



Excavating Paul

Paul & his Letters



Searching for Paul

- Best known of Jesus' early followers
- Only one whose own voice we hear
- Not a disciple during Jesus' life
- Most influential interpreter of Jesus
- We may know quite a bit about him already?
- But how much of that has a historical basis?

The road ahead

- Start with the Pauline literature
- Develop a sketch of the person
- Outline his 'reception history' in earliest church
- Note his key ideas
- Consider his legacy

The Pauline writings



Pauline literature

- ☑ 13 letters in NT attributed to Paul at times
- ☑ About 25% of whole NT
- ☑ With Luke-Acts over one-third of NT is 'Pauline'
- ☑ Wider set of Pauline texts circulated in 2C & 3C



Paul outside the NT

- ☑ Acts of Paul and Thecla
- ☑ Acts of Andrew and Paul
- ☑ Greek Acts of Peter and Paul
- ☑ Apocalypse of Paul
- ☑ Correspondence between Seneca and Paul
- ☑ Martyrdom of Paul
- ☑ Passions of Peter and Paul
- ☑ Vision of Paul



Letters of Paul

- Epistles of Paul ...
 - Alexandrians
 - **Colossians**
 - **1 Corinthians**
 - **2 Corinthians**
 - 3 Corinthians
 - **Ephesians**
 - **Galatians**
 - **Hebrews**
 - Laodiceans
 - **Philemon**
 - **Philippians**
 - **Rome**
 - **1 Thessalonians**
 - **2 Thessalonians**
 - **1 Timothy**
 - **2 Timothy**
 - **Titus**



Meet Marcion

- ☑ Not a well known character these days
- ☑ Flourished around 140 CE (96–165 CE)
- ☑ Huge fan of Paul
- ☑ Published the first distinctively Christian Bible
- ☑ His Bible had just two parts
 - ☑ The Gospel (Euangelion)
 - ☑ The Apostle (Paul)
- ☑ Reaction → formation of NT + keep OT



Before and after Marcion

- ☑ Authentic letters of Paul (~50–65 CE)
- ☑ Following Paul (2Thess, Col, Eph)
- ☑ Reaction against Paul (James, 2Peter, Clementines)



Before and after Marcion

- ☑ So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. 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. (2Peter 3:15–16 NRSV)



Before and after Marcion

- ☑ Authentic letters of Paul (~50–65 CE)
- ☑ Following Paul (2Thess, Col, Eph)
- ☑ Reaction against Paul (James, 2Peter, Clementines)
- ☑ Reclaiming Paul (Pastoral Epistles)
- ☑ Exaggerating Paul (Marcion?)
- ☑ Rescuing Paul (Acts)



Excavating Paul



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What counts as evidence



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Paul in his own words

Focus on authentic / undisputed letters

- ☑ **Romans 11:1-2** (Jewish identity)
- ☑ **2 Corinthians 11:16-33 & 12:1-10** (personal history and own religious experiences)
- ☑ **Galatians 1:13-2:14** (encounter with risen Jesus and reception by the followers of Jesus)
- ☑ **Philippians 3:4-6** (details of his Jewish credentials)
- ☑ **Philemon 1:9** (self-description as an aged prisoner)



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Dating Paul

Dates (all CE)	Events, Letters
c. 36	Paul becomes a follower of Jesus
36-39	Three years in Arabia
39	First visit to Jerusalem to meet with church leaders there.
49	Council of Jerusalem
49/50	1 Thessalonians
mid-50s	Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans
58-60	Arrest and two years in prison at Caesarea
60/61	Sea journey to Rome
61-63	Roman imprisonment
64	Executed under Nero
early 80s	Colossians
late 80s	Ephesians
early 90s	2 Thessalonians
80s-120s	Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus)



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Paul's key ideas



Paul's theology

- ☑ I like to draw especially on Romans
- ☑ one of his later letters (so ideas more fully formed)
- ☑ written for the purpose of introducing himself and outlining his teachings
- ☑ not dealing with a pressing pastoral problem
- ☑ to a congregation where Paul mostly unknown



The big ideas

- ☑ Righteousness of God (always faithful)
- ☑ Faithfulness of Jesus (second Abraham)
- ☑ One disobeys, another obeys (second Adam)
- ☑ The transformed person, renewed in the Spirit
- ☑ Affirming God's blessings of Jewish people
- ☑ God's blessing is for everyone
- ☑ Respect for authority, compassion for each other
- ☑ The end of time is at hand



Paul's legacy



“Paul disappeared into the violence of the Roman Empire and into the history of early Christianity.”

Brandon Scott, *The Real Paul: Rediscovering his radical challenge* (Polebridge, 2015), 227



Some legacy issues

Christian anti-Semitism

- Paul was and always remained a Jew.
- He was not a Christian, but a key figure in the Jesus movement that evolved into Christianity.
- He saw a place for Gentiles alongside Jews
- But Christianity saw Jews as “the other”
- Paul feared this would happen (cf. Rom 9–11)



Other legacy issues

Controversy

- Paul was not a representative Jesus follower
- Controversial in his lifetime & after his death
- Influential at critical moments: Augustine, Luther
- But remains controversial today
- Most notably opposition to Empire
- Also attitudes towards women and LGBTI



Other legacy issues

Apocalypticism v normalisation

- Paul expected imminent parousia
- Paul was wrong
- His followers spiritualised the concept
- Loss of immediacy here and now
- Political edge to Jesus movement mostly lost



Other legacy issues

Scripture

- ☑ Paul was immersed in Jewish scriptures
- ☑ He became a book (Pervo)
- ☑ His writings insured the concept of NT canon
- ☑ His voice is loudest in that collection



Other legacy issues

The death of Jesus

- ☑ Cross was central for Paul
- ☑ Supreme act of faithfulness by Jesus
- ☑ God's response is a covenant with Gentiles
- ☑ Faith of Jesus, not faith in Jesus
- ☑ Baptism is dying with the faithful Jesus
- ☑ Eucharist is proclaiming the death of the faithful Jesus, with the bread and cup signifying a communion (sharing) in the body and blood of Jesus




