

The New Testament Canon: An Overview

Four Gospels: attributed to the four Evangelists; verbal portraits of Jesus written for various early Christian communities:

The Synoptic Gospels:

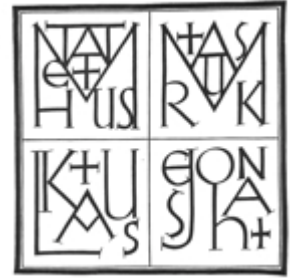
Matthew

Mark

Luke

The Fourth Gospel:

John



One Acts: a partial narrative account of the growth of the Early Church; not a complete history of apostolic Christianity:

Acts of the Apostles

Thirteen Letters attributed to Paul: actual letters written *to* particular communities or individuals about various topics:

Letters sent to Christian communities in the following cities:

Romans	1 Corinthians	2 Corinthians
Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians
Colossians	1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians

Letters addressed to individual Christian leaders:

1 Timothy	2 Timothy
Titus	Philemon



Note: 1 Tim, 2 Tim, Titus are usually called the "Pastoral Letters" since they are addressed to leaders or "shepherds" of Christian communities.

Note: Phil, Phlm, Col are sometimes called "Prison Letters" since Paul evidently wrote them while in prison (Phil 1:7,13-14; Phlm 9-10; Col 4:3,10).

One Biblical Sermon: interprets Jesus in light of the OT; neither the author nor the audience is explicitly mentioned:

Hebrews

Seven Catholic Epistles: attributed to other apostles; written to broader audiences ("*catholic*" = "general, universal"):

James	1 Peter	2 Peter		
1 John	2 John	3 John	Jude	

One Apocalypse: a highly symbolic narrative that interprets a historical crisis and provides hope for a better future:

The Book of Revelation

Eight Tips about the Canonical Arrangement of the NT:

1. The 27 books of the New Testament are **NOT** listed in *chronological* order (the order in which they were written historically); several *other* principles were operative.
2. The **overall** order begins with the life of *Jesus* (the four Gospels), then deals with the growth of the Christian *Church* (Acts, Letters, Epistles), and finally focuses on the *Eschaton* (the end of time, as described symbolically in the Book of Revelation).
3. The four **Gospels** are listed in what *was* traditionally regarded as their chronological order (i.e., Matthew was thought to be the oldest Gospel); most scholars today, however, believe that *Mark* was the first written Gospel (or at least the oldest of the four canonical Gospels in their full versions, as we know them today).
4. The **Acts** of the Apostles was originally the second volume of Luke's two-volume work; but when the four Gospels were grouped together, Acts was placed after John.
5. The letters written by **Paul** (or at least attributed to him) are divided into two sub-groups: those written to communities and those addressed to individuals; within each sub-group, the letters are arranged *not* in chronological order, but rather in *decreasing order of length* (more or less, although Galatians is slightly shorter than Ephesians).
6. The anonymous "Letter to the **Hebrews**" comes immediately after the Pauline letters because people *used* to think it was also written by Paul; it may have been written by one of his followers, but was almost certainly *not* written by Paul himself.
7. The Catholic or General **Epistles** are also listed in decreasing order of length, although letters attributed to the same apostle are grouped together.
8. The Book of **Revelation** (sg!) closes out the NT canon, since it concludes with a description of the end of time (New Heavens, New Earth, New Jerusalem, etc.).

Ten Stages of NT Formation and Transmission (*with considerable chronological overlap, continuing down to today*):

1. **The Historical Jesus** – words are spoken and deeds are performed by Jesus himself during his lifetime on earth.
2. **Oral Tradition** – traditions and beliefs about Jesus are developed and passed on by early Christian communities.
3. **Written Sources** – some of the miracles and/or sayings of Jesus are compiled and recorded in early written documents.
4. **Written Texts** – individual letters, full Gospels, etc., are written with particular messages for particular situations.
5. **Distribution** – some writings are copied and shared with other Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean.
6. **Collection** – certain Christians begin collecting the letters of Paul and gathering together several different Gospels.
7. **Canonization** – four Gospels, several collections of letters, and a few other texts are accepted as authoritative scriptures.
8. **Translation** – biblical texts are translated into other ancient and modern languages: Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, etc.
9. **Interpretation** – the meaning of the scriptures is investigated on various levels: literal, spiritual, historical, social, etc.
10. **Application** – communities and individuals use the NT for practical purposes: liturgical, moral, sacramental, theological, etc.



Four Criteria for Canonicity (*which books were accepted into the NT Canon, and the reasons why*):

1. ***Apostolic Origin*** – attributed to and based on the preaching/teaching of the first-generation apostles (or their close companions).
2. ***Universal Acceptance*** – acknowledged by all major Christian communities in the ancient world (by the end of the fourth century).
3. ***Liturgical Use*** – read publicly when early Christian communities gathered for the Lord's Supper (their weekly worship services).
4. ***Consistent Message*** – containing a theological outlook similar or complementary to other accepted Christian writings.

Pauline Chronology: His Life and Missionary Work

by Prof. Felix Just, S.J. - Loyola Marymount University

The Traditional (but Inaccurate) Division:

"Paul's Three Missionary Journeys" (each beginning/ending in Antioch) and "Paul's Voyage to Rome"

- 1) Acts 13 - 14
- 2) Acts 15:39 - 18:22
- 3) Acts 18:23 - 21:16
- 4) Acts 22 - 28

Problems with this schema:

- *Paul is not in charge* during *first* journey; rather, Barnabas is the leader and Paul is his assistant (see Acts 11:31; 13:1-2; **14:12**).
- *Paul never works alone later*, but always has assistants (esp. Timothy; see **Acts 15:39-40; 16:1-3**; and most letter beginnings).
- The second and third "Journeys" are *not really circle-trips departing from and returning to Antioch* (see Acts 18:18-23); rather, Paul makes a definite break with Barnabas and the Church at Antioch (see **Gal 2:11-14**; Acts 15:39-40).

A Better, More Comprehensive Overview:

"**Five Main Phases of Paul's Life**" The following chronology is based on a combination of evidence from Paul's own letters and from the Acts of the Apostles, since neither gives us a complete picture, and there are some points of tension between them.

1) Pre-Christian Phase (ca. 10-35 AD)

- A. Paul was a Jew born in **Tarsus**, the capital of CILICIA (Acts 9:11, 30; 11:25; 21:39), but possibly also lived and received part of his education in *Jerusalem*, "at the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3).
- B. He was a *Hebrew*, born of Hebrew parents (Phil 3:5; 2 Cor 11:22), but probably also a *Roman citizen* (Acts 22:25-29; 23:27)
- C. Thus he was *bi-lingual* (Aramaic/Hebrew and Greek) and *bi-cultural* (Jewish and Hellenistic Greek), making him an ideal "transition figure" for the spread of early Christianity from its beginnings in Israel to the rest of the Roman empire.
- D. He was raised as a *Pharisee*, and was very *zealous* for the Jewish Torah & Traditions (Phil 3:5; Acts 23:6-9; 26:5).
- E. He begins *persecuting* the followers of Jesus (Gal 1:13-14; Phil 3:5-6; 1 Cor 15:9; Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 26:4-12).

2) First Phase of His New Christian Life - in the EAST (ca. 35-49 AD)

- A. Jesus "reveals" himself to Paul (traditionally called Paul's "conversion") while Paul is traveling on the road to **Damascus** in southern SYRIA (Gal 1:11-12, 15-16; 1 Cor 15:8-10; Acts 9:3-30; 22:6-21; 26:12-18).

- B. Paul begins preaching around Arabia, Damascus, Syria, and Cilicia, despite some opposition (Gal 1:17-24; 2 Cor 11:23-33).
- C. He is the assistant to Barnabas on a first missionary journey; both of them were commissioned by the church of **Antioch** in Northern SYRIA (Acts 13-14).
- D. "**Council of Jerusalem**" (*ca. 49 AD*; Gal 2:1-10; Acts 15 - note that many scholars think this council was later, *ca. 51*).

3) *Early Independent Missionary Phase* - in MACEDONIA & ACHAIA (*ca. 50-53AD*)

- A. Paul breaks with Barnabas due to the "**Incident at Antioch**" (contrast Gal 2:11-14 with Acts 15:36-41).
- B. He travels with Silas & Timothy through ASIA and crosses over to **MACEDONIA**, where they establish small Christian churches, esp. in **Philippi & Thessalonica**, possibly also in Berea (Acts 16:1-17:15).
- C. After getting kicked out of one Macedonian city after another, they go down to **ACHAIA**; Paul briefly visits *Athens*, but his preaching is not successful there (Acts 17:16-34).
- D. They move on to **Corinth**, the capital of ACHAIA, and stay there for over 18 months (Acts 18:11, 18); they meet Prisca & Aquila in Corinth soon after **Emperor Claudius** had expelled Jews from Rome in 49 AD (Acts 18:2).
- E. Paul is brought to trial before the **Proconsul Gallio** (Acts 18:12-17), who was in *Achaia only in 51-52 AD.*; this fact gives us the only fixed date in the chronology of Paul's life, from which all other dates are calculated backward or forward.
- F. Paul & his companions *write 1 Thess (and probably 2 Thess) from Corinth* (see 1 Thess 3:1-6).

4) *Mature Missionary Leadership Phase* - in ASIA (*Minor*) (*ca. 54-57 AD*)

- A. Paul travels through Asia, then to Syria (including brief visits to Jerusalem and Antioch), and back again to **Ephesus**, the capital of ASIA (Acts 18:18-19:41).
- B. He is head-quartered in **Ephesus** for *at least 27 months*, preaching and strengthening the churches (Acts 19:8, 10, 22).
- C. He travels personally and sends & receives messengers and letters back and forth from Ephesus to Macedonia, Corinth, other parts of Asia, etc. (1 Cor 16:5-12; 2 Cor 8-9; Phil 2:19-30; 4:10-20).
- D. He encounters opposition from Jews and Gentiles, and is blamed for a riot caused by some silversmiths in Ephesus (since Paul preached against the "idolatry" of worshipping pagan gods; see Acts 19:26); he probably spends some time in prison there.
- E. Paul & his companions write **1 Cor, 2 Cor, Phil, Phlm**, and probably **Gal** from Ephesus (see 1Cor 15:32; 16:8; 16:19).

5) *Final Missionary Travel Phase* - to the WEST (*ca. 58-62/64 AD*)

- A. Paul wants to go West to Rome and Spain, but first to collect & deliver money for poor Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4; Rom 15:22-32; Acts 19:21); he stays in **Corinth** three more months (Acts 20:3), and *writes Rom* from there (Rom 16).
- B. Paul and some associates deliver this collection to **Jerusalem**; soon he is arrested in the Temple (Acts 20-21).

- C. Paul is held under arrest for about two years in **Caesarea**; at his trial he appeals to Caesar and is taken to **Rome**, where he remains under house-arrest for another two years (Acts 22-28); possibly *writes Col from prison in Caesarea* (or later from Rome).
- D. We cannot be sure what happened next, since nothing else is written in Acts: either he was tried, found innocent and released, in which case he might have gone to preach in **Spain**, as he had planned; or he was tried, found guilty, and executed.
- E. Early Christian tradition agrees Paul was executed during the reign of Emperor Nero; but we cannot be sure whether it was at the end of his first Roman imprisonment (62 AD), or after his return from Spain (64 AD), since his death is not recorded in Acts.

6) **After Paul's Death - his legacy continues** (60's -90's and beyond)

- A. Paul's associates continue to preach, gain new converts, build up Christian communities, address problems, write letters, etc.
- B. *1 Tim, 2 Tim, Tit, and Eph are probably pseudepigraphic*, i.e. letters written by his followers in his name after his death.
- C. **Ephesus** and Colossae remain strong centers of Pauline-style Christianity, possibly led by Timothy and Onesimus, respectively.
- D. Someone begins collecting (and editing) Paul's letters (cf. 2Pet 3:15-16); by the end of the first century, about 10 letters are circulating together (not yet 1&2 Tim, Tit), with Ephesians possibly functioning as an introduction or "cover letter."
- E. Eventually, thirteen different letters attributed to Paul are recognized as "canonical" (accepted as part of the NT).
- F. Other legends of Paul develop and are recorded in *non-canonical* works, e.g. the "Acts of Paul" and the "Acts of Paul and Thecla"