

# Paul and the Corinthian Church

## *A Comprehensive Chronological Timeline*

c. AD 49 – AD 58

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### **Preface and Methodology**

This timeline traces every recorded contact between the Apostle Paul and the church he founded at Corinth — from his first arrival on the second missionary journey through his third and final visit and the writing of the letter to the Romans. The primary source throughout is the canonical text of Scripture. Secondary sources — primarily archaeological evidence and scholarly chronological works — are cited where they bear on dating, and are included only where they do not contradict the biblical record.

A note on dating: The single most important anchor for Pauline chronology is the Delphi (Gallio) Inscription, a Greek stone inscription from Emperor Claudius to the city of Delphi, dated c. AD 52, which names ‘Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and proconsul of Achaëa’ — the same Gallio before whom Paul appeared (Acts 18:12–17). From this, scholars have established that Gallio served as proconsul in AD 51–52, anchoring Paul’s first Corinthian visit to approximately AD 50–52. All other dates in this timeline are reckoned from this fixed point.

A note on sources: secondary works are used only to fix dates and identify places and persons — never to settle doctrine. Where a conclusion (such as the unrecorded ‘painful visit’ or the two non-canonical letters) is reached by inference, that inference rests on the wording of Scripture itself, with academic works cited only as confirmation. Popular-level websites have been removed in favor of the standard chronological and archaeological literature, which treats this material as history rather than as denominational property.

Key secondary sources cited: (1) Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (rev. ed., 1998), pp. 390–394; (2) F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (1977); (3) Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (1989); (4) D.A. Carson & Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed., 2005; orig. with Leon Morris, 1992); (5) the Delphi (Gallio) Inscription (c. AD 52), Delphi, Greece; (6) the Erastus Inscription (c. AD 50s), Corinth, 1929; (7) Suetonius, *Life of Claudius* 25.4, with Orosius, *History* 7.6.15 (on the expulsion of Jews from Rome).

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### **Key to Event Types**

Context – Background events shaping Paul’s ministry

1st Visit – Events during Paul’s founding visit (AD 50–52)

End of 2nd Journey / Between Journeys – Transition period

3rd Journey – Events during Paul’s third missionary journey (AD 52–57)

Lost Letter – Letters referenced in Scripture but no longer extant

Painful Visit (2nd Visit) – Unrecorded-in-Acts intermediate visit inferred from 2 Corinthians

2nd / 3rd Visit – Subsequent visits to Corinth

## The Complete Timeline

Date (est.)	Event Type	Event	Biblical Reference	Secondary Source / Note
~AD 49	Context	Emperor Claudius expels Jews from Rome; Aquila & Priscilla arrive in Corinth	Acts 18:2	Suetonius, Life of Claudius 25.4; Orosius, History 7.6.15
~AD 49–50	Context	Paul completes first phase of 2nd missionary journey: Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens	Acts 16:11–17:34	
~AD 50 (Winter)	1st Visit – Arrival	Paul arrives in Corinth from Athens; meets Aquila & Priscilla; works as tentmaker with them	Acts 18:1–3	Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, p. 393
~AD 50	1st Visit – Ministry	Paul preaches in synagogue every Sabbath, persuading Jews and Greeks	Acts 18:4	
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Team Joins	Silas and Timothy arrive from Macedonia; Paul devotes himself fully to preaching; testifies Jesus is the Messiah	Acts 18:5; cf. 1 Thess 3:6	
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Letters Written	From Corinth, with Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy present, Paul writes 1 Thessalonians (soon after Timothy returns with news of that church) and, shortly after, 2 Thessalonians — his earliest surviving letters, addressed to Thessalonica but composed during this Corinthian stay	1 Thess 1:1; 3:6; 2 Thess 1:1	Addressed to Thessalonica, not Corinth; included here because they were written from Corinth during the founding visit
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Opposition	Jewish opposition intensifies; Paul shakes out his garments and declares he will go to the Gentiles	Acts 18:6	
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Titius Justus	Paul moves ministry to house of Titius Justus (a God-fearer), next door to the synagogue	Acts 18:7	
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Converts	Crispus, synagogue leader, believes with his whole household; many Corinthians believe and are baptized	Acts 18:8; cf. 1 Cor 1:14	
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Vision	Paul receives a night vision from the Lord: 'Do not be afraid... I have many people	Acts 18:9–10	

Date (est.)	Event Type	Event	Biblical Reference	Secondary Source / Note
		in this city.’ Emboldened to stay.		
~AD 50–51	1st Visit – Duration	Paul remains in Corinth a year and six months, teaching the Word of God	Acts 18:11	
~AD 51 (Summer)	1st Visit – Trial	Jews bring Paul before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, at the bema (judgment seat) in Corinth, charging him with illegal religion	Acts 18:12–13	Delphi/Gallio Inscription, c. AD 52; confirms Gallio as proconsul AD 51–52 (Steinmann, Finegan)
~AD 51	1st Visit – Acquittal	Gallio dismisses the charges as an internal Jewish dispute; refuses to judge matters of Jewish law. A significant legal precedent for early Christianity.	Acts 18:14–16	
~AD 51	1st Visit – Aftermath	Greeks beat Sosthenes (synagogue ruler) before the bema; Gallio shows no concern	Acts 18:17	
~AD 51–52	1st Visit – Departure	Paul remains ‘many more days’ after the trial, then departs Corinth for Syria with Aquila and Priscilla; takes a Nazirite vow and has his head shaved at Cenchreae (Corinth’s port)	Acts 18:18; cf. Num 6:1–21	NASB attributes the vow to Paul; note the Greek word order places the participle nearer Aquila, so a minority of interpreters read it of Aquila — the grammar is genuinely ambiguous
~AD 52	End of 2nd Journey	Paul stops briefly at Ephesus, leaves Aquila & Priscilla there, sails to Caesarea, goes up to Jerusalem, then returns to Antioch	Acts 18:19–22	
~AD 52–53	3rd Journey Begins	Paul sets out on his third missionary journey, strengthening churches through Galatia and Phrygia	Acts 18:23	
~AD 52–55	3rd Journey – Ephesus	Paul arrives in Ephesus; disciples of John the Baptist baptized in Jesus’ name; Paul teaches in synagogue for 3 months, then the Hall of Tyrannus for 2 years	Acts 19:1–10	
~AD 53–54	Lost Letter (Cor. A)	Paul writes a now-lost letter to Corinth warning them not to associate with	1 Cor 5:9–11	Scholars label this ‘Corinthians A’; no longer extant

Date (est.)	Event Type	Event	Biblical Reference	Secondary Source / Note
		immoral people (referenced in 1 Cor 5:9)		
~AD 54	Reports Received	Paul receives troubling reports from 'Chloe's people' about divisions (Apollos faction, Paul faction, Cephas faction, Christ faction) and serious moral failures in the church	1 Cor 1:11; 5:1	
~AD 54-55	Corinthian Letter to Paul	A delegation from Corinth—Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus—arrives in Ephesus, bringing a letter from the church with specific questions about marriage, food sacrificed to idols, spiritual gifts, and the collection	1 Cor 16:17; 7:1	
~AD 55 (Spring)	Timothy Dispatched	Paul sends Timothy ahead to Corinth to remind them of Paul's 'ways in Christ'	1 Cor 4:17; 16:10-11	
~AD 55 (Spring)	1 Corinthians Written	Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, addressing divisions, immorality (incest, lawsuits), marriage, food offered to idols, head coverings, the Lord's Supper, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the collection for Jerusalem saints	1 Cor 16:8 ('I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost')	Spring is fixed by the text itself (1 Cor 16:8); the year follows from the Gallio anchor and the Ephesian ministry. Finegan, p. 393; Bruce, <i>Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free</i> , ch. 24
~AD 55	Timothy Returns	Timothy is rebuffed by the Corinthians and returns to report to Paul; Paul's authority is being challenged	1 Cor 16:10-11; cf. 2 Cor 7:6	
~AD 55	Painful Visit (2nd Visit)	Paul makes a quick, unplanned visit from Ephesus to Corinth to confront the crisis directly. He is personally humiliated by one member; the church fails to defend him. Paul returns to Ephesus wounded.	2 Cor 2:1; 2:5; 7:12; 13:2	Not recorded in Acts. A necessary inference from Paul's own words: 'this is the third time I am coming to you' (2 Cor 13:1) set against the single visit recorded in Acts. The conclusion rests on the text, not on later scholars. Cf. Bruce, ch. 26
~AD 55	Severe Letter (Cor. C)	From Ephesus, a grief-stricken Paul writes a third letter ('out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears')	2 Cor 2:3-4; 7:8; 2:13	Scholars label this 'Corinthians C' or the 'Tearful/Severe Letter'; no longer extant

Date (est.)	Event Type	Event	Biblical Reference	Secondary Source / Note
		demanding discipline of the offender; sends it via Titus rather than going himself		
~AD 55	Paul Leaves Ephesus	Paul departs Ephesus (amid the riot of Demetrius and the silversmiths) and travels north to Troas, anxiously awaiting word from Titus	Acts 19:23–20:1; 2 Cor 2:12–13	
~AD 55–56	Good News from Titus	Paul meets Titus in Macedonia (likely Philippi). Titus brings the encouraging report: the Corinthians have repented, disciplined the offender, and long to be reconciled with Paul	2 Cor 7:5–7, 13–16	
~AD 56 (Fall)	2 Corinthians Written	Paul writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia, expressing relief and reconciliation (chapters 1–9) and defending his apostolic authority against ‘super-apostles’ (chapters 10–13); announces his planned third visit	2 Cor 1:1; 7:5; 8:1; 13:1	Written from Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5; 8:1; Acts 20:1), AD 56 (or late 55). Finegan, p. 394; Bruce, ch. 26
~AD 56–57	3rd Visit – Paul Arrives	Paul travels through Macedonia and arrives in Corinth (Greece) for his third visit, where he stays three months	Acts 20:2–3; Rom 15:25–27; cf. 2 Cor 12:14; 13:1	
~AD 57 (Winter)	Romans Written from Corinth	During his three-month stay in Corinth, Paul writes the letter to the Romans, mentioning Gaius as host, Erastus the city treasurer, and the nearly completed collection for Jerusalem	Rom 16:1 (Phoebe of Cenchreae), 16:23; 15:25–26	Erastus pavement found at Corinth, 1929 (mid-1st c.). The inscription names an <i>aedile</i> ; Romans names an <i>oikonomos</i> (treasurer/steward) — so the identification is probable but debated. Hemer, <i>The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History</i> , pp. 234–235
~AD 57	Departure Foiled	Paul plans to sail from Corinth to Syria but discovers a Jewish plot against him; changes route through Macedonia instead	Acts 20:3	
~AD 57	Departure & Companions	Paul departs with companions—Sopater (Berea), Aristarchus & Secundus (Thessalonica),	Acts 20:4–6	

Date (est.)	Event Type	Event	Biblical Reference	Secondary Source / Note
		Gaius (Derbe), Timothy, Tychicus & Trophimus (Asia)—traveling back through Macedonia		
~AD 57–58	Journey to Jerusalem	Paul and company sail from Philippi after Passover, stop at Troas (Eutychus episode), Miletus, and various points, heading to Jerusalem with the collection for the saints	Acts 20:6–21:16	

## Narrative Summary

### Phase 1: Founding the Church — Second Missionary Journey (c. AD 50–52)

Paul arrived in Corinth from Athens around the winter of AD 49–50, nearly alone and, by his own later admission, ‘in weakness and in fear and with much trembling’ (1 Cor 2:3). He found lodging and work with Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers recently expelled from Rome by Claudius’s edict (Acts 18:1–3; cf. Suetonius, Claudius 25.4). When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul threw himself fully into preaching (Acts 18:5). After synagogue opposition intensified, Paul relocated to the house of Titius Justus next door, and key converts — including Crispus the synagogue ruler — were baptized (Acts 18:6–8). A divine vision encouraged Paul to remain (Acts 18:9–10), and he stayed a total of 18 months (Acts 18:11).

The pivotal moment came when Jewish leaders dragged Paul before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, at the bema in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17). Gallio dismissed the case as an internal Jewish matter and declined to adjudicate — in practice, a senior Roman magistrate had refused to treat Paul’s preaching as a crime. (It is best not to overstate this as a formal grant of legal status; Gallio simply refused to judge.) The Delphi Inscription (c. AD 52) confirms that Gallio served as proconsul of Achaia in AD 51–52, making this one of the most precisely dated events in the entire New Testament and in Pauline chronology.

Paul departed Corinth for Syria with Aquila and Priscilla, having taken a Nazirite vow at Cenchreae, Corinth’s eastern port (Acts 18:18; cf. Num 6:1–21). He left behind a vibrant but fragile Gentile church in one of the most morally complex cities in the Roman world.

### Phase 2: Correspondence from Ephesus — Third Missionary Journey (c. AD 52–55)

Paul’s third journey took him back to Ephesus for roughly two to three years (Acts 19:8–10; 20:31). During this extended stay, his relationship with the Corinthian church became turbulent. He wrote at least four letters to Corinth, of which only two survive in our canon.

The first (now lost) letter — scholars call it ‘Corinthians A’ — warned against associating with sexually immoral people (referenced in 1 Cor 5:9). Then reports arrived from ‘Chloe’s people’ (1 Cor 1:11) about factionalism, and a delegation from Corinth brought Paul a formal letter of questions (1 Cor 16:17). In response, Paul wrote what we call 1 Corinthians in the spring of AD 55, one of the most comprehensive pastoral letters in the New Testament, addressing divisions,

the case of incest, lawsuits, marriage, food offered to idols, public worship, spiritual gifts, the resurrection, and the Jerusalem collection.

When 1 Corinthians failed to resolve the crisis — and Timothy’s mission was rebuffed — Paul made a brief, unplanned ‘painful visit’ to Corinth (2 Cor 2:1; 13:2). This visit is not recorded in Acts but is clearly implied by Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians; he was personally humiliated (2 Cor 2:5; 7:12) and left without achieving reconciliation. He then wrote the ‘severe letter’ (Corinthians C) ‘out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears’ (2 Cor 2:4), sending it via Titus rather than returning in person.

### **Phase 3: Reconciliation and 2 Corinthians (c. AD 55–56)**

Paul, anxious for news, traveled north from Ephesus to Troas and then Macedonia, where he finally met Titus (2 Cor 2:12–13; 7:5–7). Titus’s report was largely positive: the church had disciplined the offender and longed to be reconciled with Paul (2 Cor 7:7–9). Relieved, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (likely Philippi) around AD 56. The letter blends profound personal reflection (chapters 1–7), careful instruction on the Jerusalem collection (chapters 8–9), and a fierce defense of his apostolic credentials against the ‘super-apostles’ who had infiltrated the church (chapters 10–13). He announced his intention to come to them a third time (2 Cor 12:14; 13:1).

### **Phase 4: The Third Visit and Romans (c. AD 56–57)**

Paul fulfilled his promise, traveling through Macedonia and arriving in Corinth (Acts 20:2–3). He stayed three months — a deliberately chosen period likely corresponding to winter, when sea travel was impossible. During this stay in Corinth, he wrote the letter to the Romans (Rom 15:25–27; 16:1, 23), mentioning Phoebe of Cenchreae as the letter’s carrier and Gaius and Erastus as present companions. The Erastus Inscription, a limestone pavement discovered in Corinth in 1929 and dated to the mid-first century, names a man who paid for the pavement in return for his *aedileship*. Paul calls his Erastus the city’s *oikonomos* (treasurer or steward, Rom 16:23). The two offices are not identical, so the identification is plausible but not certain — a point worth stating plainly rather than overclaiming.

A Jewish plot to ambush Paul forced him to change his planned sea route from Corinth to Syria; instead he went overland through Macedonia (Acts 20:3). He departed with a large team of representatives from the Gentile churches, carrying the collection for Jerusalem — the practical fruit of years of correspondence with Corinth and the other churches.

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## **A Note on the ‘Lost Letters’**

Scripture itself tells us that the two canonical Corinthian letters are not the whole of Paul’s correspondence with Corinth. At minimum, Paul references (1) a prior letter warning against immoral people (1 Cor 5:9) and (2) a ‘severe letter’ written after the painful visit (2 Cor 2:3–4; 7:8). These are labeled by scholars as ‘Corinthians A’ and ‘Corinthians C’ respectively, with our canonical 1 Corinthians as ‘B’ and 2 Corinthians as ‘D.’ Some scholars suggest that 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1 may be a fragment of Corinthians A embedded in our canonical text, though this remains disputed. In all cases, only the canonical letters are treated as authoritative Scripture; the lost letters are acknowledged as historical realities referenced within Scripture itself.

*Primary Source: The Holy Bible (Acts 15–21; 1 & 2 Corinthians; Romans)*

*Secondary Sources: Delphi (Gallio) Inscription (c. AD 52); Erastus Inscription (c. AD 50s, Corinth); Suetonius, Life of Claudius 25.4 (with Orosius, History 7.6.15);*

*Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology (rev. ed., 1998); F.F. Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free (1977); Colin J. Hemer, The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History (1989); Carson & Moo, An Introduction to the New Testament (2nd ed., 2005)*