



FHS 3102: PAUL AND PAULINE TRADITION

Handout for Lecture 1
Prof Jenn Strawbridge
Week 1, Hilary 2025

The Life of Paul and the Pauline Corpus

1. Housekeeping

A few key details

- Greek Text Reading Classes are Thursdays at 11am in the Gibson Building
- 2 Revision Lectures (essays/gobbets) will be offered in Trinity Term for Finalists
- Handouts and Reading lists will be available at NTatOxford.com

2. Who is Paul and what is our evidence?

Sources for Paul's life

- Paul's letters
- Acts of the Apostles
- Both leave large parts of Paul's life open to speculation

Paul's Dates

- Edict of Claudius, most likely 49 CE (Acts 18.2)
- Gallio, in Corinth from 51-52 CE (Acts 18.12-17)
- King Aretas, 9/8 BCE to 40/41 CE (2 Cor 11.32; Acts 9.23-4)
- Porcius Festus, died 62 CE (Acts 25-26)

What do we know about Paul the Apostle?

Paul's letters as a source

- Jewish (Rom 11.1; 2 Cor 11.22; Phil 3.6)
- Tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3.5)
- Pharisee and zealous (Phil 3.6)
- Manual laborer (1 Thess 2.9)
- Persecutor of the *ekklesia* (Phil 3.6; Gal 1.13; 1 Cor 15.9)
- Eye problems? (2 Cor 12.7-9; Gal 4.13-16; 6.11)
- Other physical descriptions: 2 Cor 10.10 and *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

Acts as a source

- From Tarsus in Cilicia (21.39; 22.3)
- Citizen of Tarsus (21.39) and Rome (22.25-28)
- Studied under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (22.3)
- Given name was Saul (7.58; 9.4)
- Persecutor of the *ekklesia* (7.58; 8.1; 9.1-2, 5, 13-14; 22.4-5; 26.9-11)
- Speaks Hebrew (some translations: Aramaic) (22.2)
- Tent-maker (18.3)

3. Paul's 'conversion'

- Significance of Damascus
- Acts 9.3-9 when antagonist becomes protagonist in Luke's narrative
- 1 Cor 15.8, final vision of risen Lord in the line of the Apostles
- Gal 1.15-17, divine revelation of Jesus to Paul
- Phil 3.12, Jesus has made Paul his own
- 2 Cor 4.6, the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

4. Acts and Paul's Letters

Three case studies

- Paul and Barnabas: Galatians 2 vs Acts 15
- Paul's missionary approach: 1 Thessalonians 1 vs Acts 17
- Paul's 'conversion' or transformation: Galatians 1.15-17 vs Acts 9.3-9

5. Paul the letter-writer

Questions and challenges

- genuine letters
- missing letters (e.g. Col 4.16; 1 Cor 5.9; 2 Cor 7.8)
- involvement of others (Timothy; Silvanus; a scribe/amanuensis)
- form of ancient letters
- constructing theology
- authenticity of the letters

6. Canonical Paul

- Manuscript evidence:
 - P³² (vss of Titus; c 200 CE) and P⁴⁶ (all but 2 Thess, Pastorals, Philem; c 200 CE)
- Marcion and the Pauline canon (c mid-2nd century)
- Muratorian Canon (eccentric ordering)
- Amphilochius of Iconium (4th century: first explicit order of Paul's letters as in NT now)

7. The Set Texts

- Romans 5-11 (Greek: Rom 5-8)
- 1 Corinthians 1-7, 15 (Greek: 1 Cor 5-7)
- Ephesians 1-6 (Greek: Eph 1-3)

8. Practice Gobbet: 1 Corinthians 15:7-10

Then he [Christ] appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

Next week: Paul's Communities and Controversies

LETTERS ATTRIBUTED TO PAUL

Authentic/Hauptbriefe

1 Thessalonians: 50-51 in Corinth

Galatians: 53-57 in Ephesus (or 49-50 if South Galatia hypothesis holds)

1 Corinthians: 53-57 in Ephesus

2 Corinthians: 55-57 in Macedonia

Romans: 56-57 in Corinth

Philippians: from prison either 53-56 (Ephesus); 58-60 (Caesarea); or 60-62 (Rome)

Philemon: from prison, likely in Rome 59-61

Disputed

2 Thessalonians: end of 1st century; or shortly after first epistle in early 50s

Colossians: as late as 80; or from prison in Rome (60-62)

Ephesians: 70-80; or from prison in Rome (60-62)

Even more disputed/Pastoral Epistles

1 Timothy

2 Timothy

Titus

Not by Paul

Hebrews

TEXTS ENGAGED in the LECTURE

2 Peter 3.15-16: “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters (ἐπιστολαῖς). There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures (γραφαῖς).”

Philippians 3:4-6: “If anyone has a reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.”

Galatians 1.13: “You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it.”

1 Corinthians 15.9: “For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

Acts 21.39: “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city.”

Acts 17.1-4: “After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures....and some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks, and *not a few leading women*.”

1 Thessalonians 1.8-9: “...in every place your faith in God has become known...For the people of those regions – here he’s speaking of Macedonia and Achaia – report about us what kind of welcome we had among you and how you turned from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven...”

Galatians 1.15-17: “But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.”

Acts 19-21; 26-27: “For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ All who heard him were amazed and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name?...When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.”

Colossians 4.16: “And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea.”

1 Corinthians 5.9: “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons...”

2 Corinthians 7.8: “For even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it (though I did regret it, for I see that I grieved you with that letter, though only briefly).”

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