missionary strategy, Epaphras was responsible for recruiting one or two people who could provide a place for the young community. Nympha may have played this role in Laodicea, where she became the leader of a house church (Col 4:15). In the salutation of the letter to Philemon, the latter is called a "fellow worker" and Archippus a "fellow soldier." This indicates that they were deeply committed to the development of the Christian faith in Colossae.

Assuming that the letter to Philemon was written before the one to the Colossians, we note a change in Archippus's situation. Indeed, in the letter to Philemon, he is one of the recipients. But in the letter to the Colossians (4:17), Paul writes, "Tell Archippus," as if Archippus were no longer a member of the Christian community in Colossae. What happened? Here is a possible sequence of events. Onesimus had seriously offended his master Philemon. Epaphras sent him to Ephesus to seek Paul's mediation in the dispute between him and Philemon. Although not a Christian, Onesimus, like all servants, was well acquainted with the composition of the small community that gathered at his master's house. After his baptism (Philemon 10; cf. 1 Cor 4:15), the importance of Philemon and Archippus's active missionary role became clear to him. He informed Paul, who had to flatter Philemon to win his favor. Even before he had finished his letter, Epaphras arrived and was arrested by the Romans because of his official ties to Paul. In addition to informing Paul of the false teachings circulating in Colossae, he spoke with sadness about Archippus. Given the gravity of the theological situation, it does not seem sufficient to simply assume that Archippus was less active than before. The injunction "Tell Archippus" (Col 4:17) makes sense only if he had left the community and had not heard the letter during its public reading (Col 4:16). Had he been led astray by the false teachers to the point of no longer finding the Church's liturgy satisfying? Only an affirmative answer explains the urgency of the letter to the Colossians. If a leader of Archippus's caliber had been seduced by esoteric teaching, the danger to the other members of the community was very real. It was imperative to act without waiting for the release of Paul or Epaphras.

C. Paul's Apostolic Office

Biblical scholars are divided on the authenticity of the Letter to the Colossians. Those who deny its authenticity point to a different style. This overlooks the fact that Paul often relied on co-authors or secretaries. Personal elements are too readily attributed to a pseudepigraphical style, such as:

- “As for my situation, you will receive all the news from Tychicus, the brother whom I love, the faithful minister, my fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you specifically to give you news of us and to encourage you” (Col 1:7–8)
- “For I want you to know what a fierce struggle I am waging for you and for those in Laodicea” (Col 2:1)
- “Finally, tell Archippus: Take care of the ministry you have received in the Lord, and strive to fulfill it well.
- Here is my own greeting, written by my own hand, Paul’s: Remember my chains” (Col 4:17–18)

If we take these autobiographical elements seriously, we must date this letter to the year 53, during Paul’s imprisonment in Ephesus.

To justify the authenticity of the Letter to the Colossians, one must show that the differences between the letters written during this period are not so great and can be easily explained by the circumstances. Let us begin with Paul’s perception of his sufferings and his role as an apostle. Biblical scholars who reject the authenticity of the Letter to the Colossians find that its presentation of the vicarious value of Paul’s sufferings and his role as an apostle as universal and unique is incompatible with his historical role. Let us examine these arguments.

Let us consider Paul’s role. The remark that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing “throughout the whole world” (Col 1:6) is simply a reflection on the success of the mission among the Gentiles, and in no way implies that Paul was solely responsible for it. On the contrary, it is a demonstration of the power of God’s word, a genuinely Pauline theme (cf. 1 Thess 1:5; 2:13). When Paul writes: “the Gospel you have heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a minister,” we note the absence of the definite article before the word “minister,” an indication that Paul is but one minister among many. Finally, a phrase like “instructing everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ” simply means that Paul’s message is addressed to everyone.

We tend to forget that the letter to the Colossians is addressed to a church that Paul did not found. It was written only because Epaphras, being in prison, was unable to return there. Who was supposed to write this letter? Epaphras would have been a logical candidate. But faced with a delicate situation, he likely lacked the necessary skill. Paul preferred to rely on Timothy. The sometimes universal tone of this letter can be explained by the fact that Paul had no personal involvement with this church. He therefore had to invoke his apostolic responsibility to justify his concern for the church in Colossae.

Finally, let us address the question of Paul’s sufferings, to which the letter would seem to ascribe a substitute value. The problem arises when Col 1:24 is mistranslated as follows: “Now I am rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” This raises the question: in what way are Christ’s sufferings imperfect, and thus in need of completion; and how do Paul’s sufferings complete them? All these difficulties fade away when we respect the order of the Greek words: “I am completing what is lacking in Christ’s-afflictions-in-my-flesh for the sake of his body.” Paul is not speaking of Christ’s sufferings, but of his own, which in a certain sense are also Christ’s. In a previous letter he wrote: “I live, yet it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” He was aware that his sufferings, which he experienced in communion with Christ, would continue in his service to the Church. His imprisonment dramatized this commitment to Christ. Thus, Col 1:24 simply expresses this theme in a Christological manner.

In short, the Letter to the Colossians is authentically Pauline.

D. The Cosmic Christ

The hymn in Colossians 1:15–20 gives us a sense of what was happening in the Christian community in Colossae. This is because didactic hymns were part of the liturgy (see Colossians 3:16). Here, Paul quotes one of these hymns. It consists of two stanzas, each with four lines.

I	v. 15a	Who is (the) image of the invisible God
	v. 15b	First-born of all creation
	v. 16a	For in him were created all things
	v. 16f	All things through him and to him were created
II	v. 18b	Who is (the) beginning
	v. 18c	First-born from the dead
	v. 19	For in him all the Fullness was pleased to dwell
	v. 20a	And through him to reconcile all things to him.

The first two lines of each stanza are statements that are subsequently justified by the last two lines. Such perfect balance is the hallmark of creative work. The elements in the current text of the letter that disrupt this balance must have been added later. This is the same phenomenon we noted in Philippians 2:6–11. Let us compare the additions in the two hymns.

Colossiens 1	Philippiens 2
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v. 16b	In heaven and on earth	v. 10b	in heaven, on earth, and under the earth
v. 16c	visible and invisible		
v. 16d	whether thrones or domination		
v. 16e	or principalities or powers		
v. 17	And he is before all things and all things in him hold together		
v. 18a	And he is the head of the body, the church		
v. 18d	that he might in everything become pre-eminent		
v. 20b	making peace by the blood of his cross through him	v. 8c	even death on a cross
v. 20c	whether those on earth or those in heaven	v. 10b	in heaven, on earth, and under the earth
		v. 11b	to the glory of God the Father

The similarities are quite clear:

- i. The editor emphasizes the manner of Christ's death
- ii. He also insists on restricting the meaning of "all things" to intelligent beings

In the case of the hymn in the Epistle to the Philippians, the author responsible for the additions is clearly Paul. For, apart from the evangelists, terms such as "cross" and "crucify" are practically exclusive to Paul throughout the New Testament. Thus, one might think at first glance that the hymn in the letter to the Colossians is Paul's work, with its emphasis on the "blood of Christ" (Col 1:20b) and the fruits of the resurrection (Col 1:18c). Furthermore, when considering the additions, those in the letter to the Colossians are far more numerous than those in the letter to the Philippians. This suggests that the original hymn in Philippians was closer to Paul's theology than the one brought from Colossae by Epaphras. It also implies that if Paul accepted the latter, he had a specific intention.

a. The Original Hymn

The basic theme of the original hymn is obviously the mediation of Christ, first in creation and then in reconciliation. God is mentioned explicitly only as the referent of 'image', but he is certainly evoked by the passive verbs in verse 16a and 16f, and possibly may be the subject of 'was pleased' (v. 19). The creative power of God is revealed in the action of his chosen instrument, and thereby Christ is exalted above all other beings.

In the first strophe there is no real difference between the formulae 'in him' and 'through him'; the former can be instrumental, and is to balance 'in him' in the second strophe (v. 19) where, however, the meaning is different. On his first reading Paul may have understood 'image of God' in the light of his Adamic Christology based on Genesis 1:27, but that would have quickly been corrected. The combination of 'image' with 'firstborn of all creation' is more likely to have evoked the figure of Wisdom in the sapiential writings, notably Wisdom 7:22-26; 8:6; 9: 9. Paul after all was a child of the Hellenistic synagogue. The ambiguity of 'first-born of all creation' is remarkable: is he of or above creation? The emphasis on 'all creation' and 'all things' makes the cosmic dimension unambiguous. The participation of Christ in the act of creation extended to the totality of being. But in what sense? The context is of no help, no more than it is in answering the question arising from the one element which does not fit the sapiential background, namely, the presentation of all reality as directed, 'to him'. What precisely does this mean? That obscurity was probably intended by the author(s).

In the second strophe 'beginning' again evokes Wisdom (Prov 8: 22), but leaves vague the sense in which Christ vanquished death. The original author may have thought in terms of immortality, in keeping with the sapiential inspiration of his approach, but the formulation does not exclude resurrection. Christ's being the first to experience life after death is due to a divine gift. The formula 'to be pleased to dwell' occurs regularly in the Old Testament with God as subject, e.g. 'the mountain in which God was pleased to dwell' (LXX Ps 69:17). Why the surrogate 'Fullness' should have been used here is unclear. Perhaps the author felt it would be more appropriate to the cosmic dimension of his theme, or feared that the Old Testament formula would be misunderstood. Those coming from a Jewish background would never have taken divine indwelling to mean that the person or place was divinized. A pantheist from Phrygia, however, would have gone away with a very different impression. Christ's salvific mission is evoked only in the last line and by the verb 'to reconcile', which for the first time introduces a hint of tension within creation.

The hymn is a perfect example of what Paul calls 'beguiling, persuasive speech' (Col 2:4). Formal beauty clothes an abstract vision of Christ, which is allusive rather than explicit. The lapidary phrases are redolent of profundity, but yield no clear understanding. The pervasive ambivalence indicates that a univocal meaning was not intended. The hymn could be sung or recited by all believers (Col 3:16) in the belief that they were articulating a mystery beyond them. The initiated could debate the questions that still test the ingenuity of exegetes. In opposition to the hymn cited in Philippians 2: 6-11, nothing in the original hymn betrays Pauline roots. The preaching of Epaphras has been divested of realism by being transposed into a loftier and colder dimension.

b. Paul's revision

Even though the hymn emphasized aspects of Jesus' titles that Paul himself would not have chosen to highlight, he could not reject it outright because of its roots in the revelation to his people. This demonstrates a certain flexibility on his part, as does his acceptance of the concept of "fullness," to the point that he later uses it in Col 2:9: "For in him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily"; by using the explanatory genitive "of the Godhead," he shows that he correctly understood the role of this term in the hymn, and by adding the term "bodily," he directs attention to the physical existence of the one who is now the risen Lord (cf. Col 1:22). It was important for Paul to avoid dissociating Jesus of Nazareth from Christ. This phrase from Col 2:9 also indicates how Paul understands the expression "the Fullness was pleased to dwell" from the hymn, i.e., in the Jewish manner, and not in the manner of John's Prologue.

Paul's revisions to the hymn contain both negative and positive elements: He must restore the spiritual world to its proper place and reestablish Christ in his essential role. Thus, by inserting 1:16b–3:20c, Paul restricts the meaning of "all things" to angelic and human beings. The prominence given to angelic powers must be understood in light of the reference to the "worship of angels" (Col 2:18). He must address a situation where some Colossians were being led to place excessive importance on visions of God's throne surrounded by adoring angels. For him, such an invitation into a totally inaccessible world compromised the primacy and centrality of Christ in the real world. Skillfully, he uses the creative dimension of the hymn to emphasize that, as the one responsible for the coming of the spiritual powers, Christ was infinitely superior to them (Col 2:10).

Another addition by Paul—"those on earth or those in heaven" (1:20c)—runs parallel to the other addition "in heaven and on earth" (1:16b), but reverses the order, so that "heaven" occupies the final position. In doing so, Paul corrects the hymn by asserting that it is not only humans who need reconciliation, but also the angels of heaven. Consequently, it is unlikely that the fallen angels would be satisfactory mediators between humanity and God.

In addition to correcting the Colossians' perception of the heavenly realm, Paul directs their attention to the manner of Christ's accomplishment with this phrase: "Making peace through the blood of his cross through him" (1:20b); it is important to him that redemption was accomplished in history through the suffering of the agony. The expression "making peace" likely refers to tensions within the church in Colossae, as he returns to it later in his letter with phrases such as "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (3:15), "forgive one another" (3:13), "closely united in love" (2:2), "clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (3:14).

The theme of unity also appears in his additions in 1:17–18a. The phrase "And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (1:17) must be interpreted in light of what follows: "And he is the head of the body, the church" (1:18a). This is the logical continuation of his insight in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus," which now leads him to write in Colossians 3:11: "There is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, or free, but Christ is all and in all." This vision of the church as a "body" may have come from his reflections before the temples of Asclepius scattered throughout the eastern Mediterranean, where one could see ceramic representations of the various body parts that had been healed. Moreover, these temples were located in places where the air and water were pure. Paul likely realized that the members, like a leg, could only be a leg by being part of the body. Thus, a believer was truly alive only by belonging to Christ as his member (Col 2:6, 13; 3:4). This line of thought is further developed: "They are not attached to the head, from whom the whole body, supplied and held together by joints and ligaments, grows as God causes it to grow" (Col 3:19); the term "head" should be understood as synonymous with "source."

Another characteristic of the Letter to the Colossians is the presentation of the gospel (Col 1:5, 23) as a "mystery" (Col 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3), a theme that recurs in 1 Cor 2:6–9. The language is certainly inspired by the philosophical approach that was in vogue in Colossae (2:4, 8, 18). But precisely, Paul intends to show that "the mystery" is no longer a mystery. The revelation that Jews and Gentiles were striving to find is no longer a secret. It has been revealed by Christ and in him (1 Cor 1:27; 2:2; 4:3). The richness of assured understanding, wisdom, and knowledge is not acquired through contemplation of an illusory, spiritual, heavenly world, but through meditation on Christ and commitment to him (1 Cor 2:2–3). Later, Paul would express the same idea by presenting Christ as "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24).

E. Eschatology and Ethics

Despite appearances, it is future eschatology that dominates the Letter to the Colossians: "the hope of glory" (1:27), "When Christ, your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in full glory" (3:4), "to present you before him holy, blameless, and beyond reproach [for the final judgment]" (1:22). It is in this context that we must interpret the elements of eschatology already realized, such as "with him you have also been raised" (2:12), "Since you have been raised with Christ" (3:1), "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:3). Paul insists that grace had brought about a fundamental change and that the fullness of Christ had accomplished what is essential, and the spiritual powers could add nothing to it.

As he had done in 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12, but this time at greater length and more explicitly (Colossians 3:1–4:6), Paul reminds the believers that their way of life must change radically. His pastoral experience had made him less naive about human behavior. Moreover, the situation in Colossae was complicated by the fact that some members of the church were drawn to excessive ritualism and ascetic rigor (2:16–23), and looked down on those who did not share their views.

The emphasis on Jewish observances—“matters of food and drink, a festival, a new moon, or a Sabbath” (2:16)—reveals that the situation in Colossae was similar to that in Galatia. Yet Paul’s response is quite different.

Letter to the Galatians	Letter to the Colossians
Paul appeals to faith and the Law	No reference to faith and the Law
The intruders insisted on their mandate from the church in Antioch to correct the gospel taught by Paul, directly challenging his authority	Nothing of the sort in Colossae, where the church was not founded under the auspices of Antioch, and where Paul’s authority is not at stake
The intruders were Christian brothers who had turned into proselytizers	These were simply believers who had been drawn to a form of esoteric Jewish teaching circulating in Colossae and who wanted to share their new understanding of things
The intruders reduced Christ’s role to almost nothing	The Colossians exalted Christ’s mediatorial role
The intruders had a dogmatic attitude toward the Law	The Colossians had an ascetic and mystical piety typical of Jewish apocalyptic thought, whose roots were more emotional than theological
Paul had to counter a very real threat, presented as a matter of principle	In Colossae, this was a passing fad whose adherents sought “heavenly ascension through various ascetic practices involving abstinence from food and drink, as well as scrupulous observance of Jewish festivals. These experiences of heavenly ascension culminated in a vision of the throne and in the worship rendered by the angelic hosts surrounding it.” Jewish practices were important, not in and of themselves, but as means to an end.

Faced with so many differences, Paul could not use the same tactics in Colossae as he had in Galatia. Instead of dealing with a coherent, well-established doctrine, Paul was now confronted with apocalyptic visions that no one could verify, and so his task was to bring the believers back to reality. The most effective tactic was not to confront the mystics head-on, but to gradually introduce subtle changes, the cumulative effect of which would completely undermine their teaching. He relied on the calming effect of a serene exercise of authority.

F. The Household Code

If it were up to him, Paul would never have addressed the issue of the code of domestic life (Col 3:18–4:1), nor would he address it again in his subsequent letters. For this series of paired injunctions (wives-husbands / children-parents / slaves-masters) did not merely represent the conventional morality of society, a social grouping that, for Paul, was the antithesis of the Church, but it categorically contradicted the structure of the Church “where there can be neither Greek nor Jew, neither circumcised nor uncircumcised, neither slave nor free” (Col 3:11). If Paul nevertheless addresses this issue, it is because he wanted the Colossians to abandon the mystical world of angels and return to the real world marked by interpersonal relationships, including the three pairs we have just mentioned.

The relationships that stand out most in Paul’s text, both qualitatively and quantitatively, concern slaves (Col 3:22–25). In fact, he is merely reflecting his usual attitude toward slaves who had converted to the Christian faith. He was not interested in their manumission, but expected them to display and share the love characteristic of their new life. There was no question of changing the social order. The case of Onesimus is a fine example: Paul does not ask that he be freed, but simply that he not be treated “as a slave.” When he later addresses certain issues related to slavery in 1 Cor 7:17–24, he writes:

- i. No change should be initiated simply for the sake of change
- ii. Social change should be initiated only to compensate for human weakness;
- iii. A social change brought about by factors beyond one’s control may be accepted

In Col 3:22–25, Paul’s focus is on the authenticity of the slave’s life. This could be compared to that of a child who had no control over his life. But the slave was responsible for his attitude. Moreover, what Paul did not want was for the slave to merely obey orders to the letter while anger raged within his heart. For him, human behavior served as a testimony in the eyes of others.

G. Did Paul Visit Colossae?

While he was in prison in Ephesus, Paul had planned two visits as soon as he was released: one to Philippi (Phil 1:26; 2:24) and another to Colossae (Philem 1:22). But he abandoned his plan to go to Philippi, even though it was still on his schedule in the year 54 when he wrote 1 Cor 16:5. What about the announced visit to Colossae?

Paul was probably released from prison at the end of the summer of 53. But the situation of the church in Ephesus, particularly the opposition to his leadership, prevented him from leaving the city. In any case, a round trip to Philippi would have required at least a month, and thus brought him too close to the closure of sea travel and the risk of being stranded in Macedonia. Furthermore, the conflict between Evodia and Syntyche did not absolutely require his presence. The situation in Colossae was different, as certain doctrinal issues were at stake and Paul needed to know whether he had successfully dealt with the false teachers. On the other hand, he did not need to go to Colossae himself, as he had two sources of information: Tychicus, a permanent member of his entourage, and Epaphras, who had certainly returned to Colossae after his release from prison and could return to Ephesus with news in less than two weeks. So what decision did Paul make? In his deliberations, one factor was certainly decisive: his conviction regarding the autonomy of local churches. Furthermore, in Colossae, he knew the people only by reputation and had not met any of them personally (Col 2:1); this meant that a visit there would require time to get to know them, perhaps forcing him to spend the winter there. After careful consideration, he likely judged it best to remain in Ephesus, his base for spreading the gospel, especially since he had just addressed an issue in Corinth through his [Previous Letter](#) (1 Cor 5:9). Furthermore, he had not formally promised to visit them and had not planned to stay there with Epaphras. The request to Philemon to set aside a room for him (Philemon 1:22) may have been of a private nature. So if Paul decided to wait for reports from Tychicus or Epaphras, we will unfortunately never know what news they brought back.

Chapter 11: Confusion at Corinth p. 252-290

We noted earlier that Paul first arrived in Corinth in the early spring of the year 50, and the community he founded there reflected the best of that bustling, dynamic city. Its members were committed and enthusiastic, but at the same time, they were the ones who exasperated Paul the most: almost everything he taught them took on a somewhat distorted form among them. All of this forced Paul to reflect even more deeply on a number of issues. Moreover, the turbulent nature of this community pushed his relationship with them to its limits, revealing aspects of his personality that had not been seen before. The intense emotions he experienced became like a prism through which the facets of his character refracted into vivid colors. Thus, the letters to the Corinthians reveal Paul's soul with greater depth than the letter to the Galatians did.

A. Letters to Corinth

The depth of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians is illustrated by the number of letters he wrote to them—more than to any other church: the New Testament canon lists two letters, but these letters refer to two others—first, the [Previous Letter](#) (1 Cor 5:9), and second, the [Painful Letter](#) (2 Cor 2:4). But since the late 18th century, doubts have been raised about the integrity of the two canonical letters to the Corinthians. Over time, the theories that dissected these two letters have become increasingly complex. We will return to this.

a. 1 Corinthians

A distinctive feature of this letter is the lack of logical order in its content, which explains the impression of disorder; for some, this suggests that several letters have been combined. The key to understanding the structure of this letter is to recognize the different sources of information that prompted Paul to respond: first, the people of Chloe (1 Cor 1:11); then, the letter sent by the Corinthians (1 Cor 7:1); and finally, a delegation from the community including Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17). Once this is established, everything becomes clear, for Paul responds in turn to the issues raised by these three sources. Consequently, it is not surprising that the majority of biblical scholars uphold the unity of 1 Corinthians.

b. 2 Corinthians

When we take a broad look at 2 Corinthians, we notice a sharp divide between chapters 1–9 and chapters 10–13. It is impossible that Paul would have followed his celebration of his reconciliation with the church in Corinth (chapters 1–9) with a torrent of reproaches and sarcastic self-justification (chapters 10–13). Biblical scholars who have tried to demonstrate that these two sections were originally a single letter have failed to provide convincing arguments. Other biblical scholars have used rhetorical arguments to assert that the section comprising chapters 1–7 forms a complete whole, and that chapters 8–9 are superfluous and therefore belong to a separate letter, being too long to be a postscript. This argument is contradicted by Cicero's letter to Atticus ([Atticus](#) 12:28–29), where the postscript is longer than the letter itself. Using similar arguments, biblical scholars have claimed that chapters 8 and 9 present two different rhetorical patterns and therefore constitute two separate letters. Not only is this not the case, but it overlooks the distinctive features of Paul's style: the shift to the first-person singular at the beginning of chapter 9, combined with the structural similarity to Galatians 6:11–18—where a personal appeal gives way to profound theological argumentation—identifies chapter 9 as a personal postscript that authenticates the letter. This practice was just as common among Paul as it was among his contemporaries.

If, then, 2 Cor 1–9 and 2 Cor 10–13 constitute two letters, which was written first? First, note that some biblical scholars have identified 2 Cor 10–13 with the [Painful Letter](#). But 2 Cor 10–13 follows an attack on Paul's apostolic authority by Judaizing intruders, a subject never addressed in Paul's remarks regarding the [Painful Letter](#). Similarly, the reason for the [Painful Letter](#) was an insult hurled at Paul by an individual; this is not even mentioned in chapters

10–13. Finally, 2 Cor 10–13 was written in anticipation of an imminent visit to Corinth, Paul's third (12:14; 13:1–2), whereas the Painful Letter was composed as a substitute for a visit that Paul had promised during his second visit but subsequently declined (2 Cor 2:1–4). To summarize the various elements of this discussion, Paul wrote five letters to the Corinthians:

1. the previous letter, now lost;
2. the First Epistle to the Corinthians;
3. the Painful Letter, also lost;
4. chapters 1 through 9 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians;
5. chapters 10 through 13 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians.

The relative order of letters 1 and 2 has been established, as has that of letters 3 through 5. The only remaining question is the relationship between the First Epistle to the Corinthians and letters 3 through 5. There is a consensus among biblical scholars that 1 Cor predates the two parts of 2 Cor. The main argument is the reference to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem: in 1 Cor 16:4, Paul responds to the Corinthians' initiative by giving practical instructions, but in 2 Cor 8–9, he must rekindle their commitment. Furthermore, 1 Cor gives the impression that this is Paul's first contact with the community since its founding, and we learn that he sent Timothy to assess the situation, whereas in 1 Cor 8–9 Timothy is with him again, returning from Corinth. Finally, in 1 Cor 16:5, Paul plans to travel to Macedonia from Ephesus, whereas 2 Cor 1:16 presents a different plan in which Paul travels to Macedonia, but from Corinth.

B. The Road from Athens to the Isthmus



We need to examine Paul's first journey to Corinth in detail.

To travel from Athens to Corinth, Paul and his companions, Timothy and Silas (2 Cor 1:19), had two options: the overland route or the sea route. Ships made regular trips between Piraeus, the port of Athens, and Cenchreae, via the island of Salamis. However, delays were frequent. Bad weather, headwinds, or simply bad omens could prevent departure. The sea route could therefore take as long as the overland route, which took two days via Megara. It is highly likely that the Apostle chose the overland route.

On foot, Athens is 80 km from Corinth. For the first 22 kilometers, his route followed the Sacred Way toward Eleusis, where the great procession in honor of Demeter passed each autumn. Upon reaching the shores of the Gulf of Eleusis, he saw on his right the saltwater ponds, dedicated to the Virgin and Demeter, and the meadow of Rharia, the first place ever sown or cultivated, according to Greek legend. It is doubtful that Paul wasted time admiring the great sanctuary of Eleusis. His concern must have been to reach Megara, 19 kilometers away, before nightfall. It must have been an exceptionally long stage.

Leaving Megara, the 8-kilometer stretch of road known as the Sceironian Rocks is described as follows by Strabo:

They leave no room for a road along the sea, but the road from the Isthmus to Megara and Attica passes above them. However, the road approaches so close to the rocks that in many places it passes along the edge of precipices, because the mountain situated above them is both lofty and impracticable for roads. (Geography 9.1.4; trans. Jones)

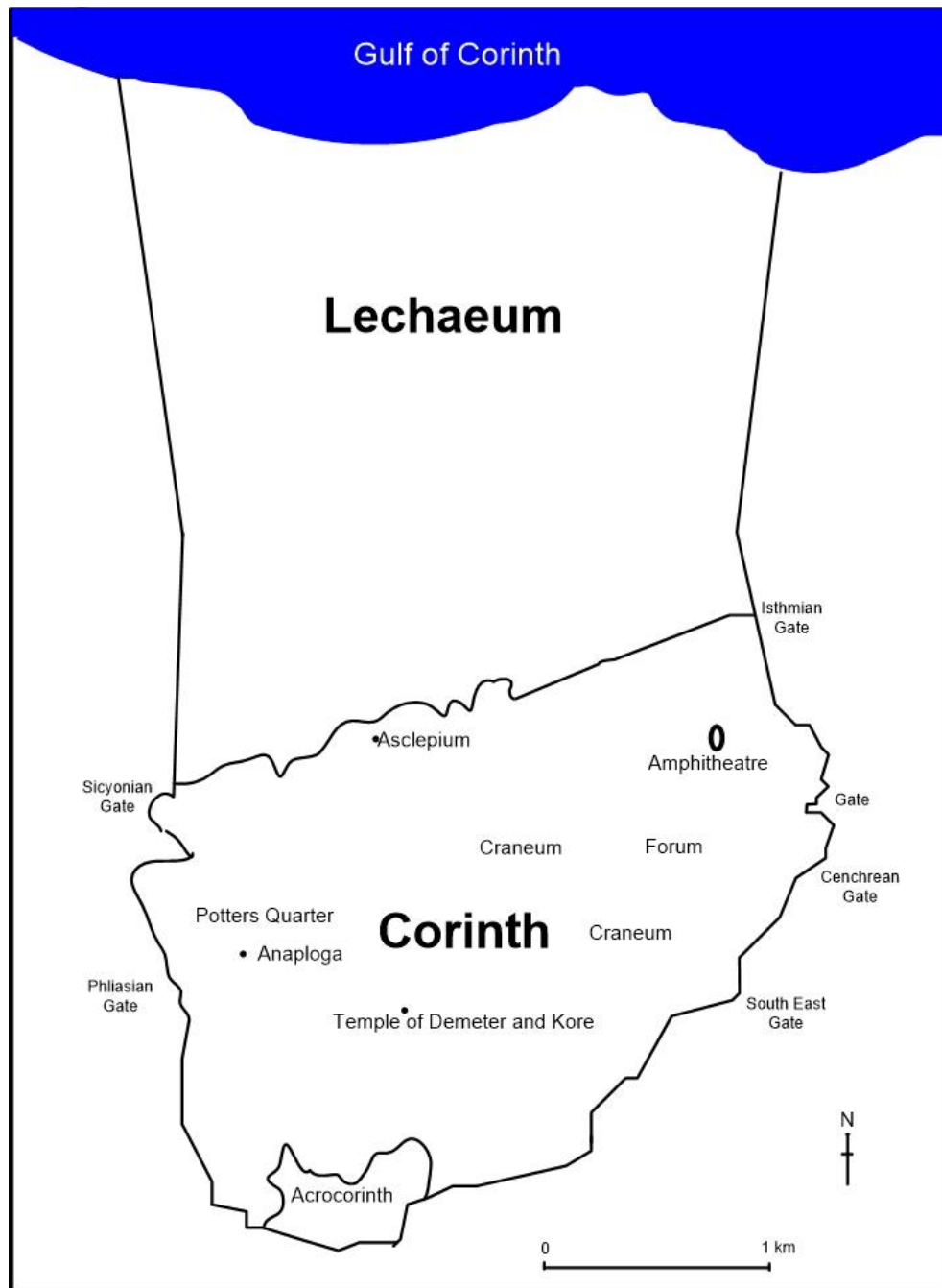
According to Pausanias the track was hewn for active men and was enlarged into a real road only by Hadrian. Its association with bandits did not end when Theseus threw Sceiron into the sea. He had been a robber who forced travellers to wash his feet and, as they finished, kicked them over the cliff. In Paul's day it was a place in which he certainly experienced 'danger from robbers ... dangers in the wilderness' (2 Cor 11: 26). Once Paul reached Crommyon (today Hagios Theodoros) he was in Corinthian territory.

At Schoenus Paul had his first experience of the dynamism of Corinth. If the isthmus was a land-bridge, permitting trade to flow easily between the Peloponnese and the Greek mainland, it was a barrier to east-west shipping, and mariners needed an alternative to the long route around the Peloponnese. As early as the sixth century BC, the Corinthians thought of cutting a canal. Like later plans, this project came to nothing, and an ingenious, provisional solution remained in place for 1,300 years. The Corinthians laid a paved road, the *diolkos* (figure on the right), to join the Corinthian and Saronic gulfs. About 400 metres of the road have been excavated on the west side of the Isthmus. The width varies from 3.4 to 6 metres. Grooves cut in the paving 1.5 metres apart guided the wheels of the wooden platform (the *holkos*), on which small boats and goods were hauled across the isthmus. Earthen tracks on either side were used by pack animals.



The noisy, restless crowd of workers thronging the street—through which Paul had to make his way—gave him his first real glimpse of what life in Corinth would be like. The city was bustling with activity. The immense volume of trade was amplified by a considerable number of travelers. Profit was easy for those willing to work hard, and fierce competition ensured the survival of the most determined. Once he had made his way through the crowd, Paul found himself in a completely different world. The road led to the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmus, with its temple, theater, and stadium. Paul could not fail to notice that the place was the site of the Isthmian Games, one of the four great Panhellenic festivals, celebrated every two years in late spring. There might still be traces of the games of the year 49, which had taken place about nine months earlier. This meant he would have little trouble finding work in Corinth. During the week of festivities, visitors flocked to the region, and all of Corinthia mobilized to serve them and celebrate with them. The former needed tents for shelter, and the latter brought stalls to display their wares. A skilled tentmaker would have no shortage of work. Repairs were just as necessary as making new tents, and the next Isthmian Games were only fifteen months away. From there, he had just ten kilometers left to the city.

C. The Narrative of Acts



Luke recounts Paul's stay in Corinth in Acts 18:1–18. But we cannot accept his account as it stands. On the one hand, we are dealing with two different textual traditions, and on the other hand, the text bears the mark of numerous editorial additions. The original account speaks only of Paul's failed attempt to convert Jews, followed by his vision of Christ who consoles him and whose protective presence is demonstrated by Gallio's refusal to hear the Jews' accusations against him. It is clear that such an account cannot reflect a stay that lasted eighteen months and produced several converts (Acts 18:18).

a. Working with Prisca and Aquilas

The first editorial addition is the introduction of Prisca and Aquila (18:2–3), which is corroborated by 1 Corinthians 16:19, showing that they were in Corinth and had a close relationship with Paul. Why did Paul go to live with this couple? According to Western tradition, Paul had previously met Aquila because he was from the same tribe, that of Benjamin. According to Alexandrian tradition, Paul joined this couple because they practiced the same trade. The Western tradition is unreliable because, lacking information, it attempts to deduce Paul's encounter with the couple

based on tribal reasons, or perhaps because it was embarrassed by Paul's manual labor, whereas the Alexandrian tradition is more solid, since the reference to the same trade has no symbolic connotation and can only be explained because this fact was well known.

b. Silas and Timothy

The second editorial addition concerns the arrival of Silas and Timothy in Corinth (Acts 18:5). According to this verse, Paul is said to have ministered there for some time before his companions arrived from Macedonia to join him. Historically speaking, it is unlikely that Paul would have left Athens for Corinth before Timothy's return from Macedonia with the news he was expecting, which would have forced Timothy to search for him in a city he did not know. 2 Cor 1:19 assures us that Silvanus and Timothy were Paul's companions from the very beginning when he arrived in Corinth. Furthermore, we must question Acts 18:5, 7, which states that Timothy arrived with funds that allowed Paul to devote himself full-time to preaching. Timothy's role was solely to strengthen the faith of the Thessalonians and to return to Paul as quickly as possible, and this was certainly not the time to go fundraising. Therefore, upon the trio's arrival in Corinth, they had to quickly find work.

c. A Change of Location

In Acts 18:7, the Western text reads: "Leaving Aquila's house, he went to the house of Justus," whereas the Alexandrian text reads: "Leaving that place [the synagogue], he went to the house of a certain Titius Justus." The first reading implies that Paul changes his residence, while the second simply states that Paul changes his place of preaching. The Western version is suspect, as it assumes a change in Paul's strategy: not only does he no longer preach to the Jews, but he no longer lives among them. In reality, it is implausible that Paul, in a symbolic gesture, would have abandoned Prisca and Aquila, a couple who were already Christians even before their arrival in Corinth. Thus, historically speaking, it can be said that as Paul's ministry expanded, particularly among the God-fearing, the hostility of the Jews intensified, and it became increasingly impossible to preach in the synagogue; he need only open his mouth to be met with shouts.

Small shops run by artisans such as Prisca and Aquila were scattered throughout the city. They lined the bustling streets and were grouped in specially designed commercial complexes, opening onto a wide covered gallery that surrounded the square on all four sides. There was no running water or toilets. In a secluded corner, a stone or brick staircase, extended by a wooden ladder, led to a mezzanine lit by a window without glass, centered above the shop's entrance and closed at night by wooden shutters. Prisca and Aquila lived on the mezzanine, while Paul slept downstairs, amid workbenches strewn with tools and rolls of leather and canvas.

The workshop was ideal for making initial contacts, especially with women. While Paul worked on a cloak, a sandal, or a belt, he had the opportunity to converse, and the conversation quickly turned into instruction (cf. 1 Thess 2:9). Subsequent meetings were easily justified by the need for new garments or other repairs. However, as his ministry grew, a more suitable location became necessary. The workshop space was so cramped that he had to stop working whenever he addressed a group, and the gathering inevitably drew the attention of passersby. The lack of privacy prevented deep discussions. Only the home of a relatively wealthy believer, with its atrium and spacious rooms, could offer him the necessary space and tranquility.

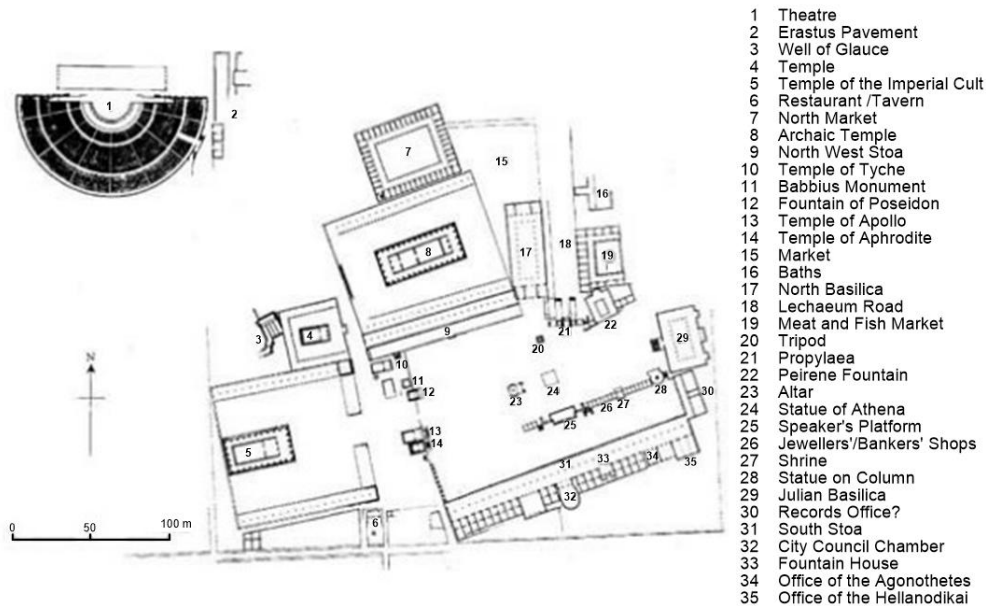
d. Many Conversions

The Western text expands on the brief reference to converts in the original text (Acts 18:18: "the brothers") by mentioning the conversion of a leading figure in the synagogue, Crispus, along with his entire household, and "a large crowd of Corinthians" (Acts 18:8). But the two events—Crispus and the large crowd—are simply juxtaposed, with no cause-and-effect relationship, since the crowd is converted by "the word of the Lord." In contrast, for the Alexandrian text, the conversion of a prominent Jewish figure enhanced the credibility of Paul's message.

The original account mentions another figure from the synagogue, Sosthenes (Acts 18:17), whom the Jews attacked after the proconsul Gallio dismissed their charges against Paul. This detail likely implies that Sosthenes subsequently became a Christian. His familiarity with the Corinthian community may explain why he is associated with Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

D. The Evangelization of Corinth

Fig.: Map of Central Corinth in the year 50



Source: C. K. Williams II, *The Corinthia in the Roman Period*, *Journal of Roman Archeology*, Sup. 8, ed. T. E. Gregory (Ann Arbor, 1993) as reproduced in J. Murphy-O'Connor, *A Critical Life*.

How long did Paul wander the streets of Corinth before meeting Prisca and Aquila? We'll never know. Perhaps they welcomed him into their workshop, not because they needed help, but because they saw his trade as common ground that would facilitate the conversion of a fellow Jew. One can then imagine their utter surprise upon discovering that they all shared the same faith in Christ.

a. The First Converts

Paul writes that "Stephanus and his household are the first fruits of Achaia" (1 Cor 16:15), meaning that he was among his first converts and one of the few whom he baptized (1 Cor 1:15). If it was Paul who made the first converts, this means that Prisca and Aquila were not very successful in their ministry. No doubt they had been traumatized by their experience in Rome and preferred to keep a low profile within the Jewish community in Corinth. Paul's arrival changed everything and gave them new momentum, so much so that they became the most committed members of the community, even risking their lives (Rom 16:4), preparing for Paul's arrival in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19) and in Rome (Rom 16:3).

When we consider that Paul worked out of a small workshop and practiced a trade that the elite despised, it is surprising to note that his first converts were members of high society. The leadership role played by Stephanas and his family implies that he was financially well-off, which enabled him to be part of the delegation sent to Ephesus (1 Cor 16:17). Another of Paul's converts is Crispus, whom Luke gives the title of *archisynagogs*, perhaps an honorary title for a benefactor of the community, suggesting that he was wealthy enough to make various donations. Similarly, Gaius (1 Cor 1:14), also mentioned in Rom 16:23 as "my host and that of the whole church," must have been wealthier than most believers to be able to host all the house-churches of Corinth in a single location.

It is probably no coincidence that Paul's first converts belonged to the wealthy class, for his practical sense allowed him to grasp that, even though the gospel is offered to all, only people with initiative, financial means, and an education could become effective assistants in its spread. Slaves could be model Christians, but they were not masters of their own time or movement. It is as if Paul had followed Jesus' method of recruitment, who, in choosing Peter and Andrew, had chosen people with a certain level of education; Andrew, with his Greek name, suggesting a bilingual family. Similarly, these two brothers, working in partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee who had employees (Mark 1:20), give us the impression that they were boat owners (Luke 5:1), and had left Bethsaida, their hometown, for Capernaum, the territory of Herod Antipas, to pay less tax on the export of their catch to Magdala. Finally, Peter and Andrew could afford to let their companions fish while they followed John the Baptist without ceasing to financially support their families.

Paul's attitude toward this core group of wealthy individuals in the Corinthian community was complex. While taking advantage of the benefits they offered him, he refused to become dependent on them. He continued to provide for himself as best he could and supplemented his income with donations from Macedonia, in order to preserve his independence (1 Cor 9:1–18; 2 Cor 11:7–9). This desire to accept only very limited offerings from the believers in Corinth would later become a source of discord.

b. Status Inconsistency

Another prominent convert in Corinth was named Erastus (Rom 16:23), whom Paul referred to as the city's *oikonomos*. Recall the discovery in Corinth, between the northern market and the theater, of an inscription carved into the pavement and dated between the years 50 and 100, which reads as follows: "Erastus, in exchange for his aedile, paved (this area) at his own expense." The absence of any mention of a father in the inscription suggests that Erastus was once a slave but is now a freedman. Clearly, Erastus was one of those enterprising freedmen who thrived in the competitive atmosphere of Corinth and who had the necessary funds to hold public office. The standard Greek translation of aedile, however, is *agoranomos*, not *oikonomos*, hence the well-founded hypothesis that the latter was the equivalent of the Latin quaestor, a lower-ranking financial position in the municipal hierarchy. Naturally, to attain a higher office, one had to have proven oneself in lower-ranking positions, and the inscriptions reveal that the office of quaestor served as a stepping stone to that of aedile, just as the latter served as a stepping stone to that of *duovir*.

Erastus was therefore at the beginning of his public career, and clearly, this career was not affected by his Christian faith. We must assume that he found a way to reconcile his monotheistic faith with his duty to participate in the worship of the city's gods and in city council meetings that involved pagan sacrifice; he was likely among those Paul refers to in 1 Cor 8:4 who had no qualms about eating meat offered to idols, since idols had no real existence.

Despite his success, Erastus likely did not feel entirely at ease among those born free. The prosperous freedman's sense of insecurity became a favorite theme in literature. The source of this insecurity lay in the bitter awareness of not being recognized for his true worth. There was a sense that contemporaries projected onto reality an unflattering image drawn from other sources. Erastus imagined that those who looked at him saw not the quaestor, but simply a former slave. However, freedmen were not the only ones to feel the unease of an ambiguous status. Phoebe of Cenchreae, although she possessed sufficient wealth to be the patroness of Paul and many others (Rom 16:2), would have been perceived first and foremost as a woman, with the social and political disadvantages that her gender entailed. The Gentile Justus experienced a sense of dissonance within his own society, which led him to attend the synagogue (Acts 18:7). Prisca and Aquila possessed the authority of recognized experts, and Crispus and Sosthenes held important positions, but to their Gentile neighbors, they were first and foremost Jews, living among them by virtue of tolerance.

One of the factors that made the Gospel appealing to these people was that it embodied the paradox they were living. Its central thesis, that the Savior of the world died under torture, echoed the contradictions of their existence. Although considered weak, they knew their own strength and could thus easily grasp the idea, revealed in the life of Christ as well as in that of Paul, that "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Christianity gave meaning to the ambiguity of their lives and, at the same time, integrated them into a society that regarded them first and foremost as human beings, all equal and respected. It offered them a space where they could flourish in complete freedom.

c. The Composition of the Community

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:26: "Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth." The "wise" refer to educated people who had a reputation for being prudent and moderate and demonstrated sound judgment in politics and business. The "powerful" refer to influential people whose opinions carried weight in civic life. The "noble" refer to those born into the wealth of the aristocracy created by the freedmen sent by Julius Caesar to found Corinth. It goes without saying that these people were a minority both in the city of Corinth and in the Christian community.

The other believers were not so fortunate, but at the same time they were not at the bottom of the social ladder. Among the unidentified members of the household of Stephanas and Crispus, there were most likely slaves (1 Cor 7:21). Despite their legal disadvantages, they enjoyed a standard of living and an education often denied to people born free, and they could exercise their talents once they were freed. Furthermore, slaves were guaranteed room and board.

Tertius's skills as a secretary (Rom 16:22) placed him on the same level as Tiron, Cicero's famous secretary. His talent made him a valuable man. If he had not already been freed, he would certainly obtain that status one day. Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17) is a nickname, "the man from Achaia," and it is therefore more likely that this name belonged to a slave rather than a free man. Clearly, this nickname was acquired outside of Achaia, and its Latin form suggests a rather western origin. In all likelihood, he had been a slave in Italy and had returned to Corinth as a freedman. His participation in the delegation to Ephesus suggests that he was a man of his own time. The same applies to Fortunatus (1 Cor 16:17). Nothing is known about Quartus (Rom 16:23); this name is common among slaves and freedmen.

There is some doubt as to whether Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (Rom 16:21) belonged to the church in Corinth: were they simply present when the Epistle to the Romans was written? This wording distinguishes them from Timothy, who is presented as Paul's collaborator. Consequently, they cannot be considered part of Paul's missionary team. A certain Sopater (perhaps a shortened form of Sosipater) of Berea appears in Acts 20:4 among those accompanying Paul to Jerusalem with the money collected for the city's poor (cf. 1 Cor 16:1-4). Like Jason, he is explicitly identified as a Jew.

The latter may be the one who welcomed Paul in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5–7). The hypothesis that these two men were entrusted with the collection for their respective churches suggests that the same is true of Lucius.

It is unlikely that Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11) were from Corinth. The issues they report did not concern matters of concern to the Corinthians themselves, such as divisions within the community. On the contrary, these were deviations from the norm that deeply affected visitors from another church—in this case, Ephesus—and which they would have been eager to discuss upon their return.

Among the members of the Corinthian church, we know the names of 16 people. Two of them (Prisca and Aquila) are married. Two are women (Prisca and Phoebe). Six are explicitly of Jewish origin (Aquila, Crispus, Prisca, Sosthenes, Jason, and Sosipater). Two are certainly Gentiles (Erastus and Justus). From these last two groups of people, one might conclude that Jewish believers were in the majority within the community. However, such an extrapolation is categorically ruled out by the nature of the issues Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians: the use of pagan courts (6:1–11); the frequenting of prostitutes (6:12–20); marriage and sexuality (7); participation in pagan temple meals (8–10); and by his explicit statements that the majority of the community had been idolatrous (6:10–11; 8:7; 12:2). The predominant group within the church in Corinth consisted of people of pagan origin belonging to various middle social classes. Only the highest (the great lords) and the lowest (the field slaves) on this scale were absent. Jews were in the minority, but at least two of them (Crispus and Sosthenes) stood out.

E. A Turbulent Community

The potential for discord within the community was evident. They differed considerably in their level of education, financial resources, religious beliefs, political skills, and, above all, their aspirations. Many of them were drawn to the church because it seemed to offer them a new realm of opportunity, where they could fully utilize the talents that society stifled. They were dynamic and ambitious people, and their motivations, often hidden, differed. A certain spirit of competition was an integral part of the church's ethos from its very beginnings.

a. The Arrival of Apollos

According to Acts 18:24–28, Apollos came to Corinth from Ephesus in the late summer of AD 51. By writing, "I planted, Apollos watered" (1 Cor 3:6), Paul confirms that Apollos carried out a ministry following his own. Paul also tells us that Apollos was with him in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:12). None of this appears in the Acts of the Apostles.

Acts 18:24–28 presents difficulties, for it states that Apollos "taught accurately what concerned Jesus," but Prisca and Aquila had to explain to him "the Way of God even more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Furthermore, if he knew only John's baptism, how could he teach accurately? This apparent inconsistency stems from Luke's theological project regarding the growth of the Church. Moreover, the very fact that Apollos is not rebaptized supports the idea that he was already a fully qualified missionary. Once the editorial additions are removed, the story of Apollos becomes perfectly clear.

Apollos would therefore be from Alexandria. If the Christian faith had reached Antioch to the north and Damascus to the northeast, there is no reason why it could not have also reached Alexandria, Egypt's great seaport. The ties between Alexandria and Jerusalem have always been very close. We must assume that merchants or pilgrims brought the Gospel to Alexandria. Apollos is described as *logos*, meaning an eloquent and educated man. Acts 18:24 presents him as an expert in the Scriptures. Now, the Jewish philosopher and theologian Philo lived in Alexandria, who presented the Law from a Hellenistic perspective. There is no doubt that he had a great influence on Apollos. Acts gives us the impression that Apollos arrived in Corinth before Paul returned to Ephesus at the end of August of the year 52, after his departure from Galatia (Acts 19:1).

This scenario easily accommodates the previous letter addressed to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:9) and written from Ephesus. The occasion was news arriving from Corinth that led Paul to write "not to associate with the sexually immoral." The simplest hypothesis regarding the bearers of the bad news is that they were Corinthian merchants who had returned to Ephesus at the start of the new trading season, in the spring of AD 53, or Apollos, who could not accept the way he had been opposed by Paul. Clearly, there was no question of divisions within the community, for Paul would certainly have addressed the subject and, in 1 Corinthians, would have reminded the Corinthians that they had disregarded his insistence on the importance of unity for the local church. Divisions must have become a problem in Corinth only after the previous letter was sent. If this is correct, Apollos's activity in Corinth must have unfolded in two phases. In the first, as reported in Acts 18:28, he was working as a missionary engaged in controversy with the Jews. Faced with the failure of this endeavor, he turned inward and became, in a sense, the theologian of the Christian community.

b. Differences within the Community

There was something anti-intellectual about Paul's preaching, for he emphasized Christ crucified as the model of authentic humanity (1 Cor 2:1–5) and was primarily concerned with the transformative power of grace (2 Cor 3:2). Apollos's presence introduced a taste for speculation and true theology into the community. By employing Philo of Alexandria's methods of interpretation and his philosophical framework, Apollos fostered intellectual growth by constructing a rich synthesis of the elements provided by Paul. Being gifted in oratory, he drew certain members of the Christian community to himself, while alienating others who insisted on the bare minimum instilled by the

founder, particularly love of neighbor. Thus the group of Apollos's followers and the group of Paul's followers were formed. Surprisingly, 1 Cor 1:12 also mentions a third group, the followers of Cephas. This group may have included Jewish converts who found it difficult to integrate into a community made up of people of pagan origin. Even though Cephas probably never set foot in Corinth, his name symbolized a type of Jewish Christian, embodied in Paul's eyes not by the conservative James, but by Peter, who, under pressure, renounced his freedom. Time had not softened the bitterness of the memory of the incident in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14).

When Paul puts these words into the mouths of the Corinthians: "I belong to Paul. – I to Apollos. – I to Cephas. – I to Christ," he is not presenting the way people identified themselves, but rather using this as a deliberate critique of their attitude—a rhetorical device of imitation to suggest a strongly condemnatory judgment. Note that the formation of these three groups was facilitated by the fact that the Corinthian church was too large—perhaps forty people—to accommodate everyone in a single house, however large it might be. Instead of lounging comfortably, some were forced to sit under the portico of the atrium. Furthermore, the unequal treatment during the liturgical meal mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 11:22 highlights another division, already suggested by the allusion to a privileged elite (1 Cor 1:26). Among the believers in Corinth, there were "the wealthy" and "the poor," and the former showed little or no interest in the latter.

F. Contacts with Corinth

At the start of the sailing season in late April 54, Chloe, a wealthy merchant from Ephesus, sent some of her employees to Corinth, where new goods had arrived from the West. It is possible that they took the initiative to contact the city's Christians, but it is more likely that Paul was the first to seize the opportunity to check in on a church he had not seen in three years. And he had a very clear idea of the problems that could arise when a church was seeking to define itself and reach full maturity. Sexual morality was certainly among the areas they had been asked to evaluate, for Paul must have been concerned about the impact of the Previous letter. The report relayed by Chloe's relatives stunned Paul. They undoubtedly emphasized the bizarre aspects—an incestuous marriage (1 Cor 5:1–8), male homosexuals presiding over the liturgy (1 Cor 11:2–16), drunkenness during the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17–34)—but there were other observations, particularly regarding factional divisions, that made Paul realize the situation in Corinth was far more complex than anything he had encountered before.

His first reaction was to send Timothy to investigate, especially since Chloe's people might have exaggerated the situation. And Timothy had already carried out a similar mission in Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1–6); he was not only trustworthy but also experienced. Given the urgency of the situation, it is highly likely that Timothy boarded one of the many ships making the journey between Ephesus and Corinth. The duration of the journey is uncertain. It depended on many factors, including fair weather, favorable winds, and auspicious omens. Two weeks for the round trip was likely the minimum for Timothy. He could hardly have spent less than fifteen days in Corinth. We can therefore reasonably assume that he was away from Paul for six weeks, probably from early May to mid-June.

At the beginning of this period, a delegation consisting of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15–17) arrived from Ephesus, bearing a letter in which the church in Corinth sought Paul's advice on several matters (1 Cor 7:1). The presence of this delegation meant that all the information Paul had hoped to obtain through Timothy was now immediately available, and from a representative source. He had access to people capable of speaking with authority about the state of the community and its problems, and thus of confirming or refuting the rumors circulating among Chloe's disciples. Paul was therefore able to formulate his response, not only to the questions the Corinthians were asking, but also to the aspects of their lives he deemed problematic. He did so in the letter we know as 1 Corinthians, written before June 2, the date of Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8), in the year 54.

G. The Kaleidoscope Letter

In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses the various problems in Corinth one by one and answers the questions raised. He presents a coherent argument aimed at showing the Corinthians that the factionalism they were engaging in was not beneficial to them; he constantly urges them to live in harmony. Finally, he focuses primarily on the attitude and behavior of a particular group in Corinth—the so-called "spiritual" people—to whom he devotes 13 of the letter's 16 chapters.

a. The Influence of Apollos

1 Corinthians 1–4 introduces us to a group whose members believe themselves to be perfect because of their "wisdom" (2:6). Possessors of "the Spirit who comes from God" (2:12), they consider themselves "spirit-people" (2:15). They see themselves as "filled with divine blessings," "rich," "kings" (4:8), "wise," "strong," and "honored" (4:10). They despise other members of the community who have not attained their elevated spiritual status, regarding them as "children" incapable of drinking anything but "milk" (3:1), and as "fools," "weak," and "dishonored" (4:10). The language used by this group reflects the distinction established by Philo between the heavenly man and the earthly man. All the key elements mentioned appear in two passages from the same work by the Alexandrian philosopher, the De Sobrietate (9–11 and 55–7). We may therefore reasonably assume that other elements essential to Philo's conception of the heavenly man and the earthly man were also part of the religious vision of the "spirit-people," and that Paul has them in mind when he refutes such arguments.

The body was a fundamental point of disagreement between the heavenly man and the earthly man. The wisdom of the former revealed to him that “the body is evil by nature and treacherous toward the soul” (*Legum Allegoriarum* 3.71), whereas the earthly man was “in love with his body” (*Legum Allegoriarum* 3.74). If the body is “a conspirator against the soul, a corpse and always dead” (*Legum Allegoriarum* 3.69), it is natural to conclude that the “spirit-people” were those who denied the resurrection (1 Cor 15:12). Death, from their perspective, was a liberation from the burden and defilement of the body (*De Somniis* 148). Regaining one’s body after death would have made no sense. It is therefore highly unlikely that the “spirit-people” could have accepted Paul’s preaching about the risen Jesus in the sense that he intended it. Perhaps they conceived of him as a purely spiritual “Lord of Glory” (1 Cor 2:8). In accordance with their sapiential conception, they were theists, and whenever Paul addresses them, he must remind them of the importance of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:16; 3:23; 8:6; 10:16; 15:3–5). When Philo’s contempt for the body is linked to his adage that “only the wise man is free” (*De Posteritate Caini*, 138) — meaning that “he has the power to do anything and to live as he pleases” (*Quod omnis probus liber sit*, 59), we see in this the foundation of the Corinthian slogans “everything is permissible for me” (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23) and “every sin a man commits is outside the body” (1 Cor 6:18). Their belief in the moral insignificance of the body allowed believers to satisfy their sexual desires (1 Cor 5:1–8; 6:12–20) and to eat whatever they desired (1 Cor 8–10).

The importance that some Corinthians attached to glossolalia (1 Cor 12–14) fits into this context, given that, for Philo, possession of the prophetic spirit was expressed through ecstasy, madness, and inspired frenzy, since “the spirit is driven out upon the arrival of the divine spirit” (*Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, 264–265). Regarding speaking in tongues, Paul specifically mentions “madness” (1 Cor 14:23) and the inactivity of the spirit (1 Cor 14:14). This mysterious and unintelligible speech reinforced the conviction of the “spirit-people” that they were superior.

Who could have spread the Philonic philosophy within the community? The answer is clear: Apollos. What he said, however, and what his disciples understood were not necessarily the same. If they misinterpreted Paul’s words so badly, it is unlikely that they understood Apollos correctly. Certainly, Paul’s dispute concerned the practical implications of their interpretation of Apollos, rather than Apollos’s personality or teaching (1 Cor 16:12). Indeed, it is possible that Apollos left Corinth to go live with Paul in Ephesus, dismayed by the way his teaching was being used.

b. An Unfortunate Strategy

Paul’s understanding of the situation in Corinth reinforced his bias against speculative theology. And instead of getting to the root of the problem and trying to understand the legitimate aspirations of the “spirit-people,” Paul chose to ridicule them. Why did he act this way? The most important factor is probably the influence Apollos wielded in Corinth, which cast a shadow over Paul’s leadership. Thus, in writing chapters 1–4 of his letter, his goal is to mystify these “spirit-people” and thereby reduce them to a confused silence, amid the laughter of all who hear the letter read aloud. He achieves this by appropriating some of the most precious terms from the lexicon of the spiritual and assigning them a meaning radically opposed to the one they give them. He concedes that they are “spiritual” and possess “wisdom,” but their spirit is “the spirit of the world” (2:12) and their wisdom “the wisdom of this age” (2:6). He accepts their self-description as “mature” only to redefine it as childishness (3:1). Those who set themselves up as judges prove themselves incompetent (2:14). The infallible precision with which he probes the heart of their beliefs is inexplicable without the help of Apollos, who was with him at the time of writing (1 Cor 16:12). The piercing tone of mockery bursts the bubble of their self-importance.

The rhetorical questions of biting irony that conclude this first section (3:3–4) reappear in 4:7: “Who distinguishes you from others? What do you have that you did not receive?” These spiritual beings possess no qualities that could make them valuable allies or supporters. They receive, and create nothing. The contemptuous tone intensifies when Paul mocks them by taking their spiritual language literally, thereby transforming their legitimate religious aspirations into absurd social achievements. One can easily imagine the stifled laughter of the assembly and the mischievous glances exchanged as the reader of the letter emphasizes these words: “Without us, you have become kings! And if only you were reigning, so that we might share power with you!” (4:8). It seems quite likely that those claiming to be possessed by spirits came mainly from the wealthiest and most educated circles of the Corinthian church. They were the ones who had the leisure and the capacity to indulge in religious speculation.

The tone of this letter likely offended the sensitive souls who felt Paul had gone too far. And the “spirit-people,” wounded and humiliated, became his implacable enemies. Unable to attack him directly, they channeled their pain and anger by attacking his ambitions for the community. Shortly after receiving the letter in Corinth during the summer of AD 54, they offered hospitality to those whom Paul feared as the greatest threat to his ministry—the Judaizers from Antioch, who had troubled the churches in Galatia.

c. A Feast of New Insights

Despite his efforts to disparage the “spirit-people,” Paul could not ignore their views, which forced him to reflect on issues that had not previously caught his attention. The Corinthians had the merit of trying to put into practice in their daily lives the Gospel they had received, even if they made mistakes. Paul therefore engages in a dialogue with them on issues concerning the means of ministry, communal and personal freedom, the very nature of the Christian community, and the role of women in the Church.

1. Transformed by Grace

His break with the church in Antioch had forced Paul to reflect on the nature of ministry. But it was the opposition that some Corinthians had drawn between him and Apollos that led him to examine and evaluate the differences between them. Was ministry primarily a matter of style? Why did some choose one, and others the other?

The fundamental insight is expressed with exemplary simplicity: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of action” (1 Cor 4:20). The Church is not a collection of ideas that fill the mind, but the divine power that transforms the person. Therefore, ministry does not need to resort to rhetorical devices to develop persuasive arguments, but must rather manifest the presence of the Spirit given by pure grace. Faith is not the conclusion of a logical argument, but arises from the vision of God at work here and now. The minister assumes the responsibility of being where God is at work; his conduct must be such that it reveals the power of grace. He must be able to say, “Follow my example” (1 Cor 4:17; 11:1).

The need to define his relationship with Apollos leads Paul to present the minister as “God’s co-worker”: God has chosen instruments through which he brings about and sustains faith (1 Cor 3:5–9), and it is God who assigns each person their role according to his will. Therefore, it is essential that all ministers cooperate together, and any inappropriate behavior nullifies the cross of Christ (1 Cor 1:17). Likewise, the entire community is called to play the role of witness in the proclamation of the gospel. This is why, after addressing divisions within the community (chapters 1–4), Paul develops a coherent three-part section, whose central theme is the importance of the Church as the place where commitment to Christ takes on its full meaning (chapters 5 and 6). The key section is the one devoted to lawsuits (6:1–11). His point is not that the church should hide its problems from unbelievers, but that it should seize the opportunity to demonstrate the power of grace to unbelievers by resolving these disputes itself. If it is not missionary, the church betrays itself. The world needs to see grace at work.

2. Personal and Communal Freedom

A distinctive feature of Paul’s intervention in the case of an incestuous marriage in Corinth is his emphasis on his spiritual presence within the community gathering:

For I, though absent in body, am present in spirit, and as if present I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. (1 Cor 5:3–5)

Previously, when dealing with a case of disorder in the community (2 Thessalonians 2:14), Paul asked that contact with that person be avoided. Now, he recommends outright excommunication. Note, however, that for Paul, the community is responsible for its own integrity, and he leaves the final decision to them. All he can do is offer his opinion and vote in a spirit of prayer during the community council.

This is the same attitude he takes in the case of disorder in the Eucharist (1 Cor 11:17–24). Without telling the community how to resolve the problem, he points out to them that, due to a lack of charity, their communal meal cannot be the Lord’s Supper. He invites everyone to examine themselves: “Whoever eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on themselves” (1 Cor 29). For interpersonal relationships are crucial in this meal.

What applies to the community also applies to individuals, and this is the case for those who eat meat offered to idols (1 Cor 8). Even though he does not agree with their positions, he does not give orders, but merely states what he, Paul, would do: “If food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I may not cause my brother to stumble” (1 Cor 8:13).

It is regrettable that Paul did not adopt the same attitude toward the “spirit-people.” Perhaps the situation in Corinth would have been quite different.

3. The Body of Christ

In Galatians 3:27 (“For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”), Paul has only a vague sense of Christian unity, but it is in confronting the factions in Corinth that his understanding of the Christian community as the “body of Christ” will unfold in all its power. In the first part of his letter, he introduces the name “Christ” four times in contexts where it cannot refer to the individual Christ. But in what sense can a community be called Christ? In fact, believers are the only means through which the risen Lord can act in the world: they are his ears, his eyes, his hands. What Jesus did when he was physically present, believers now do in his name and by his power: they are his agents.

In 1 Cor 12:27 Paul writes: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it.” We must keep in mind the connotation of physical reality or corporeality in the word “body” to understand Paul’s statement, for he distinguishes between two bodies: the individual body of Christ who lived, died, was raised, and is now in

God's realm, and the ecclesial body composed of believers in whom he dwells on earth through his Spirit. By calling this community the "body of Christ," Paul identifies it as the physical presence of Christ in the world. The mission of the Church is the extension in time and space of Christ's ministry by manifesting the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).

How the Church exercises this ministry is clarified as follows: "Since there is one bread, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:17). Unlike functional groupings, ecclesial unity is organic, for it not only shares a common purpose but also a common existence. Thus, diversity has meaning only as an expression of fundamental unity, just as a leg can fulfill its role only when connected to the whole body. The believer's existence consists in the expression of this love that comes from Christ, which implies relationships with one another. This is why Paul can say: "I live, yet it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

This understanding of the Church in Paul shapes his view of individuals. Like the arms and legs of the physical body, the members of the Body of Christ are distinguished by their various capacities for service. Each possesses a different spiritual gift, necessary for the common good of the community (1 Cor 12:4–7). The authentically Christian use of the first person singular must always express "I am here to serve you."

Paul's vision of the Church as an organic unity has profound implications for his conception of Christian morality. This is why he tells those in conflict: "It is already a defeat for you to have lawsuits among yourselves" (1 Cor 6:7). For a Christian, suing another is equivalent to suing oneself, for they are both members of one body. Would it make sense for the arm to sue the leg? From the same perspective, Paul refuses to consider what is right in itself (for example, eating meat sacrificed to idols) as a sufficient moral rule for believers. The questions a believer must ask are: Will the action in question strengthen or harm others (1 Cor 8:9; 11:29)? Will it contribute to the edification of the community (1 Cor 14:3–5)?

4. The Ministry of Women

Paul took it for granted that women served as ministers in the church on an equal footing with men. But given the male-centered context of the time, this attitude met with opposition. Nevertheless, he faced a different situation when Chloe's people brought him news from Corinth (1 Cor 11:3–10): they were shocked to see the liturgical presiding role taken on by a man—who appeared to be homosexual—and a very strange woman. To understand this situation, we must recall one of the themes of Paul's preaching: "There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In a move typical of an infantile mindset, some Corinthians decided to take such a phrase literally and strove to blur the distinction between the sexes! They reportedly adopted hairstyles considered unmanly and unfeminine for the time, and regarded incest as normal (1 Cor 5:1–2).

Paul's response to the Corinthians is based on Gen 2:21–22 (the creation of woman from one of man's ribs). From this passage he deduces that gender difference is part of God's plan for humanity and must be preserved. Therefore, a man should look like a man, and a woman like a woman. Of course, all this depends on the fashion of each era: in Paul's time, men had short hair, while women, with long hair, braided it and wound it around the top of their heads to form a small headdress. But immediately, Paul hastens to add that man and woman are inseparable from one another and that "though woman was taken from man, man is born of woman, and everything comes from God" (1 Cor 11:11–12). This passage is the first and only explicit defense of women's full equality in the New Testament: Paul reverses the chronological priority of man in the creation account by highlighting the priority of woman in the birth of man and considering this fact as part of God's plan. What is at stake here is not their complementarity, but their equality. All of this provides the central argument to show that 1 Cor 14:34–35, which demands that women remain silent in the assembly, is not Paul's own writing but stems from a later addition by a scribe who sought to harmonize Paul's thought with the non-Pauline text of 1 Tim 2:11–14.

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When Paul had finished writing his letter to the Corinthians and had handed it over to the Corinthian delegation, he turned his attention to his plan to visit the Macedonian churches and, from there, to go to Corinth toward the end of the summer of 54, where he might spend the winter (1 Cor 16:5–7). But his plans were about to be completely disrupted.

A. An Unplanned Visit

Did Paul visit Corinth between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians? The Book of Acts makes no mention of it. Everything hinges on two passages in 2 Corinthians, first 2 Cor 12:14: "Behold, I am ready to come to you for the third time" and 2 Cor 13:1a: "This is the third time I am coming to you." The question has been raised as to whether Paul is simply alluding to his intention to go to Corinth, or whether he is speaking of actual visits. Fortunately, 2 Cor 13:2 provides valuable insight: "I have said this before, and as I did on my second visit, I say it again today while I am away, to those who have sinned previously and to everyone else: 'If I return, I will not hold back.'" Thus, "I have said this before" would refer to an event during his second visit, and "I say it again" alludes to the current situation in which he is "absent." In short, Paul is saying that he is about to pay a third visit to the Corinthians, and that this upcoming visit will not be easy, for he will act without restraint. So what happened? We have a clue that this second visit was not a pleasant one.

a. The Mission of Timothy

We have no direct information about what led Paul to make this unplanned visit to Corinth shortly after sending 1 Corinthians. But there is one possible explanation, and it is connected to Timothy's mission. Moreover, in 1 Cor 4:14–21, we sense Paul's anxiety when, after tender words for his beloved Timothy, he suddenly lets his anger slip out: "Now, thinking that I would not return to you, some have become puffed up with pride" (1 Cor 4:18), perhaps fearing the fate that might be reserved for Timothy, especially at the hands of the "spirit-people." At the end of his letter, he returns to the subject: "Let no one, then, look down on him" (1 Cor 16:11). Timothy likely lacked their intellectual sophistication. It is therefore anxiety that Paul feels, expressed in this sentence: "I am waiting for him with the brothers [in Ephesus]" (1 Cor 16:12). Thus, the simplest explanation for Paul's surprise visit to Corinth is that it was motivated by Timothy's report.

b. What Happened at Corinth?

Much of what happened when Paul arrived in Corinth remains unclear. Nevertheless, let us note certain clues. These concern both the offense and the community's reaction: (1) an isolated Christian (2 Cor 2:6; 7:12) launched a serious attack (2 Cor 2:1, 3, 4) against Paul personally (2 Cor 2:5, 10); (2) the church members did not show the personal loyalty and enthusiasm that Paul expected (2 Cor 7:12). Their fault was serious enough to warrant repentance (2 Cor 7:9). Yet they managed to convince Titus of their innocence (2 Cor 7:11). It is therefore likely that the incident was caused by an intruder.

But how can we explain that an intruder would have insulted Paul to the point of deeply wounding him without the members of the community reacting? A plausible answer is that this visitor was a delegate whom Antioch had sent to exercise its authority over a church founded by Paul in its name. Had Paul not previously warned the Philippians of the danger posed by the Judaizers who followed him throughout Europe (Phil 3:2–4:1), and was this not the very reason he was planning to visit the churches in Macedonia to investigate the situation? In this context, it is possible that the news Timothy reported to Paul was that the Judaizers were far ahead of him and had already made inroads in Corinth; and this could mean that they had perhaps passed through Philippi and Thessalonica before heading to Corinth.

What, then, should Paul do? While he could count on the unwavering affection of the Macedonians, the same could not be said of the Corinthians, especially on the part of the "spirit-people." His strategy was therefore to send Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia, while he would set sail for the port of Cenchreae for a personal visit to Corinth. If that community fell into the hands of the Judaizers, the encirclement of the churches he had founded would be complete, and Ephesus would certainly follow soon.

The confrontation in Corinth with the leader of the Judaizers was undoubtedly dramatic. The position he took must have been very similar to the one he had taken in Galatia. According to him, Paul was a dishonest representative of the church that had sent him to proclaim the common faith. A traitor to his mission, he was preaching his own ideas, not the common Gospel. The contemptuous tone with which these slanders were uttered added insult to injury. Paul leaves no doubt that he had been deeply humiliated and that his authority had been challenged in the most radical way possible.

c. The Neutrality of the Corinthians

What upset Paul most was the attitude of the Corinthians, who were not quick to support him. In fact, they cared little about the position of the church in Antioch and were sufficiently proud of their own identity, having learned Paul's lesson about local churches well; and they cared little about their ties to Jerusalem. But it was not the same for Paul. To him, the Corinthians were his children, whom he had fathered in the faith (1 Cor 4:15), and they should have preferred him above all others. And their silence suggested that they were ready to listen to the message of the Judaizers. And the "spirit-people" were perhaps behind the refusal to let Paul dictate their faith (2 Cor 1:23); the wound left by 1 Corinthians was no doubt still raw.

All of this created a dilemma for Paul. Should he remain in Corinth to counter the arguments of the Judaizers, or go to Macedonia where they were still active? He thought it best to give the Corinthians some breathing room and decided to leave. Where did he go?

d. A Journey to Macedonia

Based on 2 Corinthians 2:12–13, Paul would have left Corinth to go to Macedonia, as his original plan had intended, and from there would have returned directly to Ephesus. This hypothesis is supported by the difficult experience Paul may have had in Corinth: if he found it hard to control the Judaizers in Corinth, how would Timothy and Erastus, who had less authority, manage to do so in Macedonia? To get there, traveling by sea was out of the question: the Etesian, a north wind, made navigation difficult, almost impossible during the three summer months. The overland route stretched 580 km to Thessalonica, a journey of about three weeks fraught with the danger of wild animals such as bears, wolves, and wild boars. In Thessalonica, his fears regarding the Judaizers did not materialize. On the contrary, the Macedonians' commitment to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem revealed that they were fully on his side (2 Cor 8:1–4). And even their cold reception of the Judaizers explains why the latter

quickly went to Corinth. The contrast between the Macedonians' faithfulness and the Corinthians' mocking neutrality intensified the bitterness Paul felt toward the latter.

Perhaps under the influence of Timothy, who had likely remained in Macedonia, Paul had the wisdom to realize that it would be counterproductive to return to Corinth, consumed by anger (2 Cor 2:1). That could only make the situation worse and cause even greater damage. So he decided to change his plans, even if it gave the Corinthians another excuse to criticize him. He found a ship leaving from Neapolis for Troas. From there, he had 350 km left to walk to Ephesus. He could have returned home in early August.

B. The Painful Letter

Since leaving Corinth, Paul felt it was important to explain how he felt after the difficult events that occurred during his visit: "So it was with great distress and a heavy heart that I wrote to you, with many tears, not to make you sad, but so that you might know the deep love I have for you" (2 Cor 2:4). This letter has been lost and cannot be reconstructed in detail. He does not seem to have revisited the issue of the Judaizers, but rather focused exclusively on his own personal relationships with the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:9; 7:12). His strategy was to win their sympathy by revealing how their betrayal had hurt him. This letter sought to move them, while also delivering a brutal shock. Once the letter was sent, Paul must have feared its impact, not knowing if it would do more harm than good.

The letter was entrusted to Titus (2 Cor 2:13; 7:6), the Christian of pagan origin who had been with him at the Jerusalem Council in the fall of 51. This was a wise choice, for Titus had participated in the debates on circumcision in Jerusalem and knew the apostles' position and the danger of legalism, and thus could refute the distortions of the Judaizers.

C. Departure for Troas

After his return to Ephesus, Paul's situation was not without its difficulties. In 1 Cor 16:9, he had already mentioned that he had many adversaries. It is likely that they were the ones responsible for "the affliction we suffered in Asia," a trial so terrible that "we despaired even of life itself; we felt we had received the death sentence" (2 Cor 1:8b-9). This wording suggests less a legal conviction than Paul's conviction that his days were numbered. The introduction to this episode, "we do not want you to be unaware" (2 Cor 1:8a), indicates that this situation occurred fairly recently and that the Corinthians are learning of it for the first time. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this happened after Paul's return from his brief visit to Corinth. The clues converge to form a coherent picture. By the time Titus was sent to Corinth, opposition to Paul in Ephesus was intensifying. A sudden intensification of hostility forced Paul to leave the city. He went north to Troas, where he began a new mission. And according to 2 Cor 2:13-14, it was in Troas that Paul had arranged to meet Titus to receive news from Corinth.

Regarding the difficult events prior to Paul's departure, the Acts of the Apostles recounts a violent incident: the riot instigated by Demetrius the silversmith (Acts 19:23-40). Unfortunately, Luke's account contains contradictions, and one can see Luke's strategy of presenting, in a striking scene, Paul's rehabilitation by the city authorities and the victory of Christianity over paganism. This is a deliberate attempt to persuade the reader that Paul was not driven out of Ephesus. One immediately suspects that, on the contrary, this is exactly what happened!

Two factors influenced Paul's choice of Troas as the area for his new apostolate. The first was personal: the city had to be on Titus's return route from Corinth. The second was strategic. The missionary expansion of the Church of Ephesus had until then been limited to localities within a week's walk of the capital of Asia. Paul therefore decided to expand his work, and his two visits to Troas had shown him the importance of a local community that could serve as a link between the churches of Asia and those of Europe. Moreover, Troas would provide him with the vast urban environment in which he worked most effectively. In Paul's time, Troas was "one of the most important cities in the world," a Roman colony founded by Augustus and surrounded by an imposing wall 8 km long. Due to its strategic location as a crossroads for trade between Asia and Europe, it enjoyed great prosperity. Its population is estimated at between 30,000 and 40,000 inhabitants. Paul's ministry in Troas likely lasted less than a month, but he suggests it was fruitful—"despite the opportunity, I took my leave of them" (2 Cor 2:12-13)—and the existence of a Christian community in Troas is inferred from Acts 20:7-12.

D. The Report of Titus

According to 2 Corinthians 2:13-14, Paul did not find Titus in Troas as expected, so he hurried to set sail for Macedonia before the waterways closed for the winter. On this journey, Paul was certainly accompanied by Timothy, since in 2 Corinthians 1:1 he uses the word "we."

The beginning of his stay in Macedonia seems difficult: "In fact, when we arrived in Macedonia, we had no rest, but every kind of distress—struggles on the outside, fears on the inside" (2 Cor 7:5). Having not yet received news from Titus, he must have been in a state of extreme tension. He certainly stopped in Philippi to visit the church he had founded there. This visit was no doubt brief, and he had to travel the 150 km separating him from Thessalonica, and it was probably in that city that Titus made his appearance. It was therefore there that Paul decided to spend the winter.

All we know of Titus's report is what Paul tells us in 2 Cor 7:7-16. Paul is elated. It seems that this Painful Letter had achieved its purpose and that the Corinthians' repentance was expressed through their action against the intruder. Paul can now say: "I rejoice that I can rely on you in everything" (2 Cor 7:16). Numerous clues in chapters 1 through 9 of the

Second Epistle to the Corinthians show that Titus was an attentive observer and a perceptive critic of what was happening in Corinth, and that he gave Paul a very precise report. We must now attempt to reconstruct the gist of his remarks.

a. Judaizers and Spirit-People

After assuring Paul of the Corinthians' affection, Titus provided proof of their change of heart by detailing the measures taken against the man who had insulted him. The nature of the punishment is not specified, likely because there was only one possibility: total ostracism. The believers simply refused to have anything to do with him. Paul was sensitive enough to feel the impact of such isolation. So he asked that the offender's punishment be lifted and that he be reinstated into the community (2 Cor 2:6–8). His intention may have been to reconcile with those who were hostile toward him.

Nevertheless, the news reported by Titus is troubling. We have seen previously that the individual who had insulted him was most likely an emissary from Antioch. This is confirmed by the nature of Paul's response in 2 Cor 1–9; the intruders were Jewish Christians. Only a church could send letters of recommendation to another (2 Cor 3:1), and they presented themselves as "ministers of the new covenant" (2 Cor 3:6). They had chosen this title in order to harmonize their belief that the *eschaton* had been inaugurated in Christ with their conviction, inspired by Jer 31:33, that the Law retained permanent validity. Their emphasis on the role of the Law is underscored by the abrupt introduction of "on stone tablets" (2 Cor 3:3) instead of the expected "on scrolls."

Among their opponents, there are also references to the "spirit-people." The accusation that Paul's Gospel was veiled (2 Cor 4:3) can only have come from those who regarded Paul as having an unremarkable personality and a dull presentation (2 Cor 10:10), that is, from those who preferred the more speculative approach advocated by Apollos, itself based on Philo. The sophisticated and nuanced use of the terms "life" and "death" in 2 Cor 2:16 finds its equivalent only in Philo, as does the language of 2 Cor 6:14–7:1. The attitude toward the body in 2 Cor 5:6b is typically Philo-like.

Several clues suggest that these two groups were not acting as separate groups, but had formed an alliance against him. When the Judaizers arrived in Corinth, their first act would have been to probe the weaknesses of the community Paul had built. In order to operate from within, they needed to be welcomed by someone, and prudence would have advised them to seek out a group already at odds with Paul. In principle, this group should have been more receptive than others to an alternative form of Christianity. Recall that the "spirit-people" had been the target of Paul's criticism in 1 Corinthians and would have felt humiliated. Naturally, their pride drove them to seek revenge. If Apollos had remained in Corinth, they could have formed an alternative church, but he had left them to join Paul and seemed hardly inclined to return (1 Cor 16:12). Such a betrayal, for which they might have held Paul responsible, had only exacerbated their bitterness.

Beyond this negative common ground, the two groups shared an interest in Moses. For the Judaizers, he was the great Lawgiver, whose words held eternal value. For the adherents of spiritual Christianity, nourished by a form of Philonism, he represented much more. Philo regularly presents Moses as "the wise man par excellence" (*Legum allegoriae* 1, 395), embodying all Hellenistic virtues as "king, lawgiver, high priest, and prophet" (*De vita Mosis* 2, 3). Having detached himself from the body (*De confusione linguarum* 82), Moses penetrated the mysteries of God, which he was then able to reveal and teach (*De gigantibus* 54). In short, Moses was everything to which the spirit-people aspired. Thus, a beautiful bond formed around Moses.

In order to win over the believers in Corinth, the Judaizers had to make some concessions. They quickly realized that these believers' hostility toward Paul stemmed from his inability to meet their expectations regarding religious leadership. Consequently, the intruders were led to highlight their own superior qualifications. They proclaimed their credentials (2 Cor 4:5; 10, 12) by publicizing their visions and revelations (2 Cor 12:1), as well as their miracles (2 Cor 12:12). If they had not already been familiar with them, they would have adopted the conventions of Hellenistic rhetoric. At length developed themes, tinged with mystery, would have appealed to the sensibilities of the believers.

Thus, the Judaizers had now consolidated their base among the discontented elements of the community. There was danger in the making.

b. Travel Plans

Titus likely reported that Paul was unable to keep his word, particularly regarding his travel plans. He told them one thing (1 Cor 16:5–6) and did not do it. Then he promised them something else (2 Cor 1:15–16), and again he did not do it. Instead, he wrote them a letter. All these things may seem trivial—why did they cause discontent?

When Paul responds: "Did I act rashly in making this decision? Or are my plans merely human plans, so that there is both 'Yes' and 'No' within me?" (2 Cor 1:17), it becomes clear that Paul was accused in Corinth of having the fickleness of a flatterer. To some, Paul could not be trusted. Consequently, he could be neither a friend nor an authentic leader. The atmosphere had become toxic. Titus must have warned him that every word and every gesture of his was liable to be deliberately misinterpreted (2 Cor 1:12–14). From what we already know, only "spirit-people" were capable of such malice.

c. Financial Assistance

The same contemptuous attitude is evident in the criticisms leveled at Paul's financial dealings with the Corinthians. This issue had been addressed in 1 Corinthians and provided yet another reason to use it as a weapon against Paul. It gave them the opportunity to highlight another aspect of Paul's inconsistency and to turn a suspicion of unreliability into an accusation that Paul did not practice what he preached. He had refused, and continued to refuse, an act of love.

The social glue that bound the inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world was the reciprocity of favors. The mere possession of wealth had no value. It was through its distribution that it was transformed into status and power. Offering a gift was a public gesture, an assertion of superiority, a call for respect. For the recipient, no duty is more compelling than that of showing gratitude. The gift had to be returned. If the reciprocity was greater, the original recipient benefited. If it was equal, both parties remained on equal footing. On the other hand, if the reciprocity was less, the recipient became a client, with an unfulfilled obligation toward the giver. Refusing a gift, though theoretically possible, was not a realistic option. The obligation to accept was therefore generally honored, even if, in many cases, it was done negligently, carelessly, and reluctantly.

In Corinth, those who could grant favors to Paul belonged to the elite, among whom he had made his first converts. Their offer to help him could be justified not only by the customs of the time, but also by the fact that he had been of service to them. In Corinth, they were his oldest "friends." The terminology used by Paul does not allow us to determine whether this was a gift or remuneration. This distinction, however, is as superfluous as any discussion of their motives, since Paul refused. Why did he make a decision so contrary to a respected custom of his time?

Paul tells us only that "we endure everything rather than put a stumbling block in the way of the Gospel of Christ" (1 Cor 9:12b). This rather vague justification can only be translated into specific reasons in light of the general principles that guided Paul. His concern to bear witness to his experience of faith prevented him from being compared to the philosophers and religious teachers who expected payment for their teaching. His refusal to conform to their behavior was intended to highlight the uniqueness of his message. His concern for the unity of the community ruled out any action that might have made him a protégé of one faction within it.

This last point becomes clear when we compare Paul's refusal to accept support from the Corinthians with the warm welcome he gave to the contributions from Philippi, both in Thessalonica (Phil 4:16) and in Corinth (2 Cor 11:9). While one of the gifts could be considered communal, the other was necessarily individual. The distinction changed the situation radically. The gift from the Philippians represented a collective effort. The church had established a common fund to which all could contribute.

The sum of money was brought by an official delegation and presented on behalf of the church. For Paul, this implied that all members of the church had participated, even if some had given more than others. Thus, Paul was able to accept this contribution as a sign of unwavering friendship. His response was addressed to the entire church (Phil 4:10–20). In Corinth, on the other hand, since Paul resided there, all the gifts were very personal. Lodging meant someone's home; a meal meant someone's kitchen. How was Paul to respond to such a multitude of individual gifts? According to social norms, he should have divided his time and energy so that those who had contributed the most would receive the most. The poor and needy would have stood no chance against the resources of the elite. Even with the best of intentions, the rich would have monopolized Paul's attention, to the detriment of the community's real needs. It is therefore hardly surprising that he refused them all.

The Corinthians were certainly aware of the arrival of the delegation from Philippi with gifts for Paul. Paul was compelled to explain to the Corinthians the reasons for his refusal of their gifts, while accepting those of the Philippians. In light of 1 Cor 9:1–12a, it would appear that he introduced his explanation by asserting his authority, emphasizing his right to be supported. Such a paradoxical approach likely did not contribute to the clarity of his argument. To people of good will, the distinction between them and the Philippians seemed perfectly logical. Others, however, among the elite, felt aggrieved. Their quest for prestige within the community had been thwarted. It was easy for them to ignore the explanation and focus on the facts: Paul was refusing their gifts while accepting those of others.

Titus must have been informed that criticism of Paul had become commonplace. His report to Paul therefore had to mention how Paul's attitude toward financial support was being increasingly and seriously misrepresented.

d. The Collection for Jerusalem

The reason Paul did not address the issue of his personal finances in 2 Corinthians 1–9 is that the matter of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem had been raised during Titus's visit to Corinth. The Corinthians had never been officially informed of this collection. They heard about it by chance, presumably from Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11). Only in this way can we understand a) why Paul commends them for taking the initiative to participate in this collection, and b) why they needed to ask for instructions on the details of the organization, which Paul provides in 1 Cor 16:1–4.

For Titus, this collection provided him with the perfect *ad hominem* argument to demonstrate to the Judaizers Paul's love and concern for the mother church in Jerusalem. They could not oppose this project without endangering the survival of their fellow countrymen in Jerusalem. Once Titus was convinced that the Corinthians had accepted the rebuke of the Painful Letter, it would have seemed natural to him to tactfully remind them of their commitment to the collection, a gesture that the Judaizers could only approve of (2 Cor 8:6)! At that precise moment, Paul, the Corinthians, and the Judaizers would have been in agreement, and the enthusiasm of Titus's report becomes more understandable.

E. Winter in Macedonia

Since winter had set in by the time Titus returned from Corinth, it was no longer necessary for Paul to respond immediately to the situation in Corinth. The weather conditions gave him time to reflect on his response. This time, he had the added advantage of having Timothy by his side, who proved to be a much better co-author than Sosthenes had been for 1 Corinthians. It was therefore no earlier than March or April of the year 55 that the letter (2 Cor 1–9) was sent.

a. Co-authorship

Sosthenes' contribution to 1 Corinthians was limited to chapters 1:18–31 and 2:6–16. He seems to have been one of those people who were quick-witted and perceptive in conversation but whose written expression proved complex and overly subtle. Paul gave him two chances, then, irritated, parted ways with him; in addition to these collaborative passages, we find Paul's own straightforward wording, explaining what he was trying to express (2:1–5; 3:1–4). Timothy, who was much closer to Paul, thus exerted a greater influence on him. Clearly, his role in the composition of chapters 1 through 9 of 2 Corinthians was far more significant.

While 1 Corinthians is a letter written in the first person singular, where the sudden appearance of the first person plural must be explained, 2 Corinthians (chapters 1–9) presents exactly the opposite case. 74% of the letter is written in the first person plural, and only 26% in the first person singular. These latter passages deal with situations in which Timothy was not involved, namely the consequences of the brief visit (2 Cor 1:15–17; 1:23–2:13; 7:3–12) and the matter of the collection in Corinth (2 Cor 8:8–15; 9:1–15). The specific reference to the first-person plural may vary, but there is no need whatsoever to exclude Timothy. He and Paul collaborated effectively and regularly, particularly in the significant section devoted to the apostolate (2 Cor 2:14–7:2), but the nature of certain passages compelled Paul to adopt a very personal tone. These digressions sometimes tended to drag on. Each time, however, Timothy managed to bring Paul back to the task of collaboration, which ultimately resulted in the most extraordinary letter in the New Testament.

b. Weaning the Spirit-People from the Judaizers

Unlike 1 Corinthians, where Paul addresses the most difficult issue right away after some rather superficial expressions of thanks (1:4–9), 2 Corinthians (1–9) begins with great caution and subtlety, setting the tone for the letter. The extreme care taken in its composition reveals a refinement born of long reflection and numerous drafts.

When we analyze the style of 2 Corinthians, we note that Paul departs from his usual approach, for example by placing the thanksgiving at the end, not at the beginning. It is unlikely that the Corinthians were unaware of the systematic way in which Paul had reversed his usual pattern. Many of them, considering themselves intelligent, had one or two letters of thanksgiving for comparison: the previous letter (see 1 Cor 5:9) and 1 Corinthians. It would have been difficult for them to avoid the (justified) conclusion that Paul was sending them a subtle message. First, this suggests that he could not express unequivocal gratitude for the state of the church in Corinth. A breach has been repaired (2 Cor 7:5–16), but difficulties persist, and Paul's subversion of the traditional thanksgiving foreshadows a similar manipulation of Philonic vocabulary in the body of the letter. Furthermore, Paul's unusual focus on his own experience foreshadows the letter's major theological theme: suffering and weakness, not power and eloquence, are the hallmarks of the true apostle.

Paul's dual strategy aimed not only to reestablish his authority but also to sow discord among the believers, particularly the "spirit-people" and the Judaizers. To this end, he offers a critique of the Mosaic covenant in terms to which the believers would be particularly sensitive, while presenting the Christian covenant in a light that would be favorable to them.

In 2 Cor 3:7–18, Paul focuses on the figure of Moses, an instrument used by the Judaizers to win the favor of the "spirit-people." The polemical dimension of his commentary on the passage "When Moses had finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face" (Ex 34:34–35) is clearly evident in the contrast he draws between his own behavior and that of Moses: "we act with confidence and boldness, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face" (3:12–13). These implications are well highlighted by Philo, for whom only those who do evil hide themselves. Thus, by simply presenting himself as he was, without any pretense, Paul implicitly claimed a whole range of qualities that Moses must have lacked, since he concealed his true nature by veiling himself.

Having thus sown doubt in the minds of the believers regarding the stature of Moses, associated with the old covenant, Paul then links the fulfillment of the latter to intellectual blindness (3:14–15). The presence of Jews in the Corinthian community shows that they had recognized a shortcoming in their former way of life based on the Law.

Once blind, they now see. Why, then, Paul suggests, would these spiritual beings condemn themselves to the darkness of intellectual rigidity, when they could receive the light of the true glory of the Gospel?

In 3:17, Paul shifts from indirect criticism to persuasion by appropriating two key terms from the lexicon of “spirit-people,” namely “spirit” and “freedom.” While in 3:14–15 he associated the Law with intellectual blindness—the vice they abhorred most—here he identifies the Gospel with the values they held most dear. “Spirit” evokes Philo’s heavenly man, and for Philo, “freedom” carries connotations of virtue, perfection, and wisdom.

In short, with Timothy’s help—and perhaps Apollos’s as well—Paul was able to penetrate the religious world of the “spirit-people” and subtly undermine their convictions. His subtle denigration of Moses eroded the common ground on which the Judaizers stood. His reformulation of the Gospel is carefully calculated to harmonize with the Philo-inspired perspective that the believers had received from Apollos, while gently but firmly reshaping it. Paul’s discreet and indirect approach helped avoid the risk of a backlash, such as the one that followed 1 Corinthians.

c. Manifesting the Life of Jesus

The attitude of the “spirit-people” is summed up by the shocking statement: “Cursed be Jesus” (1 Cor 12:3). For they found repugnant the idea of a crucified savior associated with the name Jesus, and they preferred to speak of the “Lord of glory,” a superhuman being who came from above (1 Cor 2:8). For Paul, the historical Jesus could not be separated from the Christ of glory. For only a being of flesh and blood, anchored in space and time, could demonstrate the real possibility of a restored humanity as proclaimed by the Gospel. Jesus did not merely preach love; he lived it.

Even though the Gospels recount Christ’s passion and his death on a cross, the early church was content merely to mention the fact that Jesus had died. For Paul, however, it was important to recognize how Jesus had died—crucified like a slave—which, of course, was a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor 1:23). The “spirit-people” preferred to set this aspect aside, as it did not fit with a philosophical approach to religion. As for the Judaizers, they could align themselves with the “spirit-people” by focusing on a life compatible with the Lord of glory.

It was likely while reflecting on Jesus’ ministry that Paul made the connection to his own situation, which led him to a new and much deeper understanding of Christ’s ministry. Thus he was able to understand that God had chosen to immerse him in a world marked by sin (2 Cor 5:21), to make him suffer the consequences of sin, even though he had not sinned. He was humanity’s savior from within by accepting its condition and transforming it. He became a human being like the rest to reveal to them all that humanity could become.

Other passages in 2 Corinthians emphasize Christ’s free cooperation with God’s plan (2 Cor 5:14; 8:9). His life and death constituted a deliberate self-sacrifice for the benefit of others. Before Christ, it was taken for granted that the primary goals of human existence were survival, comfort, and success. Christ’s radical selflessness introduces a new way of life that can be seen as the “death” of selfishness. Related to this is Paul’s presentation of Christ as “the image of God,” a phrase taken from Gen 1:26–27 (2 Cor 4:4). Thus, the authentic human being is a creator like the One whom he resembles, insofar as he enables others to act and develop.

Hence, Christ is the New Adam, but he is so through poverty and his ignominious situation. His entire life amounts to dying on various levels (2 Cor 4:10), but in doing so, he brings into existence “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Reflecting on this, Paul could not help but see in it the archetype of his own situation. By identifying with the historical Jesus, he realized that they shared a common experience of suffering. Thus he could accept that suffering is an integral part of the human condition. Moreover, this suffering could now have meaning: it was an extension of Christ’s sacrifice (2 Cor 2:15). And in this way, Paul found himself proclaiming Jesus to the whole world, not only through words, but more fundamentally through his conduct. This is how the life of Jesus is manifested through the body of believers.

This extraordinary statement constitutes the climax of 2 Corinthians and the deepest insight ever articulated regarding the meaning of suffering and the nature of authentic ministry. Death loomed over every step Paul took; he could die at any moment. Heading toward a fate that seemed inescapable, he perceived his life as an “agony,” which he identified with that of Jesus, who too had foreseen his death. The authentic humanity of Jesus became visible through him and through the believers. This explicit presentation of the minister as *alter Christus* is unique in the New Testament. It was imposed on Paul by the denial of the reality of Jesus’ earthly existence by the “spirit-people” / Judaizers, and by their contempt for Paul’s ministry.

F. Plans for the Collection

The Corinthians’ initial enthusiasm for the collection for the poor in Jerusalem evaporated amid the heated atmosphere of the dispute between the various factions in the community. Furthermore, offended by the way they were singled out in 1 Corinthians, the “spirit-people”—potentially the major donors—likely retaliated by refusing to take part in a project that was dear to Paul’s heart.

2 Corinthians 8–9 reveals the best of Paul’s religious leadership. Even if he sometimes has to stretch the truth, he praises everything he can praise while avoiding any criticism. He explicitly states that he is not forcing anyone to contribute

(8:8a), but is merely expressing an opinion (8:10). If he refers to the generosity of the Macedonians, it is simply an incentive. He emphasizes their attitude, which is more important than the amount of the gift (8:12). Even though he mentions the possibility that they might be humiliated by the generosity of the poorer people of Macedonia (9:4), he is quick to add that he absolutely does not want to extort anything from them (9:5).

Previously, the Corinthians had given their consent without doing anything further. This time, Paul did not want to settle for mere words and decided to send emissaries to Corinth, whose presence would constantly remind them of his invitation. There is Titus, responsible for delivering the letter to the Corinthians, who volunteered to oversee the collection (8:17). Joining Titus as a companion is a delegate chosen by the churches of Macedonia, who is described as an exceptional preacher of the Gospel. The third member of the group (8:22) is not named either. His description suggests that he was a close, long-time associate of Paul, with ties to the Corinthians. He may have accompanied Paul on the brief visit, or he may have accompanied Titus when the latter delivered the Painful Letter.

G. Once Again a Missionary

According to 2 Cor 9:4, Paul planned to visit Corinth soon—that is, during the summer of 55—to finalize the collection he had been working on for four years. It was clear to him, however, that he could not simply make a brief visit and then return to Jerusalem with the collection: certain issues remained unresolved, and he would need to stay in Corinth for some time. But in the meantime, he needed to give the Corinthians time to take in the letter he was sending them before appearing before them. He was confident that Titus would be able to steer the discussions in the right direction. So the best plan seemed to him to be to send the collection delegates to Corinth with his letter, while he could return for a time to his primary calling: founding churches and preaching Christ where he was unknown (Rom 15:20). And so he set out for Illyria (Rom 15:19).

To get to Illyria, Paul simply had to follow the Via Egnatia westward. The distance between Thessalonica and the border of Illyria is 320 km. If Paul had left in mid-April, he would have been among the Illyrians by the end of the month and could have looked forward to at least three months of intense missionary work before having to head south in August to reach Corinth before winter set in.

H. Bad News from Corinth

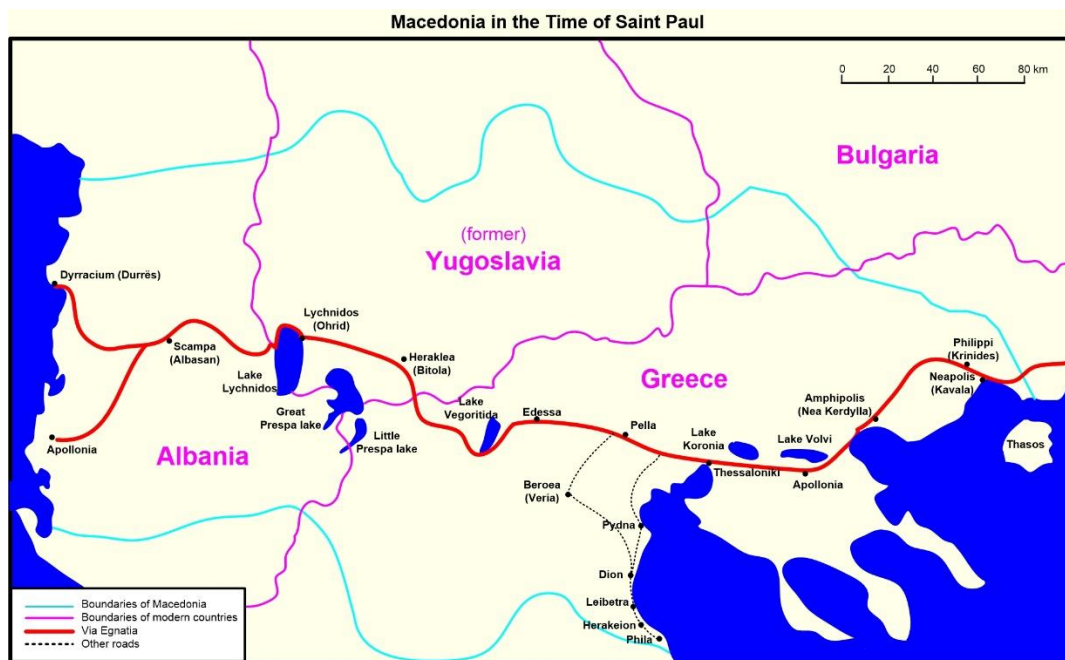


Fig.: Map published by Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, using F. Papazoulou, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, 7/1 (1980).

While Paul was ministering in Illyria, he received a visit from Titus—or perhaps from someone sent by Titus—to inform him that the old criticism of his unimpressive presence and uninspiring preaching was circulating in Corinth (2 Cor 10:10). Recall that 2 Cor 1–9 had two objectives: to create a separation between the Judaizers and the “spirit-people,” and to win the latter over to his cause. It seems that at least the first objective—isolating the Judaizers—was achieved. This would explain why the latter redoubled their criticism of Paul, implying that their spiritual gifts made them superior to Paul (2 Cor 11:5). Moreover, wasn’t the fact that he had not returned to Corinth since his brief visit an expression of cowardice? Finally, the Judaizers seem to have highlighted Paul’s ambiguous attitude toward money: on the one hand, he refuses gifts from the Corinthians, but on the other hand, he solicits them for the poor in Jerusalem. Will this money really go to Jerusalem? By refusing to accept help from the Corinthians, isn’t this a sign that he doesn’t really love them? (2 Cor 11:9)

a. Speaking as a Fool

Paul could only view this criticism as a malicious distortion of his motives and actions. His bitter anger was exacerbated by the realization that, if he were discredited, his version of the Gospel would be threatened. Another Gospel risked taking its place. In a state of deep anxiety for the future of the Corinthian community, he hastily wrote chapters 10 through 13 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. The reasonable tone and subtle arguments of chapters 1 through 9 give way to an outburst of anger, in which Paul gives free rein to his sarcasm and irony. Thus he writes:

19 For you gladly put up with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you or preys upon you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or gives you a slap in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.

The writing of this letter is remarkable and is matched only by the power of its strategy. His opponents forced him to compare himself to them, which led him to display his contempt for their pretensions by subverting rhetorical conventions. After mentioning his education (2 Cor 11:22–23), he parodies the ostentation of the Judaizers by highlighting the situations in which he was humiliated. With remarkable dramatic flair, he concludes his list of “feats” with the gripping account of his humiliating escape from Damascus, lowered from the wall like a defenseless child in a basket (2 Cor 11:32–33).

Parody is not the only weapon in Paul’s rhetorical arsenal. He discredits his opponents’ claims to visions and revelations by recounting his own experience in the third person (2 Cor 12:2–4). This technique distances him from the episode and thus highlights its uselessness for his ministry. This episode did not transform him in any way and provided him with no useful information. The criticism of his opponents is all the more effective because it is implicit. If their experience was identical to Paul’s, it contributed nothing to their ministry.

Chapters 10 through 13 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians reveal, in an extraordinary way, a Paul rarely seen elsewhere. Here, the rigid control he usually imposed on his passionate nature dissolves under the intensity of his anger. He gives free rein to his emotions and, in doing so, betrays the quality of his education, which he usually denied. The fluidity and creativity of his thought are matched only by the mastery and freedom with which he employs numerous figures of speech. His ease in using rhetorical devices can only be the result of long study and diligent practice. There is little doubt that Paul was raised in a socially privileged environment, which he was destined to honor.

b. The Thorn in the Flesh

In 2 Cor 12:7–10, Paul concludes his defense as follows:

7 even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, 9 but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

The vast majority of biblical scholars view this “thorn in the flesh” as a physical, somatic, or psychological ailment. The only plausible hypothesis is that, by the thorn in his flesh, Paul was referring to opposition to his ministry. His mention of a “messenger of Satan” suggests an external and personal source of suffering, and he had previously described his opponents in Corinth as “servants of Satan” (2 Cor 11:14–15). In the Old Testament, “thorns” are a metaphor for Israel’s enemies, both internal (Num 33:35) and external (Ezek 28:24).

What constantly troubled Paul was the realization that none of his churches met his expectations. In every community he founded, there was always someone who opposed him: the idlers in Thessalonica, Evodia and Syntyche in Philippi, those paralyzed by caution in Galatia, the resentful in Ephesus, the mystics in Colossae, and those sowing dissension in Corinth. Yet such divisions were contrary to God’s plan, for whom the Church was to manifest the organic unity of a living body.

The biting humor of his self-assessment continues in the presentation of the answer to his prayer in the form of a divine oracle: “My grace is sufficient for you; my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9a). The paradox is as striking as the meaning is profound. The thorn reminds him that he possesses none of the qualities the world considered essential prerequisites for the success of his mission. Yet he is a channel of divine grace expressed in the power of Christ (2 Cor 12:9b), whose “life” he manifests (2 Cor 4:10–11), and the world is transformed.

Chapter 13: Looking Westward p. 323-340

The messengers who had brought the bad news from Corinth returned there with 2 Corinthians 10–13. In this text, Paul promised a visit soon (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1–2). Even though his concern for the Corinthians consumed him, he could not,

however, leave Illyria immediately and abandon the new converts to the sole protection of the Holy Spirit. It was his responsibility to establish the young community on a solid foundation. One can easily imagine the redoubled fervor with which he worked, striving to accomplish as much as possible before the arrival of winter forced him to undertake the long journey south.

We know nothing of the reception Paul received in Corinth, but it seems that chapters 10 through 13 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians had a beneficial effect. If the Corinthians did indeed contribute to the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26), it is unlikely that the community as a whole, or even a majority, had turned away from Paul. Moreover, during the winter of 55–56, he had the opportunity to compose his letter to the Romans, his most accomplished theological argument, which was part of his preparations for the future. After accompanying the collection to Jerusalem, he planned to go first to Rome, then to Spain (Rom 15:24, 28). One gets the impression that he had no intention of returning to Corinth.

A. The Textual Problems of Romans

The manuscript tradition attests to eight different versions of the Epistle to the Romans. Most of the issues concern the presence or absence of chapters 15 and 16, and the placement of the doxology (Rom 16:25–27). Furthermore, in some manuscripts the words we have set in italics in the following verses are missing:

- 1:7: “To all God’s beloved who are *in Rome*, the saints”
- 1:15: “Hence my desire to preach the Gospel to you also who are *in Rome*”

The absence of any mention of Rome would make this letter so generic that it could be addressed to any church. In fact, it is likely that scribes would have removed any reference to the city of Rome in order to give it a more universal character. Similarly, since chapter 15 contains personal elements, scribes would have considered this a threat to the letter’s universality and would have eliminated it.

Today, there is near-unanimity among biblical scholars that the letter written by Paul contained the entire passage Romans 1:1–16:23. There are doubts regarding Romans 16:24, but none regarding the doxology (Romans 16:25–27). Considering the content, style, and epistolary practice, some biblical scholars argue that it is unlikely Paul is the author: this is not his typical way of concluding his letters, and the word “Christ” is not mentioned when he writes: “according to the revelation of a mystery kept hidden for ages past, but now made known” (Rom 16:25b–26a).

The most heated debates among biblical scholars concern whether Rom 16:1–23 belongs to the original letter. As early as the 18th century, some hypothesized that Rom 16:1–23 constituted a separate letter addressed to the Ephesians. Following the 1937 publication of P⁴⁶, which contained only 15 chapters, some believed this confirmed their hypothesis, before it was realized that this manuscript did not contain the original version of the epistle’s text.

In our view, Rom 16:1–23 cannot be an independent letter and is part of the entire Letter to the Romans. Let us analyze Rom 16:1–17:

Then, I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, 2 so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. 3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but also all the churches of the gentiles. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Israelites who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. 8 Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. 9 Greet Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. 10 Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those among the [slaves] of Aristobulus. 11 Greet my fellow Israelite Herodion. Greet those among the [slaves] of Narcissus. 12 Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and greet his mother—a mother to me also. 14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. 15 Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. 17 I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who create dissensions and hindrances, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.

1. “Then (*de*), I commend to you...”. The Greek particle *de* expresses continuity with what precedes it.
2. Without the “holy kiss,” we would be missing a conclusion typical of Paul’s letters.
3. “I commend to you our sister Phoebe” seems unusual for Paul, but there are examples, such as in Cicero, where a recommendation could be inserted into the conclusion of a letter, sometimes in reference to the recipient, but not always.
4. Two of the groups greeted in Rom 16 were certainly domiciled in Rome. “Those among the [slaves] of Aristobulus” worked for the grandson of Herod the Great, who died in Rome around the late 40s. According to his will, they would have been integrated into another large household while retaining their distinctive name. From this perspective, Paul’s formula would translate as *Aristobuliani*. This interpretation is virtually certain based on the name of the next person mentioned. “Herodion” unambiguously suggests a connection to Herod’s family, since freed slaves took the name of their patron. In light of the above, it is plausible that “those among the [slaves] of Narcissus”

were the slaves of the influential freedman of Claudius, who was assassinated shortly after his patron's death in 54. They, along with his immense fortune, entered Nero's household under the name *Narcissiani*, as inscriptions attest. If these identifications are correct—and they are widely accepted—these two groups can only be sought in Rome. It is inconceivable that such “inheritances” would have been moved en masse out of the Eternal City, much less to Ephesus.

5. Paradoxically, the long list of people greeted in Rom 16:1–23 proves that Paul was writing to a community within which he had neither lived nor worked, and of which he was not a member. Paul was in the habit of not naming the recipients of his greetings, no doubt because it would have been inappropriate to single out individuals from a group whose members he knew all. This conclusion is confirmed by the Epistle to the Colossians, which is addressed to a church that Paul neither founded nor visited, where he mentions “Nympha and the church that meets in her house” (Col 4:15).
6. “Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.” This note contradicts the hypothesis that the letter was sent to Ephesus. The description of Epenetus as “the first convert in Asia for Christ” is more plausible if he was then outside his province. In Ephesus, this would have been common knowledge, just as Timothy's status as Paul's “co-worker” (Rom 16:21) would have been, and therefore Paul would not have needed to specify it.
7. “the teaching (*didachē*) that you have learned” (Rom 16:17). The Greek term *didachē*, also used in Rom 6:17, refers to the body of Christian teachings. The unusual verb form suggests that Paul did not know who had instructed the Romans. If Paul had instructed the recipients, as would have been the case in Ephesus, he would have used the first person singular (see 1 Cor 15:1; Gal 1:8).

B. Planning for the Future

In chapter 16, Paul greets 26 people, 24 of whom are named. He also mentions three house churches (verses 5, 14, 15) and two groups of former slaves (verses 10, 11), which may also have been house churches. He certainly knew some of them personally. Prisca and Aquila were with him in Corinth, then in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19). The adjective “beloved” used for Epaenetus, Ampliatus, and Stachys cannot be a mere formality. If Rufus's mother had also been a mother figure to Paul, he must have known her and her son. It is not surprising that Paul, during his ministry in Greece and Asia Minor, knew at least seven and at most nine Christians who had settled in Rome.

What is significant is that Paul knew where these people were and was familiar with the names and merits of several other members of the Roman church. The conclusion that he had contacts in Rome before writing this letter is inevitable. Were these contacts coincidental or intentional? The presence of Prisca and Aquila in Rome points to careful planning. This couple, as we have seen, had provided Paul with a foothold in Corinth and had laid the groundwork for his ministry in Ephesus. If they now appear in Rome, it is evident that they had been sent by Paul in anticipation of his arrival.

a. A Mission to Spain

Rome was a well-established church, many of whose members had been raised in the cultural ethos of the Eastern Mediterranean. For these people, hospitality toward travelers was second nature, and Paul could count on their generosity. But then why did he lay the groundwork so meticulously by sending his close associates and gathering information about the church members? He must have had something specific in mind, as revealed in Rom 15:24: “when I go to Spain... I hope indeed to see you on my way there and to receive your help (*propempō*) in getting there, after first being filled, even if only a little, by your presence.” The Greek term *propempō* is a technical term in the New Testament used to denote the missionary support provided by a church. This term refers not only to financial support but to the fact that a community takes responsibility for a mission. Recall that during his first mission, Paul had been sent by the church in Antioch, which had taken responsibility for it. Now, Paul would ask the same of the church in Rome.

Why did Paul choose Spain as a mission field? It is possible that he was inspired by Isaiah's eschatological vision: “I will guide their actions and their thoughts; I am coming to gather all the nations of every language; they will come and see my glory: yes, I will set a sign among them. Moreover, I will send survivors from among them to the nations: Tarshish, Put, and Lud, who bend the bow; Tubal, Javan, and the distant islands, who have never heard of me, who have never seen my glory; they will proclaim my glory among the nations” (Is 66:18–19). Tarshish would refer to the western tip of the Mediterranean (see Jon 1:3; 4:2). This would correspond to Paul's messianic understanding of his vocation, that of extending God's reign to the ends of the known world. In Gal 1:15, Paul clearly states that he sees his life as foreshadowed in the Song of the Servant: “I have appointed you to be a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (Is 49:6). For Paul's contemporaries, the “Sacred Cape”—today “Cape St. Vincent” in Portugal—was the edge of the world.

However, this choice is surprising. Up to this point, Paul had moved in a world that spoke his language and where a network of Jewish institutions existed that he could draw upon. None of this existed in Spain. The Jewish diaspora did not extend further west than Italy. There were no God-fearing people in Spain who had any knowledge of Scripture. Likewise, few people spoke Greek. The interior was dominated by a staggering number of Iberian dialects. Latin was the language of administration, but few people spoke it. It is difficult to know to what extent Paul was

aware of these obstacles. At the very least, he must have known that he was venturing into a world different from the one he knew, and needed the expertise of those who were closer to that world.

b. A Winter in Greece

When did Paul decide to go to Spain? It was probably during the summer of 55, while he was in Illyria. His letter (2 Corinthians 1–9) had been sent to the Corinthians, and he was free to undertake a new mission. And from Illyria, Rome was not very far away. So, after delivering the collection to Jerusalem, he could consider a trip to the other side of the Mediterranean. It was probably during this somewhat euphoric moment that he was also able to formulate his plan to send Prisca and Aquila to Rome.

Then came the bad news from Corinth. He had to resign himself to spending the winter in Corinth as planned, but afterward he would have no more time for the childishness (1 Cor 3:1; 14:20) of that church. It was time for him to devote his energies to something more fruitful, and Rome could serve as a springboard for Spain. Rome would therefore be on the agenda for the summer of 56. So, as soon as the collection was delivered to Jerusalem, he would head west, which meant Prisca and Aquila would have to leave immediately for Rome to prepare the ground. Perhaps it was at this point that Paul, or someone in his circle, conceived the idea of writing the Letter to the Romans. Even if Prisca and Aquila could speak well of him to the Romans, a personal letter would undoubtedly be more effective in introducing him. But this was something new for him, for until then all his letters had been responses to community issues. Unfortunately, preoccupied with his mission in Illyria and the problems in Corinth that demanded his full attention, he had to postpone writing such a letter until winter. This would give him more time to gather further information about the Roman church, having previously sent Prisca and Aquila there.

The Letter to the Romans was certainly sent in the spring of 56 at the latest.

C. The Writing of the Letter to the Romans

This letter had several objectives. First, Paul needed to address a topic of interest to the community while also introducing himself and his gospel. The first thing he needed to know in order to write Romans 1–12 was that the community was primarily composed of God-fearing people—information that Prisca and Aquila may have shared with him during their initial meeting in Corinth. On the other hand, writing Romans 13–16 required detailed, up-to-date knowledge of the Roman community. Therefore, we can surmise that Paul first wrote Romans 1–12 during the winter of 55–56, but the rest of the letter only in the spring of 56 after receiving the information from Prisca and Aquila.

a. Jew and Gentiles in Rome

The origins of the Roman church are unknown. It appears, however, that it was the work of Christians of Jewish origin. The first mention of its existence is Suetonius's remark about Emperor Claudius: "He expelled from Rome the Jews who were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (*Claudius* 24.4). As we have already seen, Claudius's action likely affected only a single synagogue, which would explain why this expulsion is not mentioned in any Jewish source. Thus, a tiny fraction of Rome's 40,000 or 50,000 Jews would have been involved.

Paul's focus on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity was likely inspired by the problems he encountered with the Judaizers in Corinth during the winter, and by his concern about how he would be received in Jerusalem with the collection.

A striking feature of the style of chapters 1 through 11 of the Epistle to the Romans confirms that Paul had only a general understanding of the Church in Rome. He addresses an imaginary interlocutor, addresses objections and erroneous conclusions, and expresses himself in a dialogue punctuated by examples. He uses the diatribe, a pedagogical technique employed in the context of a school of philosophy. The choice of this technique reveals another facet of the quality of Paul's education, and the sophistication with which he uses it betrays the give-and-take characteristic of many discussions. We can also infer that the questions and objections do not express the specific problems of his audience, but rather synthesize the experiences of many new converts. Paul had dealt with many Jews and Gentiles who were striving to understand their past and their present.

b. Sin, Law, and Death

The central theme of the Epistle to the Romans is that God not only desires the salvation of all, but has also set in motion a plan to ensure that His grace reaches every individual (Rom. 3:29). The overarching proposition underlying the entire development of the letter is as follows: "The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, first for the Jew, then for the Greek" (Rom 1:16). This conviction has guided Paul's life since his conversion, and in this sense, the Epistle to the Romans crystallizes his gospel message. However, the way in which the power of the Gospel produces its effects was much better presented in his earlier letters. On the other hand, those letters did not adequately express Paul's perception of humanity's need for salvation. Thus, the originality of the Epistle to the Romans does not lie in its teaching on the how of salvation, but in its explanation of the why of salvation.

A distinctive feature of the letter to the Romans is its use of the Greek word *hamartia* (sin). It first appears in Rom 3:9: "all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin." Clearly, the word "sin" does not refer to the individual

sins of people. To emphasize this aspect, the word will be capitalized: Sin. We can group Paul's use of this word under three headings:

1. Sin

- "Through one man, Sin entered the world" (Rom 5:12a)
- "so that we might no longer be slaves to Sin" (Rom 6:6)
- "Do not offer your members as instruments of Sin" (Rom 6:13)
- "you were slaves to Sin" (Rom 6:16, 17, 20)
- "freed from sin" (Rom 6:18)
- "sold into slavery to sin" (Rom 7:14)
- "the sin that dwells within me" (Rom 7:20)

2. Sin and the Law

- "For sin will no longer have dominion over you, since you are no longer under the Law but under grace" (Rom 6:14)
- "For without the Law, sin is dead" (Rom 7:8)
- "it makes me a prisoner of the law of sin that is in my members" (Rom 7:23, 25)
- "Jesus Christ has set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2)

3. Sin and Death

- "Sin entered the world, and through sin, death" (Rom 5:12b)
- "just as sin reigned in death" (Rom 5:21)
- "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23)

The term "sin" functions like a myth or a symbol. It is in Gal 3:22 ("But the Scripture has imprisoned all under sin") that the word appears for the first time. In Rom 3:9–18, Paul clarifies this enigmatic statement by citing various passages from the Old Testament where humanity appears ungodly, ignorant of God, doing evil, deceitful, and murderous (see Rom 1:29–31). However, unlike his ancestors, Paul refuses to see in this situation anything that implies human responsibility. This is where the power of Sin comes in. According to him, humanity is perverted and distorted by a force beyond its control. This insight is rooted in Paul's personal experience. As a traveler, he found himself compelled to be other than he would have wished. His commitment was to be another Christ, entirely devoted to the service of others. But to survive on the road, he first had to look out for his own interests. The conditions of his life compelled him toward selfishness and mistrust of others rather than love.

This situation dates back to Genesis 3, where, in the history of humanity, a wrong decision was made by one person. From then on, according to Genesis 4:11, evil grew exponentially (Genesis 6:5). Wickedness became endemic, with sinners interacting with one another. All who are born into a corrupt society inherit its flaws. They have no choice but to internalize these values and pass them on, reinforced, to the next generation. They are slaves to the sin that dwells within them. For Paul, sin was not an external force, but a reality inherent in humanity—the accumulated power of lived adherence to a flawed value system. "God has imprisoned all people in their own disobedience" (Rom 7:10).

For Paul, one of the erroneous values inherited by the Jews was a particular attitude toward the Law, which distorted its true meaning (Rom 7:10). At the heart of the Jewish faith lies the conviction of their election through a free act of God. By giving the Law, God established a covenant. Belonging to this covenant was necessary for salvation, and it entailed obedience to the precepts of the Law. But over time, there was a shift in the understanding of this covenant. For originally, obedience to the commandments was not conceived as a means of obtaining salvation—which came rather from God's grace—but was nonetheless required as a condition for remaining in the covenant; and disobedience to the commandments led to damnation. But in the Jewish mind, if disobedience to the commandments of the Law caused damnation, it seemed logical that obedience to these precepts would guarantee salvation. Thus, despite a superficial adherence to the fundamental concept of free grace in election, in practice, all attention was focused on the observance of the commandments.

A religion of grace expressed in the form of a covenant quickly became a religion of merit, at least in the collective imagination, if not in the treatises of theologians. For Paul, there was a reversal of values: the emphasis had shifted from the importance of the free gift of the covenant to the importance of obedience to the Law. Thus the Jews began to debate endlessly about points of the Law, rather than the mystery of grace. The Law took up all the space, even God's own.

This is why Paul, to ensure that God's free gift in Jesus Christ retained its primacy, had to insist that the Law was entirely superfluous for all believers, Jews and non-Jews alike. God's free gift is revealed in Christ's self-sacrifice, a sacrifice that the Law had in no way anticipated. On the contrary, Christ is the new Law (Gal 6:2). Hence, it is understandable that Paul insists that Christ has put an end to the Law as it pertains to humanity (Rom 10:4). Once the purpose of the Law was definitively fulfilled in and through Christ, the means to achieve it (the Law) no longer had any reason to exist.

The condition of the Gentiles, distorted by the self-centered values of the society into which they were born, and that of the Jews, made “captives of the law of sin” (Rom 7:23), is summed up by Paul in a single word: death. This vision of the human condition stems from Paul’s conviction—already outlined in the Epistle to the Galatians—that the criterion of authentic humanity is the sacrificial love revealed in Jesus, who “did not seek his own pleasure” (Rom 15:3), but suffered for all people (Rom 8:17), even to the point of dying for the ungodly (Rom 5:6). Without this creative impulse, a life turned inward by society or the Law can only be compared to the existence of a corpse. Those who do not love are the living dead.

This brief summary of what Paul meant by sin, Law, and death reveals the depth of his reflection on the circumstances of his ministry. An analysis of the human condition was essential for him to give his preaching a precise direction. His conviction that his listeners had to be freed from sin before they could receive the Gospel and thus pass from death to life led to a commitment to be Christ—the power and wisdom of God—for others (1 Cor 1:24; 2 Cor 4:10–11).

c. The Salvation of the Jews

Although the tentacles of Sin reached into every stratum of humanity, Paul regarded his own people as its greatest victims. He and others had freed multitudes of Gentiles from the power of Sin, but very few Jews had accepted Christ as the Messiah. Why were those whom God had most privileged in preparing for the coming of the Messiah the most adamant in their rejection of Jesus? This mystery tormented Paul throughout his apostolic life. The urgency of this question was heightened by his apprehension regarding the reception he would receive in Jerusalem (Rom 15:31), which implicitly acknowledged the Jews’ growing hostility toward the movement of Jesus. The winter in Corinth gave him time to gather the scattered insights that had come to him over the years and to formulate a comprehensive response.

The complex argumentation in chapters 9–11 of the Epistle to the Romans bears impressive witness to the depth of Paul’s knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. The subtlety of his interpretation reveals once again the solidity of his intellectual training. The quality of his writing is also remarkable, and the hymn, in which he expresses his adoration with extraordinary eloquence (Rom 11:33–36), is undoubtedly his literary masterpiece.

This outpouring of gratitude perfectly concludes the summary of the argument presented in Rom 11:25–32, where Paul reveals his solution to the problem of Israel’s salvation. He never doubted that God could deny himself and abandon those whom he had chosen and endowed with gifts (Rom 11:1–2). It was by reading Isaiah that he understood the means by which the Jews would be saved. In Rom 11:26, to support his thesis that “all Israel will be saved,” he quotes: “The Redeemer will come from Zion; he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; and this is my covenant with them” (Isa 59:20–21); “when I take away their sins” (Isa 27:9). This is an allusion to the Parousia of Christ. In other words, the Jews will be saved exactly as Paul was. Just as Paul’s attitude was transformed by a completely unexpected encounter on the road to Damascus, where Christ took the initiative, so it will be for all Israel at the Parousia, when Christ appears in his glory. Then, the Jews will be no more able to reject him than Paul had been.

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The depth of Paul’s concern about his reception in Jerusalem can be gauged from the fact that he mentions it in his letter to the Romans, a group whose support he needed if he was to preach in Spain.

A. An Uncertain Future

At the end of his letter to the Romans (Rom 15:31–32), Paul asks the community to pray for three things:

1. To be rescued from the unbelievers
2. That the aid sent to Jerusalem may be well received by the saints
3. To go to Rome with joy by God’s will

By “unbelievers,” Paul refers to the Jews who have not accepted Christ (Rom 11:30–32). By using the verb “to be rescued,” Paul suggests that he feels physically threatened. How is this possible? During his two previous visits to Jerusalem, everything went smoothly. But the situation is different now. Recall that emissaries from Antioch had been closely monitoring him for four years, challenging his attitude toward the Law. In Galatia, they had the opportunity to read Paul’s letter to the local churches, and it is highly likely that they sent a copy to Antioch and reported on his antinomianism. Given the regular contact between Antioch and Jerusalem, we can be certain that James and his companions were fully aware that Paul’s position had become more radical, becoming the antithesis of their own. It was therefore perfectly reasonable for Paul to wonder whether James would accept a gift with which he was so closely associated.

To Paul’s personal views must be added the political situation. In the past, the Jews accepted gifts from the Gentiles for sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. However, as relations with Rome deteriorated, such Gentile participation in Jewish worship gradually became less acceptable to the more extremist elements. The climax was reached in the year 66. Eleazar, son of Ananias, the high priest and governor of the temple, persuaded those who officiated in the worship not to

accept any offering or sacrifice from any foreigner. This marked the true beginning of the war against the Romans. Now, Paul was well aware of James's nationalist stance, both in a positive sense (Gal 2:3) and a negative one (Gal 2:12), and knew full well that any gesture that might be perceived as an attempt to reach out to people of pagan origin risked being rejected. Paul could not be certain of this, however, because he did not know how much the Jerusalem community needed this money.

Note that Paul could have decided not to go to Jerusalem. His participation in the delegation was not essential. The delegates from the contributing churches were with him, and he could have let them the money and withdrawn. The only impact for him would have been on his pride. But his decision to persevere, despite the mortal danger and the possible futility of his gesture, underscores the depth of his feelings regarding the relationship between the Jewish and non-Jewish churches. No one was more aware than he of the widening chasm between those for whom Christ was central and those for whom he was not. Yet it was absolutely crucial to build a fragile bridge of charity across that chasm. He was willing to risk everything to achieve this.

B. A Farewell Circuit of the Aegean Sea

Luke recounts Paul's journey to Jerusalem in detail in the Book of Acts (Acts 20:3–21:17). He is able to provide so many details because he draws almost the entire account from the Travel Journal, one of the earliest sources for the Book of Acts, written by an eyewitness. With the exception of a brief speech at Miletus, it is simply a list of dates and places, which corresponds perfectly to the coastal navigation techniques of antiquity. Setting out from Philippi, more precisely from Neapolis, the ship traveled each day the distance allowed by the wind, skirting the coast of Asia Minor toward the south, in search of a port for the night. It was not until Myra that they found a ship sailing directly to Tyre.

This route to Jerusalem is surprising, as one would have expected Paul to set sail for Jerusalem from the Corinthian port of Cenchreae. How can this detour through Macedonia be explained? Luke gives us this explanation: "When he was about to set sail for Syria, since the Jews were plotting against him, he decided to go through Macedonia again" (Acts 20:3). Where could Luke have obtained this information? One possible explanation is this: Luke knew that the normal route by ship to the east departed from Cenchreae, but his source gave Philippi in Macedonia as the point of departure, and so he had to postulate a scenario—that of a plot—to explain this change in itinerary.

a. Transporting the Collection

Before addressing the issue of the change in itinerary, let us examine the question of transporting the collection. The model that would have spontaneously come to mind for people in the Apostle's time was the procedure for transferring the annual temple tax—half a shekel—from the Diaspora to Jerusalem. The money collected from the various communities was reduced to a minimum in volume by being converted into a precious metal, namely gold. We will never know exactly how much money Paul collected. It is certain, however, that the sum was considerable. The symbolic value of the gesture would have been nil if the sum had been paltry (1 Cor 16:2); it would have been perceived by the Jerusalemites as an expression of contempt.

Given the conditions of travel in the first century, Paul's primary concern was undoubtedly the safety of the funds entrusted to him. It was hardly possible for him to hire armed guards. His challenge was to ensure the transport was as discreet as possible and carried out in absolute secrecy. Each member of the group had to carry their personal funds for the journey in a money belt or a small pouch suspended by a cord around the neck, but each also had gold coins sewn into their clothing so that they would not jingle. Since gold is heavy for its volume, the risk of distorting the garment would have limited the number of coins a person could carry. Consequently, the number of Paul's companions was determined by the amount of money to be transported.

In such a context, it was better to travel by ship, since the crew and passengers of a vessel were fixed and known individuals whose movements could be monitored, whereas on the road and in inns one was constantly encountering strangers about whom it was difficult to know what they had noticed and who might flee after an attack.

b. A Sense of Foreboding

Why, then, did Paul choose to take the overland route northward instead of the sea route eastward? It was because he had decided to return first to Macedonia, and the sea route northward would have forced him to sail against the summer winds and would have caused endless delays. But why did he want to return to Macedonia? Paul likely had a premonition that he would never return from Jerusalem, and so he wished to bid farewell to the communities he had founded there. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that, despite his eagerness to reach Jerusalem, he devoted time to his two foundations.

Paul remained in Troas, even though a ship bound for Assos was ready to set sail. He instructed his companions to go ahead, having agreed to join them by crossing on foot at the foot of the great promontory (Acts 20:13). We can assume that he was held up by unresolved matters in Troas. Paul had been able to devote only a little time to the local community (2 Cor 2:12–13). No doubt he had promised them he would return during his previous stay. During a final meeting, he told them it was unlikely he would ever see them again. Naturally, they stayed with him until the very last moment.

It is only in this light that it becomes possible to explain why Paul decided to avoid going to Ephesus and instead summoned the elders to Miletus. He did not wish to relive the same heart-wrenching ordeal as the farewell at Troas. Miletus was located 80 km from Ephesus, and thus a journey of about three days, perhaps a little longer for elderly people. In his speech at Miletus, Paul does not explicitly bid farewell to the elders, but the final nature of the visit is clearly indicated by his apprehension regarding what will happen in Jerusalem (Acts 20:22), and by his foresight for the future, since he warns the elders that they will henceforth bear sole responsibility for the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:28).

C. Paul's Reception in Jerusalem

This section of the Travelogue culminates with Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17) and continues with his departure for Rome (Acts 27:1). For everything that happened in the meantime, we rely entirely on Luke and his other sources. However, it is increasingly accepted that Luke had only a very rudimentary idea of what actually happened to Paul during his last visit to Jerusalem. The basic framework likely included nothing more than the following elements: Roman intervention saved Paul from a Jewish mob. The tribune in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, referred the case to his superior in Caesarea, Felix, who had not resolved it when he was replaced by Festus. Eventually, Paul asserted his right, as a Roman citizen, to be judged by the emperor and was sent to Rome. With remarkable literary skill, Luke brought these events to life. His aim was simply to embellish the facts and manipulate them in order to convey his own convictions regarding Paul's role in the plan of salvation.

Rather than attempting to establish the historical veracity of Luke's account, it is preferable to address the two issues that concerned Paul in Rom 15:31–32: his apprehension regarding the reception of the collection and his fear of assassination. Were his fears justified?

Only one verse in Acts can possibly be interpreted as an allusion to the collection: "After many years, I have come here with alms and offerings for my people" (Acts 24:17). But, since it was customary for devout pilgrims to bring alms to distribute in the Holy City, as well as money for sacrifices, Luke simply intends to show that Paul believed "in everything written in the Law and the Prophets" (Acts 24:14). But is it really possible that Luke was unaware of the existence of this collection? Since we cannot say for certain what Luke knew or did not know, it is more relevant to ask what James and the other members of the Church in Jerusalem knew. Recall that it was James who had requested financial assistance for his church from Paul during the Jerusalem Council. Not only had this request been made less than five years earlier, but Paul's response must have been the subject of constant discussion.

What, then, were the feelings of James and the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem at the time of Paul's arrival? One can imagine that as Paul's radically antinomian stance spread within the increasingly nationalistic church in Jerusalem, some intended to categorically refuse any gift from such "unclean" hands, while others, more pragmatic, would have argued that money has no smell, that it was necessary, and that it could be put to good use, without necessarily subscribing to Paul's idea of a link between the Jewish and Gentile churches. In any case, the decision rested with James.

What happened when Paul finally made his appearance? The possibilities are limited: (1) the collection was accepted; (2) the collection was rejected; (3) some Jerusalemites accepted the collection despite the objections of others; (4) the delivery of the collection was blocked. In order to remain faithful to a project he had initiated, James's first reaction would have been to seek a way to accept the collection. His main concern, therefore, would have been to convince himself and his right-wing constituency that Paul remained a practicing Jew and that his reputation as an antinomian was unjustified. A simple profession of faith would not have sufficed. Paul had to make a public gesture demonstrating his Jewish identity. The simplest act—and the minimum that James could accept—would have been the purification required of all Jews coming from Gentile territories and wishing to enter the Temple. They were presumed to be defiled by a corpse, and this Levitical impurity had to be cleansed by a priest sprinkling water from the sacrifice on the third and seventh days. Only by performing this ritual could Paul have established a relationship with the most devout members of the Jerusalem community, who, moreover, would have been satisfied by the implicit condemnation of the Gentiles.

Luke alludes to a form of purification at the temple, but he confuses Paul's purification with the ceremony marking the end of his Nazirite vow. Fulfilling a Nazirite vow was no easy task. The required offering consisted of "a one-year-old male lamb without blemish as a burnt offering, a one-year-old female lamb without blemish as a sin offering, a ram without blemish as a fellowship offering, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, along with the grain offerings and drink offerings required for them" (Num 6:14–15). For a poor person, the financial burden was considerable. Given Paul's personal financial situation, as revealed in his letters, it is highly unlikely that he had the means to pay for four Nazirites.

Luke attributes the initiative for Paul's purification rite to the leaders of the Jerusalem community, but it is more likely that Paul himself was behind it. The concern expressed in Rom 15:31–32 attests to his constant worries about how he would be received in Jerusalem. During the long journey from Greece, he had all the time necessary to devise a plan that would reassure the believers in Jerusalem while presenting them with a fait accompli. Unfortunately, the plan was set in motion but never carried through to completion. Even before the seven days of his purification had ended (Acts 21:27), the second danger Paul had foreseen materialized. Non-Christian Jews attempted to lynch him. The garrison at the Antonia Fortress intervened to save him. He was then detained by the Romans. We will never know what his companions did with the collection.

D. A Roman Prisoner

A distinctive feature of Luke's account following Paul's arrest is the number of speeches attributed to him. In Jerusalem, he addresses the people (Acts 22:1–21) and the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1–10), then in Caesarea, the Roman governors Felix (Acts 24:1–21), Festus, and the Jewish king Agrippa II (Acts 26:1–23). Paul's message reaches all segments of the Palestinian population, from the crowd to the royal court, from religious authorities to civil authorities. Historically speaking, all of this coming from a prisoner is hardly plausible. Luke puts his theological vision into Paul's mouth.

a. A Hazardous Journey to Rome

Problems multiply when we turn to the account of the voyage to Rome (Acts 27:1–28:14). Not only do the Western and Alexandrian texts offer significantly different versions, but both show traces of source material and editorial interventions. Let us give a few examples of the lack of literary unity within the Western text.

1. Acts 27:8–10 cannot belong to the same narrative as 27:11–12. The former recounts a dangerous voyage on the high seas departing from Fair Havens in Crete, while the latter describes a similar voyage, the success of which is far from assured, and whose destination is Phoenix in Crete.
2. Acts 27:13–17 recounts a tumultuous crossing to the island of Clauda, where the ship finds refuge, but in 27:18, it is still at sea.
3. The unusual Homeric expression *epekilan tēn naun*, meaning “to land on an open beach” (with no connection to a shipwreck), appears in both 27:29 and 27:41. This repetition reveals the editorial technique of “repetition.”

Here is a reconstruction of Luke's source by Boismard and Lamouille (*Les Actes des deux apôtres* – 2, 1990, pp. 225–226).

Note : TA = Alexandrian text-type

Travel Journal	Acts I
(27: 1) When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, (3) we came to Sidon. (7b) Putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Crete, (8) and came to Fair Havens near a city. (9) Since we had lost much time, and sailing was now dangerous because even the Fast had already passed, Paul advised them (10) saying, ‘Men, I can see that the voyage will be with danger and much heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.’ (12 TA) But the majority was in favour of putting to sea. (13) When a moderate south wind began to blow we sailed along the coast of Crete. (14) A storm struck from the south-east. (18) The next day, since the boat was being pounded so violently, (19) we jettisoned the cargo. (20) When the storm had raged for many days, when neither sun nor stars appeared, we finally lost all hope of surviving. (37) We were about 70 people. (21) The food having completely run out, Paul stood up and said, ‘Men, you should have listened to me and not set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this danger and loss.	(27: 1b) The following day having called a centurion called Julius, he delivered to him Paul and some other prisoners. (6) The centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put (them) on board. (11–12) The captain and the owner decided to put to sea on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete. (13) Supposing that they had obtained their purpose they weighed anchor and sailed (to) Crete. (14) But soon a tempest struck. (15) When the ship was caught and could not face the wind, they took measures to undergird the ship. Then fearing they should run on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and so were driven. (18b) They began next day to throw the cargo overboard. (19) And the third day they cast out with their own hands the tackle of the ship (38) and the ship was lightened. (27) When the fourteenth night had come, about midnight, the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. (41) They ran the vessel aground. (28: 1) Having landed, they recognized the region which was called Malta. (2a) The

(22a) I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among us. (26) We must strike an island. (15) The ship was pushed by the wind, and we arrived at an island called [Gaudos]. (17b) There we rested. (28: 2) The natives welcomed us (10a) and showed us unusual honours. (11) We sailed on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island. (14b) And so we came to Rome. (15 a) The believers, when they heard, came to meet us.	natives showed them unusual kindness, (10b) putting on board whatever we needed. (16) When we came to Rome, Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him.
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The similarity between the two accounts is striking. From the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, a ship set sail for Crete as autumn gave way to winter. The risk was justified by the prospect of a smooth crossing. On the next leg of the journey, toward Italy, the travelers were not so fortunate. Caught in a storm, the crew was forced to throw the cargo overboard. They survived and found refuge on an island, where they were welcomed with hospitality by the natives, who eventually sent them on their way to Rome. So many similarities indicate unequivocally that we are dealing with two versions of the same event. Furthermore, the two journeys must be dated to roughly the same period. The journey described in the Travel Journal must have taken place after Paul's visit to Jerusalem to deliver the collection for the poor. According to Acts I, the process leading up to this journey began with Paul's arrest in Jerusalem.

There is, however, one major difference between the two texts: Paul's status. According to Acts I, he is a prisoner, but in the Travel Journal, he is free, as in the other sections of this document. Yet it is the same journey. How can we make sense of these two versions? We must not forget that, according to Acts I, the decision to go to Rome was made by Paul (Acts 25:11–12). Festus could not have refused his appeal to the emperor. It was therefore perfectly plausible to recount the journey while omitting the fact that Paul was, technically, a prisoner. Furthermore, certain clues in the Travel Journal suggest that Paul was not in control of his own destiny. For Paul was in the habit of preferring the overland route. The decision to take to the sea here was not his own. Second, why did Paul not heed his own warning that it was too risky to continue the journey (Acts 27:11) and why did he not leave the ship at Fair Havens? It is because he had no choice. The decisions were made by the centurion, under whose custody he was traveling.

b. Incarceration in the Eternal City

Luke describes the conditions of Paul's imprisonment in Rome. He lived in private quarters, under the supervision of a single soldier (Acts 28:16, 30). This form of detention is not implausible in itself. The alternative would have been prison. However, in prison, it would have been difficult to receive visitors and deliver the speech that Luke attributes to Paul. The implausibility of this speech to the Jews, as well as their reaction, reveals Luke's intentions and once again compromises his credibility as a historian. If this account is his invention, could he not also have created the context allowing Paul to continue his missionary activity "quite openly and without hindrance" (Acts 28:31)? A major question mark therefore hangs over the nature of Paul's detention in Rome. It is highly likely that he endured difficult times, even though, based on his experience, there was no reason to be discouraged: he had always been released after his many imprisonments (2 Cor 11:23).

According to Luke, Paul's imprisonment lasted two years (Acts 28:30). From a Roman official's perspective, Paul was not a particularly important prisoner, and a purely fortuitous release might have been beneficial to him—for instance, if an act of clemency were deemed appropriate at a given moment, or simply to lighten the court's caseload by clearing backlogs. But Luke was probably unaware of what happened to Paul, as well as to Peter, and ended his account because he had no further information.

E. The Pastoral Letters

Are there other sources of information that shed light on Paul's later career? For some biblical scholars who accept the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), these letters provide insight into the period of Paul's life between his imprisonment in Rome and his death in the year 67.

a. The Problem of Authenticity

A simple reading of the Pastoral Epistles is enough to show that they differ from the other letters in the Pauline corpus: there are differences in (1) language, (2) literary style, (3) theological perspective, (4) the organization of the Church, and (5) the nature of the opposition the Church faces. Consequently, the prevailing view among biblical

scholars is that at least the majority of these three letters were not written by Paul. According to this hypothesis, the author sought to invoke Paul's authority in an attempt to resolve the Church's problems around the year 100. He thus created three apocryphal letters. How were they accepted? Rumors spread that they had remained outside the developing Pauline corpus because of their private nature. However, the needs of the Church now demanded their publication.

This hypothesis is entirely plausible. Most scholars agree that the Epistle to the Ephesians was not composed by Paul himself, and the extent to which he explicitly wrote it under his own authority remains questionable. There are, moreover, several apocryphal letters, such as the Epistle to the Laodiceans and the Third Epistle to the Corinthians, as well as the Epistle to Titus, not to mention the supposed letters of Paul to the Macedonians and Alexandrians, known only through vague and late allusions. However, unlike the apocryphal gospels, the epistolary form was not a widespread genre. We cannot therefore assert that there was a climate of acceptance conducive to the integration of the apocryphal pastoral epistles into church life. Furthermore, the pastoral epistles, addressed to individuals and rich in personal details, differ fundamentally from the apocryphal letters that have come down to us, which are addressed to churches and contain little or no personal information. Finally, we must not assume that Christians of the first two centuries were characterized by credulity and naivety. If the pastoral letters were indeed accepted, there must have been a very close connection with Pauline circles.

b. The Authenticity of the Second Timothy

When considering the three pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus), we must distinguish the group consisting of 1 Timothy and Titus from 2 Timothy. Indeed, when analyzing the vocabulary, style, and doctrine of these pastoral epistles, we must conclude that 2 Timothy cannot have been written by the same author who composed 1 Timothy and Titus. Regarding the status of the sender and the recipient, Christology, ministry, the Gospel, attitudes toward women, and false teachings, it is possible to identify 30 points where elements found in 2 Timothy are absent from 1 Timothy and Titus, or conversely, are present in the latter but absent from 2 Timothy. Thus, the judgment regarding the authenticity of 1 Timothy and Titus cannot be applied to 2 Timothy.

As a methodological approach, one must initially consider a document to be authentic unless compelling evidence demonstrates that it is not. However, an in-depth stylometric study has concluded that 2 Timothy is as close to the core of the Pauline corpus as the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, which belongs to the group most widely recognized as authentic. The significance of the Second Epistle to Timothy within the Pauline corpus is clearly illustrated by the large number of parallels with the authentic letters. Furthermore, the only plausible explanation for the acceptance of the Pastoral Epistles lies in the authenticity of one of the three letters. If one of them had been known and recognized for a long time, the late "discovery" of the other two—which share the same general structure—could be explained in various convincing ways.

As for the biographical details, it is a mistake to try to reconcile those contained in 2 Timothy with those in 1 Timothy. They belong to two different worlds. The biographical details in 2 Timothy must be studied on their own terms.

F. Rome and Spain

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he was in prison (2 Tim 1:8, 16) as a criminal (2 Tim 2:9). As had been the case in Ephesus, he was able to write letters and receive visitors. His visitor was Onesiphorus: "May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he has often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. On the contrary, as soon as he arrived in Rome, he eagerly sought me out and found me" (2 Tim 1:16–17). This passage provides us with a great deal of information, particularly regarding the location of his imprisonment. Paul praises Onesiphorus's tenacity in finding him, since Rome was a large city of one million inhabitants with no street names or house numbers. The implication that Onesiphorus was his only visitor and that he received little help in finding him is confirmed by Paul's sense of isolation (2 Tim 4:11). Evidently, Paul's interactions with the church in Rome were not particularly warm. At the end of the Second Epistle to Timothy, Paul conveys greetings from Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the believers (4:21). All these names are Latin. There is no doubt that they were members of the local church. It is equally clear, however, that they distanced themselves from the apostle: "When I first made my defense, no one stood by me; everyone deserted me" (2 Tim 4:16). Given Paul's evident desire to be surrounded by faithful friends (2 Tim 4:11), it would seem that if he mentions a few names, it is to give Timothy the impression that his relations with the church in Rome were better than they actually were.

This situation is hardly compatible with the circumstances of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, however long it may have lasted. At that time, as we know from the Epistle to the Romans (Rom 16), he not only had old friends in the Roman church (for example, Rufus's mother), but two of his most faithful co-workers, Prisca and Aquila, were in charge of one of the house churches. When the Second Epistle to Timothy was written, they were no longer in Rome (2 Tim 4:19). We are therefore compelled to consider a second imprisonment in Rome some time after the first. This means, of course, that Paul was released after his first imprisonment, and we must assume that he continued his missionary work. Where was he preaching? His plan was to travel to Spain (Rom 15:24), and Clement of Rome, writing around the year 95, affirms that this was precisely what he intended to do:

It was as a result of jealousy and discord that Paul demonstrated (how one wins) the prize of endurance. Chained seven times, exiled, stoned, and having become a herald in the East and the West, he received

resplendent glory for his faith. After teaching righteousness to the whole world, reaching the *borders of the West*, and fulfilling his martyrdom before those in authority, he left the world and went to the holy place, an illustrious model of endurance " (1 Clement 5:5–7).

By using the term "borders of the West," Clement of Rome can only be referring to Spain. Under the best conditions, the Iberian Peninsula was a seven-day sail from Ostia, the port of Rome. But it is impossible to be more precise about the exact place where Paul might have gone. As for whether the Church of Rome sent him on a mission as he had hoped, this is doubtful given the strained relations with the Church revealed in 2 Timothy. One can imagine that, with his impetuous nature, Paul must have set out on the mission anyway, accompanied by those who had been his companions.

The Iberian Peninsula was the most Romanized of all the territories under Roman control. Given this close relationship, it is not unlikely that the Roman believers considered Spain to be part of their sphere of influence and felt it was their responsibility to bring the Gospel there. In their eyes, it would have been extremely presumptuous of Paul to act without their approval. Not only would he have flouted the dignity of the church in the empire's capital, but his inevitable failure would have jeopardized the organization of their own subsequent missionary expeditions. This hypothesis, despite its speculative nature, would help explain the Roman church's hostility toward him. Paul's own silence could be explained by his failure, as was the case with his aborted attempt to convert the Nabataeans (Gal 1:17). Chronologically, this event likely lasted no more than a single summer. The fact that Greek was not widely spoken remains the most likely explanation for the failure of the Spanish mission. Consequently, the southern coast of Gaul and northern Italy would not have been any more fertile ground. Where could Paul have gone next?

G. Once More the Aegean

Upon his return from Spain, it would have been surprising for Paul to have made his failure known to the Roman church. It is more likely that he bypassed the city of Rome to the south to reach the Appian Way, which ran through southern Italy to the port of Brindisi on the Adriatic Sea. If the season were not too far along, it would have been easy to find a ship to Dyrrachium, the gateway to Illyria.

We must not forget that Illyria was the only region in the East where Paul still had unfinished business, since his mission had been abruptly interrupted by the crisis in Corinth, which is the subject of chapters 10 through 13 of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Drawing on his long experience, Paul knew that the foundations of the church there needed to be strengthened—something he had been unable to do because of his first imprisonment. He therefore owed them a follow-up visit, just as he had done for all his other congregations. This is likely the reason for his return to the East. Had he followed his usual practice in Macedonia, Paul would have spent at least a year ministering to the Illyrians. Once convinced of the church's strength, he knew that his continued presence would hinder the community's normal development. Where did Paul go next?

The Second Epistle to Timothy provides several geographical references, but only five pertain to Paul's itinerary. Two allude to what Timothy already knew; the other three constitute new information. The expressions "you know" (1:15) and "you know very well" (1:18) frame two types of behavior that should be instructive for Timothy. Paul contrasts the attitude of those "in Asia who deserted me" with the devotion of Onesiphorus, as evidenced by "the gifts he sent to Ephesus." It is clear that Timothy has firsthand knowledge of these two episodes, and the second would place him in Ephesus with Paul at the time they occurred. The fact that he was unaware of what had happened in two port cities—one north of Ephesus, Troas, and the other to the south, Miletus—indirectly confirms that the capital of Asia was Timothy's base of operations. "When you come, bring the cloak I left with Carpus in Troas, along with the books, and especially the scrolls" (2 Tim 4:13); "Trophimus I left behind, sick, at Miletus" (2 Tim 4:20). The fifth mention contrasts sharply with the previous one: "Erastus remained in Corinth" (2 Tim 4:20).

This last reference allows us to choose among the options available to Paul after his departure from Illyria. It rules out a journey south to Corinth, since he would then have been able to inform Timothy of Erastus's decision during their subsequent meeting in Ephesus. Consequently, Paul continued eastward along the Via Egnatia and likely visited Thessalonica and Philippi before crossing over to Troas. The simplest explanation for why Paul left his cloak, books, and notebooks in Troas is that they would have been an impossible burden to carry on his 338-kilometer walk to Ephesus in the heat of summer. It is not known how long he spent in the capital of Asia or whether he visited the churches in the Lycus Valley. He eventually settled in Miletus, from where he took a ship to Corinth. The purpose of this pastoral journey through the Aegean Sea could only have been to edify, encourage, and console (1 Cor 14:3) the churches he had founded.

H. The Problem of Timothy

Where was Timothy when Paul wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy? It cannot have been Ephesus, since Paul has to inform him that he sent Tychicus there (2 Tim 4:12). We know that Timothy had previously been in Ephesus with Paul (2 Tim 1:15–18), but it is clear that he was no longer there. Nevertheless, Paul still knew where to send his letter. Since Timothy was unaware of what had happened north (Troas) and south of Ephesus (Miletus) (2 Tim 4:13, 20) and since he had to pass through Troas to reach Rome, his new mission could therefore only have been to the east, among the churches of the Lycus Valley or those of Galatia.

The Second Epistle to Timothy clearly suggests that Paul is dissatisfied with his disciple's attitude. The repeated exhortation: "Share in my sufferings" (2 Tim 1:8; 2:3), when considered in the context of the invitation to "rekindle the

gift of God that is within you... for God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self-control" (2 Tim 1:6), reveals a certain lack of commitment on Timothy's part. To some extent, he was not fulfilling the mission of an evangelist; he was not fully carrying out his ministry (2 Tim 4:5). Paul may have noticed this himself during his stay in Ephesus. Paul's first attempt to remedy the situation was to devise a mission that would take Timothy away from the city, while he himself would take charge of the church.

Paul's stay in Ephesus does not seem to have improved the situation. Indeed, "all the residents of Asia have turned away from me" (2 Tim 1:15) suggests that he exacerbated the tensions that were stirring up the community. Opposition to Paul had always existed in Ephesus (Phil 1:14–18), and it is highly likely that the church had evolved differently from the Pauline model during the seven years—or even longer (beginning in the year 54)—that Paul was separated from his flock. The false teaching that Paul urges Timothy to avoid undoubtedly reflects his personal experience during his last visit to Ephesus. The main concern of 2 Timothy is fruitless debate, "quarrels over words" (2 Tim 2:14), "profane and empty talk" (2 Tim 2:16), and "senseless and empty inquiries" (2 Tim 2:23). Such fruitless discussions, Paul insists, lead only to "the demoralization of the listeners" (2 Tim 2:14), to "increasing godlessness" (2 Tim 2:16), and to "quarrels" (2 Tim 2:23). Everything suggests that there was a group in Ephesus whose intellectual aspirations were similar to those of the "spirit-people" in Corinth.

Paul's departure for Miletus (2 Tim 4:20) may have been motivated by the realization that he was unable to resolve the problems within the Ephesian community. However, it was impossible for him to abandon the believers entirely, so he entrusted the responsibility to Prisca and Aquila, the founders of the church. Their presence in Ephesus is suggested by their ties to the family of Onesiphorus (2 Tim 4:19; cf. 1:18). Furthermore, the city lay on Timothy's route from the Lycus Valley to Rome. From this perspective, the dispatch of Tychicus—whom Luke identifies as an Asian (Acts 20:4)—was intended to strengthen the Pauline faction within the church in Ephesus. Upon reflection, Paul realized that it was not wise to leave Timothy in the region. He lacked both the skills and the authority necessary to combat the theological verbalism that had taken hold in Ephesus and was in serious danger of spreading into the hinterland. Clearly, Timothy was one of those who make excellent assistants but poor leaders. That is why Paul summoned him to Rome, under the pretext that it would be for his own good (2 Tim 1:4; 4:9, 21).

I. What did the Future Hold?

"Do your best to come see me before winter" (2 Tim 4:21). This terse instruction provides us with two important pieces of information. The letter must have been sent from Rome toward the end of spring or the beginning of summer, and Paul expected to be in Rome to receive Timothy at least four months later. Furthermore, he fully expected to need his winter coat (2 Tim 4:13). In addition, Paul instructs Timothy to bring Mark with him, "for he is helpful to my ministry" (2 Tim 4:11). Despite being in prison, it is clear that Paul looks forward to an active future. Although no one stood by him at his first trial (2 Tim 4:16), the verdict was not unfavorable to him, despite the fact that he had made no secret of his identity or his activities: "The Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully, so that all the Gentiles might hear it. Thus I was rescued from the lion's mouth" (2 Tim 4:17). He cannot imagine what new evidence might be brought against him and therefore looks forward with confidence to a favorable outcome: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil" (2 Tim 4:18).

This optimistic outlook poses serious problems for understanding 2 Tim 4:6–8, where Paul alludes to his impending death. However, the entire context points to Paul's sense of fulfillment. We are not dealing with the anguish of a man condemned to death, but with the serenity of a life well lived. Paul, who was then approaching 70, knew that his best years were behind him. Given the average life expectancy, he was living on borrowed time—especially for one who had borne in his body, for so many years, the death of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10). Every day was a blessing, and he intended to make the most of every moment. He might not live long after his release from prison, but that did not exempt him from the obligations of his ministry. He could prepare for the future, and if he were to be arrested, Timothy and Mark could take over.

J. Martyrdom

Paul's return to Rome must have taken place after the great fire that ravaged Rome for nine days (from July 19 to 28) in the year 64 and destroyed ten of the city's fourteen districts. Very early on, rumors circulated that Herod had set the city ablaze to make way for his new urban development plan. Here is the account by the Roman historian Tacitus (Annals 15.44):

But no human means, no imperial largesse, no expiatory ceremonies silenced the public outcry that accused Nero of having ordered the burning. To appease these rumors, he offered other culprits, and made a class of men, hated for their abominations and called Christians, suffer the most refined tortures. This name comes from Christ, who, under Tiberius, was delivered to the torture by the procurator Pontius Pilatus. Suppressed for a moment, this execrable superstition overflowed again, not only in Judea, where it had its source, but in Rome itself, where all that the world encloses of infamies and horrors flocked and found supporters. Those who confessed their sect were first seized, and, on their revelations, an infinite number of others, who were convinced not so much of arson as of hatred for the human race. Some were covered with animal skins and devoured by dogs; others died on crosses, or were smeared with inflammable substances, and when the day was over, they were burned in place of torches. Nero lent his gardens for this spectacle, and at the same time gave games in the Circus, where he sometimes mingled with the people in the clothes of a coachman, and sometimes drove a chariot. Also, although these men were guilty and had deserved the last rigors, the hearts

opened with compassion, while thinking that it was not with the public good, but with the cruelty of only one, that they were immolated.

The chronology of events suggests that the persecution of Christians was not an immediate consequence of the fire. Some time must have passed before the failure of the imperial efforts to appease the public became apparent and the rumors reached their peak. We cannot, therefore, assume that it lasted more than a year. The persecution should therefore likely be dated to the spring of the year 65. It is doubtful that it lasted any longer than was necessary to keep the population occupied. Prolonging the crackdown excessively risked drawing attention to the emperor's true motives. Moreover, that same spring, Nero had to contend with the Pisonian conspiracy aimed at assassinating him. The unfortunate and lasting consequence of this episode was the creation of a troubling precedent: the presumption of guilt against Christians.

News of Nero's bestial ferocity spread like wildfire throughout the empire. By the fall of 65, it had reached the Pauline churches in Greece and Asia. Believers were horrified at the thought of the agonizing deaths suffered by their fellow believers. Seeing the impact of such horror on his own converts, Paul had little difficulty assessing the consequences for the few Christians in Rome who, by luck, had escaped the emperor's clutches. If the Roman church was to survive, other communities would have to come to its aid. This is a reason that perfectly explains Paul's return to Rome and Erastus's decision to remain in Corinth (2 Tim 4:20). Erastus considered the risk too great. Paul knew he was putting his life in danger, but the need was urgent.

If Paul returned to Rome under such circumstances, it is unlikely that he sneaked into the city and then cautiously wandered from one refuge to another. The restoration of the community required a visible presence. In order to instill courage and hope, he had to openly assume a leadership role. His witness had to be public. How long was he able to maintain this role?

The reference in 1 Clement 6:1 to the persecution of Peter and Paul under Nero is elaborated upon by Eusebius:

It is reported that, during the reign of Nero, Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter was also crucified. This is confirmed by the fact that the cemeteries of Rome still bear the names of Peter and Paul... Bishop Dionysius of Corinth (around the year 170) informs us, in a letter to the Romans, that they were both martyred during the same period: "Through your eloquent exhortation, you have thus brought together all that has sprung from the seed sown by Peter and Paul in Rome and Corinth. For both of them sowed in our Corinth and taught us together; in Italy, too, they taught together in the same city and were martyred during the same period." (Church History 2.25)

The year of Paul's death, which is not mentioned in Eusebius's Church History, is provided in his Chronicle. Unfortunately, the versions differ. According to the Armenian version, the persecution unleashed by Nero cost Peter and Paul their lives during the thirteenth year of his reign (October 13, 66 – October 12, 67), whereas Jerome's translation places it during the fourteenth year (October 13, 67 – June 9, 68). In his note on Paul in Illustrious Men, Jerome states that "he was beheaded in the fourteenth year of Nero, on the same day as Peter," while the entry on Seneca in the same work indicates that "Seneca was executed by Nero two years before the martyrdom of Peter and Paul." Since Seneca died in April 65, the eleventh year of Nero's reign, the death of the apostles would therefore date to the thirteenth year of his reign. As for Nero's personal involvement, it should be noted that he was in Greece from the fall of 66 until the end of 67 or the beginning of 68.

Paul's beheading suggests that he was condemned by a duly constituted court. The location of his execution and burial are unknown. No public liturgical veneration of the martyrs is attested in Rome before the mid-3rd century. Consequently, no reliable local tradition can be established. It has been convincingly argued that the veneration of Peter and Paul at *Ad Catacumbas*, on the Appian Way, originated in a private revelation of dubious origin, and that the Roman Church handled the situation with great skill by claiming that the bodies had been secretly transferred elsewhere: Peter's to the Vatican and Paul's to the Ostian Way.