The Life of the Apostle Paul

A Comprehensive Chronological Timeline

c. AD 5 – c. AD 67

Primary Source: Holy Scripture · noblemind.study/apostle-paul/

This timeline draws together every event Scripture records of Paul's life, from his birth at Tarsus to the martyrdom under Nero. Events marked with a secondary reference rest on dates from Roman or Jewish sources outside the biblical text.

I · Before the Mission: Tarsus, Conversion & the Silent Years (c. AD 5–43)

c. AD 5

Background

Born in Tarsus, a Roman citizen by birth

📖 *Acts 22:3; 22:28; 21:39; Phil 3:5*

Saul is born at Tarsus in Cilicia, "no insignificant city," a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin who holds Roman citizenship from birth, a status that will repeatedly protect him.

> *Birth year inferred from "young man" (Acts 7:58) and "Paul the aged" (Phlm 9).*

boyhood

Background

Raised in Jerusalem, trained under Gamaliel

📖 *Acts 22:3; 26:4–5; 23:6; Phil 3:5–6*

Brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel and schooled in the strict observance of the Law, Saul becomes a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees, zealous beyond his peers.

> *Gamaliel the Elder, a leading Pharisaic teacher (cf. Acts 5:34).*

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Background

Learns the trade of tentmaking

📖 *Acts 18:3; cf. 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Thess 2:9*

He is trained in tentmaking (leatherwork), the skill that will later let him support himself and preach without being a burden to the churches.

c. AD 33–34

Background

Present at the stoning of Stephen

📖 *Acts 7:58; 8:1; 22:20*

The witnesses lay their garments at the feet of the young man Saul, and Saul stands by approving of Stephen's execution, his first appearance in the narrative.

c. AD 33–34

Background

Saul ravages the church

📖 *Acts 8:3; 9:1–2; 26:9–11; Gal 1:13; 1 Cor 15:9; Phil 3:6; 1 Tim 1:13*

Breathing threats and murder, Saul drags believing men and women to prison and pursues them even to foreign cities, a persecution he never stops grieving in his letters.

c. AD 34

Conversion

The road to Damascus

📖 *Acts 9:1–9; retold 22:6–11; 26:12–18*

Nearing Damascus to arrest more disciples, Saul is struck down by a light from heaven and the voice of the risen Christ: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” He rises blind.

> *Conversion year reckoned back from the Aretas anchor.*

→ *Compare the three conversion accounts side-by-side* →

c. AD 34

Conversion

Ananias, baptism, and the commission

📖 *Acts 9:10–19; 22:12–16; cf. 9:15*

Sent by the Lord, Ananias lays hands on Saul; he regains his sight, is baptized, and is named “a chosen instrument” to carry Christ’s name to the Gentiles.

→ *Compare the three conversion accounts side-by-side* →

c. AD 34

Conversion

Preaches Christ in the Damascus synagogues

📖 *Acts 9:19–22*

At once Saul proclaims in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God; those who had known him as the persecutor are astonished.

→ *Compare the three conversion accounts side-by-side* →

c. AD 34–37

Early Years

Into Arabia, then back to Damascus

📖 *Gal 1:16–17*

Rather than consulting "flesh and blood," Saul withdraws into Arabia and returns to Damascus, years his own letter records but Acts passes over.

> *The "three years" of Gal 1:18 span this period.*

c. AD 37

Early Years

Escape from Damascus in a basket

📖 *Acts 9:23–25; 2 Cor 11:32–33*

The Jews watch the gates day and night to kill him, and the ethnarch under King Aretas guards the city to seize him; the disciples lower Saul through an opening in the wall by night in a large basket, one of the firmest anchors of his early chronology.

> *Must precede AD 40 (Aretas IV's death); the ethnarch was active in Damascus from c. AD 37.*

c. AD 37

Early Years

First Jerusalem visit; Barnabas vouches for him

📖 *Acts 9:26–28; Gal 1:18–19*

The disciples fear him until Barnabas brings him in; Saul meets Peter (Cephas) and James the Lord's brother, staying fifteen days.

> *"After three years" (Gal 1:18).*

→ *Open the detailed Jerusalem Visits timeline* →

c. AD 37

Early Years

Sent to Tarsus to escape a plot

📖 *Acts 9:29–30*

When the Hellenists try to kill him, the brethren take Saul down to Caesarea and send him off to his home city of Tarsus.

c. AD 37–43

Early Years

The silent years in Syria and Cilicia

📖 *Gal 1:21–24*

For most of a decade Saul labors in the regions of Syria and Cilicia, still unknown by face to the churches of Judea, who hear only that their former persecutor now preaches the faith.

c. AD 42

Early Years

Caught up to the third heaven

📖 *2 Cor 12:1–10*

Likely in these years Paul receives visions and revelations (caught up to the third heaven) and is given a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him from exalting himself.

> *Dated by counting back "fourteen years" from 2 Corinthians (c. AD 56).*

II · Antioch & the First Journey (c. AD 43–48)

c. AD 43–44

Antioch

Barnabas brings Saul to Antioch

📖 *Acts 11:25–26*

Barnabas fetches Saul from Tarsus to help shepherd the booming Gentile church at Antioch; they teach together a full year, and there the disciples are first called "Christians."

→ *Open the detailed Antioch timeline* →

c. AD 44

Antioch

Herod Agrippa I strikes the church, then dies

📖 *Acts 12:1–23*

James the brother of John is killed and Peter imprisoned; Herod Agrippa I, accepting the people's flattery, is struck down at Caesarea, a fixed date that brackets this period.

> *Josephus, Antiquities 19.343–352: Agrippa dies AD 44.*

c. AD 46

Antioch

Famine-relief visit to Jerusalem

📖 *Acts 11:27–30; 12:25*

When the prophet Agabus foretells a famine over all the world, the Antioch church sends relief to Judea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, Paul's second recorded visit to Jerusalem.

> *The Claudian famine in Judea is attested c. AD 46–48 (Josephus, Antiquities 20.51–53).*

→ *Open the detailed Jerusalem Visits timeline* →

c. AD 47–48

First Journey

Commissioned and sent out from Antioch

📖 *Acts 13:1–3*

The Holy Spirit sets apart Barnabas and Saul; the church fasts, prays, lays hands on them, and sends them off, with John Mark as their helper.

→ *Open the detailed Antioch timeline* →

c. AD 47

First Journey

Cyprus: Elymas blinded; Sergius Paulus believes

📖 *Acts 13:4–12*

At Paphos Paul confronts the magician Bar-Jesus (Elymas) and strikes him blind; the proconsul Sergius Paulus believes. From this point Luke calls him "Paul."

> *First use of the name "Paul" (Acts 13:9); a Sergii Pauli family is attested at Pisidian Antioch.*

c. AD 47

First Journey

John Mark turns back at Perga

📖 *Acts 13:13*

At Perga in Pamphylia, John Mark leaves the team and returns to Jerusalem, a departure that will later divide Paul and Barnabas.

> *The cause of the later rift (Acts 15:38).*

c. AD 47

First Journey

Pisidian Antioch: the turn to the Gentiles

📖 *Acts 13:14–52*

Paul's synagogue sermon draws great crowds; when the Jews oppose him, he declares he is turning to the Gentiles, who rejoice, and he is driven from the district.

c. AD 47–48

First Journey

Iconium: a divided city

📖 *Acts 14:1–7*

Bold preaching and signs win many, but a plot to stone them drives Paul and Barnabas on into Lycaonia.

c. AD 48

First Journey

Lystra: hailed as gods, then stoned

📖 *Acts 14:8–20*

After Paul heals a man lame from birth, the crowd calls them Hermes and Zeus; soon the same crowd stones Paul and drags him out of the city for dead, yet he rises and goes back in.

> *Recalled in 2 Cor 11:25 ("once I was stoned"); 2 Tim 3:11.*

c. AD 48

First Journey

Derbe, then the return appointing elders

📖 *Acts 14:20–28*

They preach at Derbe, then retrace their steps through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, appointing elders in every church before reporting back to Antioch in Syria.

→ Open the detailed Antioch timeline →

III · The Jerusalem Council (c. AD 49)

c. AD 49

Jerusalem Council

The Jerusalem Council settles the circumcision question

📖 *Acts 15:1–35*

Over the demand that Gentiles be circumcised, the apostles and elders rule that they need not be; salvation is by grace through faith, and the decision is sent out in a letter.

> *Often identified with Gal 2:1–10; see the disputed-points note in the companion document.*

→ *Open the detailed Jerusalem Visits timeline* →

c. AD 49

Jerusalem Council

Paul rebukes Peter at Antioch

📖 *Gal 2:11–14*

When Peter withdraws from eating with Gentiles after men from James arrive, Paul opposes him to his face for not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel.

> *Exact timing debated.*

→ *Open the detailed Jerusalem Visits timeline* →

IV · The Second Journey: Into Europe (c. AD 49–52)

c. AD 49

Second Journey

Paul and Barnabas part over John Mark

📖 *Acts 15:36–41*

A sharp disagreement over taking John Mark splits the pair; Barnabas sails for Cyprus with Mark, and Paul takes Silas, commended by the brethren to the grace of the Lord.

→ *Open the detailed Antioch timeline* →

c. AD 49

Second Journey

Timothy joins at Lystra

📖 *Acts 16:1–5*

Paul takes young Timothy, well spoken of by the brethren, and has him circumcised for the sake of the Jews; the churches grow daily in number.

c. AD 49–50

Second Journey

Forbidden by the Spirit; the Macedonian vision

📖 *Acts 16:6–10*

Barred from Asia and Bithynia, Paul sees at Troas a man of Macedonia pleading, “Come over and help us.” The first “we” passage begins: Luke has joined the company.

c. AD 50

Second Journey

Philippi: Lydia, the jailer, and the earthquake

📖 *Acts 16:11–40*

Lydia is converted and a slave-girl freed from a spirit; Paul and Silas are beaten and jailed, but a midnight earthquake and their refusal to flee bring the jailer’s household to faith. The magistrates, learning they are Romans, apologize.

> *Recalled in 1 Thess 2:2 (“after we had suffered… at Philippi”).*

c. AD 50

Second Journey

Thessalonica and Berea

📖 *Acts 17:1–15*

Three Sabbaths of reasoning in Thessalonica end in an uproar; the noble-minded Bereans then receive the word eagerly and examine the Scriptures daily to test whether it is so.

c. AD 50

Second Journey

Athens: the Areopagus address

📖 *Acts 17:16–34*

Provoked by the city's idols, Paul reasons in the synagogue and marketplace and addresses the Areopagus on the "unknown god"; Dionysius and Damaris are among those who believe.

c. AD 50–52

Second Journey

Corinth: eighteen months and Gallio

📖 *Acts 18:1–17*

Paul stays a year and a half, working with Aquila and Priscilla; Crispus believes, and the Lord assures him in a night vision. Hauled before the proconsul Gallio, Paul is dismissed without needing to speak a word.

> *GALLIO ANCHOR: proconsul of Achaia AD 51–52 (Delphi Inscription), the single most precise date in Paul's life.*

→ Open the detailed Corinth timeline →

c. AD 50–51

Second Journey

Writes 1 & 2 Thessalonians from Corinth

📖 *1 Thess 1:1; 3:6; 2 Thess 1:1; 3:17*

With Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy beside him, Paul writes 1 Thessalonians and, shortly after, 2 Thessalonians, his earliest surviving letters.

c. AD 51–52

Second Journey

Departs Corinth; a vow at Cenchreae

📖 *Acts 18:18–22*

Paul sails for Syria, his hair shorn at Cenchreae for a vow; he leaves Priscilla and Aquila at Ephesus, then goes down to Caesarea, up to Jerusalem, and home to Antioch.

> *NASB takes the vow as Paul's; the Greek is genuinely ambiguous.*

V · The Third Journey: Ephesus to Jerusalem (c. AD 52–57)

c. AD 52–53

Third Journey

Sets out again through Galatia and Phrygia

📖 *Acts 18:23*

Paul begins his third journey, traveling through the Galatian and Phrygian country and strengthening all the disciples.

c. AD 52–55

Third Journey

Ephesus: three years of ministry

📖 *Acts 19:1–41*

Disciples of John are rebaptized; Paul teaches three months in the synagogue and two years in the hall of Tyrannus until all Asia hears the word. Magic books burn, the sons of Sceva flee, and the silversmiths riot for Artemis.

> *About three years in all (Acts 20:31); the affliction in Asia is recalled in 2 Cor 1:8–10; cf. 1 Cor 15:32.*

→ Open the detailed Ephesus timeline →

c. AD 55

Third Journey

Writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus

📖 *1 Cor 16:8; 5:9*

Intending to stay “until Pentecost,” Paul writes 1 Corinthians, and refers in it to a still earlier letter now lost.

→ Open the detailed Corinth timeline →

c. AD 55

Third Journey

The painful visit and the severe letter

📖 *2 Cor 2:1; 2:3–4; 13:1–2*

A second, sorrowful visit to Corinth and a tearful letter carried by Titus are attested only in 2 Corinthians, filling a gap that Acts leaves silent.

> *A necessary inference from Paul’s own words, not recorded in Acts.*

→ Open the detailed Corinth timeline →

c. AD 56

Third Journey

Writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia

📖 *Acts 20:1; 2 Cor 2:12–13; 7:5–7*

Leaving Ephesus for Troas and then Macedonia, Paul is met by Titus with good news from Corinth and writes the deeply personal 2 Corinthians.

c. AD 57

Third Journey

Writes Romans from Corinth

📖 *Acts 20:2–3; Rom 15:25–27; 16:1, 23*

Wintering three months in Greece, Paul writes Romans, the fullest statement of his gospel, while completing the collection for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

> *The Erastus inscription (Corinth, 1929) names a city official of that name; the identification is probable, not certain.*

c. AD 57

Third Journey

Troas: the all-night sermon; Eutychus raised

📖 *Acts 20:7–12*

Forced by a plot to return overland through Macedonia, Paul preaches at Troas until midnight; Eutychus falls from a third-story window and is restored to life.

c. AD 57

Third Journey

Miletus: farewell to the Ephesian elders

📖 *Acts 20:17–38*

Paul calls the Ephesian elders to Miletus, declares himself innocent of the blood of all, warns of coming wolves, and kneels with them in tears, certain they will not see his face again.

→ Open the detailed Ephesus timeline →

c. AD 57

Third Journey

Tyre and Caesarea: Agabus foretells his chains

📖 *Acts 21:1–14*

At Caesarea (and the home of Philip the evangelist) the prophet Agabus binds his own hands and feet with Paul's belt, foretelling the arrest; Paul answers that he is ready even to die at Jerusalem.

→ *Open the detailed Jerusalem Visits timeline* →

VI · Prisoner of Christ: Arrest, Caesarea & Rome (c. AD 57–62)

c. AD 57

Arrest

Seized in the temple at Jerusalem

📖 *Acts 21:15–36*

Received by James, Paul undertakes a temple purification to answer rumors, but Asian Jews seize him, charging that he has defiled the temple; a riot erupts and the Roman tribune arrests him.

→ *Open the detailed Jerusalem Visits timeline* →

c. AD 57

Arrest

Defense from the barracks stairs

📖 *Acts 21:37–22:21*

Permitted to speak, Paul addresses the crowd in Aramaic, recounting his upbringing, his conversion, and his commission to the Gentiles, until the word "Gentiles" reignites the mob.

c. AD 57

Arrest

Spared scourging as a Roman citizen

📖 *Acts 22:22–29*

About to be flogged for questioning, Paul reveals his Roman citizenship; the tribune, who had purchased his own, is alarmed and at once removes the bonds.

c. AD 57

Arrest

Before the Sanhedrin

📖 *Acts 22:30–23:10*

Declaring himself a Pharisee on trial for the hope of the resurrection, Paul divides the council; the dispute grows so violent that the tribune removes him by force.

c. AD 57

Arrest

The Lord stands by him; a plot uncovered

📖 *Acts 23:11–35*

The Lord promises Paul will testify at Rome. When more than forty men vow to ambush him, Paul's nephew warns the tribune, who sends Paul to Caesarea by night under heavy guard.

> *Acts 23:16: Paul's sister's son in Jerusalem.*

c. AD 57–59

Caesarea

Two years imprisoned under Felix

📖 *Acts 24:1–27*

Tertullus prosecutes; Paul answers; Felix, hoping for a bribe and wishing to do the Jews a favor, leaves Paul bound for two years.

> *Felix served as procurator until c. AD 59.*

c. AD 59

Caesarea

"I appeal to Caesar"

📖 *Acts 25:1–12*

When the new governor Festus proposes a trial at Jerusalem, Paul exercises his right as a citizen and appeals to the emperor, and so his road to Rome is fixed.

> *FESTUS ANCHOR: arrival c. AD 59 (AD 60 also argued), from the change in Judaean coinage in Nero's fifth year.*

c. AD 59

Caesarea

Before Agrippa II and Bernice

📖 *Acts 25:13–26:32*

Paul recounts his conversion before King Agrippa, who answers, "In a short time you would persuade me to become a Christian." Agrippa judges he might have gone free had he not appealed.

c. AD 59–60

Voyage

The storm and the shipwreck at Malta

📖 *Acts 27:1–28:10*

Under the centurion Julius, the ship is caught in a fourteen-day tempest and wrecked on Malta; all 276 aboard reach land, and Paul, unharmed by a viper, heals the sick of the island.

> *A "we" passage; the fourth shipwreck of his life (cf. 2 Cor 11:25, written earlier).*

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 60

Rome

Arrival in Rome

📖 *Acts 28:11–16*

Brethren come out as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Inns to meet him; at Rome Paul is allowed to stay by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 60–62

Rome

Two years' house arrest: the close of Acts

📖 *Acts 28:17–31*

For two whole years Paul receives all who come to him, "preaching the kingdom of God… with all openness, unhindered": the final words of Acts.

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 60–62

Rome

Writes the Prison Letters

📖 *Eph 3:1; 6:20; Phil 1:13; Col 4:3, 18; Phlm 1, 9*

From this imprisonment come Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon: the letters of "an ambassador in chains."

> *Provenance debated (Rome / Ephesus / Caesarea); see the disputed-points note in the companion document.*

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

VII · The Final Years: Release, the Pastorals & Martyrdom (c. AD 62–67)

c. AD 62

Final Years

Released (inferred)

📖 *cf. Phil 1:25; 2:24; Phlm 22*

Acts leaves Paul alive under guard, with no verdict recorded. Because the travels named in the Pastoral Letters fit nowhere in Acts, most conclude he was released around this time.

> *An inference, a strong one, not a recorded event.*

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 62–66

Final Years

Further travel; writes 1 Timothy and Titus

📖 *Rom 15:24, 28; 1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:5; 3:12*

Possibly reaching westward toward Spain as he had long hoped, Paul leaves Titus in Crete and Timothy at Ephesus, winters at Nicopolis, and writes 1 Timothy and Titus.

> *"The limits of the west": 1 Clement 5 (c. AD 95).*

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 66–67

Final Years

Second imprisonment; writes 2 Timothy

📖 *2 Tim 1:8, 16–17; 4:6–8, 11, 13, 20*

Arrested again and held in harsher conditions, with only Luke beside him, Paul writes 2 Timothy: "I have fought the good fight… the time of my departure has come."

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 64–68

Final Years

Martyred at Rome under Nero

📖 *2 Tim 4:6–8 (his own anticipation)*

Scripture records Paul's expectation of death but not the act itself. The earliest external witnesses report that he was beheaded at Rome under Nero, as befit a Roman citizen.

> *Not in Scripture; 1 Clement 5–6; later Tertullian, Scorpiace 15; Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 2.25.*

→ *Open the detailed Roman Years timeline* →

c. AD 64

Final Years

"Our beloved brother Paul"

📖 *2 Pet 3:15–16*

Peter commends Paul's letters, notes that some things in them are hard to understand, and ranks them with "the rest of the Scriptures," an early witness to their recognized authority.

> *The one explicit reference to Paul by another New Testament writer.*