

# Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

## 01. Introduction



## Re the 'Acts of the Apostles' by Luke

Luke was a close companion of Paul in his mission.

Luke was a historian: 'I have decided, after investigating everything carefully, to write an orderly account for you so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed' (Luke 1:3-4).

First century historians used all the tools of rhetoric to impress the reader, and they were expected to create speeches, but only after 'investigating everything carefully.'

born in Tarsus

“I am from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city” (Acts 21:39).

- Born possibly about 4BC



He refers to himself as a **προεσβύτης** (late 50's) in his Letter to Philemon (composed c.54AD)

Luke (Acts 7:58) refers to him as a **νεανίας** (middle 30's) at Stephen's martyrdom (c. 34AD).

## Saul was a Jew

- ‘I was circumcised on the eighth day’ (Philippians 3:5).
- In his Letter to the Philippians (3:5), he refers to himself as ‘a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews.’
  - Given the name ‘Saul’ (Acts 7:58). In all his letters he calls himself ‘Paul’. Luke refers to him as ‘Paul’ only after the meeting with the proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7). Did they share a family name, or did the proconsul offer him patronage?

- He was a 'Pharisee' (Philippians 3:5; see Acts 26:5)
- He studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, 'educated strictly according to our ancestral Law' (Acts 22:3).
- He inherited Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28).

33AD

‘The members of the council dragged Stephen out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man (νεανίας, 37?) named **Saul**. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him’ (Acts 7:58-60)

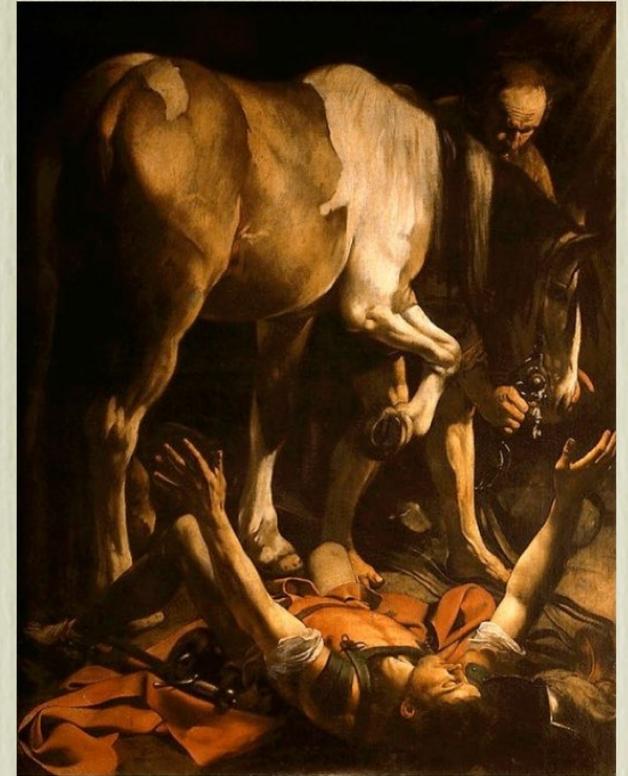
- Paul claims to have been ‘intensely zealous in persecuting the Church of God and was trying to **destroy it**’ (Galatians 1:13; see Philippians 3:6; Acts 9:1-2, 22:4, 26:9-11).

34AD

## His Encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus

(Acts 9:1-19; 22:6-16; 26:13-18).

‘As Saul was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” He asked, “Who are you, Lord?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do”



Acts 9:3-6

‘Have I not seen the Lord’ (1 Corinthians 9:1).

‘He was seen also by me’ (1 Corinthians 15:8).

‘I received the Gospel through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ (Galatians 1:12).

‘God called me through his grace and was pleased to reveal his Son in/to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles’ (Galatians 1:15-16).

## Acts 9:17-19

‘Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptised, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus.’

*‘I went away at once to Arabia,  
and afterwards I returned to  
Damascus’* (Galatians 1:17).

‘Arabia’ (The Nabataean kingdom)  
(Acts 9:20-25)



37AD

‘In Damascus, the governor 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’ (2 Cor 11:32-33).

Saul pays a short visit to Jerusalem ‘to talk things over with Cephas’ (Galatians 1:18)

37-45AD

‘Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy” (Galatians 1:21-23).



46AD

‘Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people’ (Acts 11:25-26).

Saul visits Jerusalem with Barnabas and Silas and confers with Peter, John & James concerning conditions for accepting Gentiles into the Christian community (Galatians 2:1-10; Acts 11:27-30)

47AD

Sent on mission

Acts 13:1-4

‘In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers ... While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off. So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus.’

48AD

‘They sailed back to **Antioch**, where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had completed’ (Acts 14:26).



## Acts 14:27-28

When they arrived back at Antioch, they called the church together and related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles. And they stayed there with the disciples for some time.



## Acts 15:1-2

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.

48AD

Paul writes from Antioch to Galatia

Letter to the Galatians

49AD

Shortly after writing to the Galatians Paul went with Barnabas to the [Assembly in Jerusalem](#) which decided that Gentiles could be welcomed into the community as Gentiles.

To help harmony in a Christian community of Jews and Gentiles, the Council concluded that the Gentiles should follow only the instructions in Leviticus that applied to Gentiles living in a Jewish territory.

Gentiles were asked to abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from πορνεία.

49AD

Paul returns to Galatia, accompanied by Silas. They are joined by Timothy.

Acts 16:11

Mission to Macedonia

‘We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi.’



# Acts 17:1

They left Philippi and came to Thessalonica.



They were forced to leave the Via Egnatia and escape to Beroea

But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea as well, they came there too, to stir up and incite the crowds. Then the believers immediately sent Paul away to the coast, but Silas and Timothy remained behind. Those who conducted Paul brought him as far as **Athens**; and after receiving instructions to have Silas and Timothy join him as soon as possible, they left him.

## Acts 17:13-15



‘After a brief stay in Athens **Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.**’ (Acts 18:1).



In Corinth Paul met Aquila and Priscilla. Like Paul they worked with a needle, making canvas shades for the market-place, as well as tents and coverings for the caravans and other cloth and leather goods (Acts 18:3).

Corinth commands two ports. Between two and three kilometres to the north the port of Lecheion on the Gulf of Corinth opens westward to the Adriatic, and so to Spain, Italy and Sicily. Nine kilometres to the east the port of Cenchreae on the Saronic Gulf opens into the Aegean and so to Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt.

## Acts 18:4-7

Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks. When **Silas and Timothy** arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshipper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue.

## Acts 18:8-11

Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptised. One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people.” He stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

## Acts 18:12-16

When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. They said, “This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law.” Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of crime or serious villainy, I would be justified in accepting the complaint of you Jews; but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I do not wish to be a judge of these matters.” And he dismissed them from the tribunal.

We know from a letter written by his brother, Seneca, that Gallio retired before the completion of his term, so it is reasonable to assume that he left Corinth as soon as the sailing season opened in the spring of 52.

Acts 18:11, 18

Paul stayed there a year and six months ... He said farewell to the believers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.

It would seem that Paul arrived in Corinth before the onset of winter in the year 50 and left at the same time as Gallio in the spring of 52.

# Letters to the Christian community in Thessalonica

52AD

‘Paul sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila ... When they reached Ephesus he left them’ (Acts 18:18-19).



Acts 18:21 – 19:1

52AD

‘Paul set sail from Ephesus, landed at Caesarea and went up to Jerusalem ... and then down to Antioch. After spending some time there, he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia ... and came to Ephesus.



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Philippi ▪

Troas ▪

ASIA

▪ Corinth

Ephesus ▪

Antioch ▪

• Colossae

Attalia ▪

CRETE

Josephus tells us that there were five hundred cities in the Roman province of Asia – a thickly populated and agriculturally and commercially prosperous area. Ephesus itself, reconstructed and embellished by Augustus and Tiberius, is estimated to have had a population of between two and three hundred thousand in the middle of the first century. Located at the mouth of the Cayster river, it commanded the richest hinterland in the province. The main trade routes, whether by land, sea or river, went through it.

52-55AD

‘Paul entered the Ephesus synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord’ (Acts 19:8-10).

Among the major cities linked to Ephesus by a Roman road were Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea – the cities addressed in the Book of Revelation (chapters 2-3) towards the end of the century. Paul was in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). For two of those years he lectured in the hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), laying the foundations for a thriving Christian community in the province. Luke is content to sum up this most successful period of Paul's missionary life in one brief verse: 'all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord' (Acts 19:10).

# Ephesus: 52-55AD

Letters from Ephesus

First Corinthians 53AD

Philemon 54AD

Colossians 54AD

