The Life of Paul and the Pauline Corpus

1. Housekeeping

A few key details
Please take 20 minutes to engage with this week’s set texts on Perusall (instructions on Canvas in the Paul and Pauline Tradition ‘Container’)
Greek Reading Classes are Mondays at 1pm
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)

Paul’s background
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 zeal (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 sources for physical description: 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. 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’: Galatians 1.15-17 vs Acts 9.3-9

4. Paul the letter-writer

Some 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

5. Canonical Paul

Manuscript evidence:
P² (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)
The Set Texts

Romans 5-11

5.1-21: God’s reconciling love (1-11); Adam and Christ (12-21)
6.1-7.25: Sin and the law
8.1-8.39: The Spirit
9.1-9.29: God’s grace and Israel’s election and rejection
9.30-10.21: The purpose of the law and explanation of Israel’s failure
11.1-36: God’s plan for Israel

1 Corinthians 1-7, 15

1.1-1.9: Introduction and Thanksgiving
1.10-4.21: Appeal for Unity and Paul’s Apostolic Authority
5.1-7.40: Sexual and Related Issues
   5: Expulsion of an Immoral Member of the Corinthian church
   6: Absurdity of using Corinthian courts; Significance of the body
   7: Celibacy and Marriage
15.1-58: The Resurrection of Christ and the Resurrection Body

Ephesians 1-6

1.1-23: Introduction, Blessing, and Paul’s Prayer
2.1-22: Reminder of what God has done in them in Christ
3.1-13: Paul as steward of the great mystery, continued prayer
4.1-32: The Church’s unity, purpose; how to live in the world as the body of Christ
5.1-20: Ethical exhortations between old and new life modelled on Christ
5.21-6.9: Household code
6.10-20: The armour of God
6.21-24: Closing and blessing/benediction
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, many scholars place these letters around 100**

1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus

**Not by Paul**

Hebrews
PAULINE 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 (ἐπιστολαίς). 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 (γραφὰς).”

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).”
Select Bibliography


Harrill, James A. 2012. Paul the Apostle: His life and legacy in their Roman context. New York: Cambridge UP.

Hicks-Keeton, Jill. 2019. ‘Putting Paul in his Place: Diverse Diasporas and Sideways Spaces in Hellenistic Judaism’ JMJJS 6, 1-21.


Dipping into other ways of reading Paul

Baur, F. C. *Paul: The Apostle of Jesus Christ* (2 vols., London: Williams & Norgate, 1873 (vol. 1)).

The first application of philosophical frameworks to Paul’s letters and what kicked off the Tübingen School and History of Religions school.


Contains all of Dunn’s essays on the new perspective from the 1980s up to 2004.


A consideration of the new perspective for feminist approaches to theology.


Heim, Erin M. *Adoption in Galatians and Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

A study of Paul’s use of metaphor, especially that of adoption.


The book that many believe started it all a la new perspective.


A look at Taubes, Badiou, Agamben, Žižek, Reinhard and Paul’s writings as a paradigm for politics.


A look at the Pauline passages concerning gender and the canon of Paul’s writings as a whole.


An excellent introduction to Paul’s letters, their interpretation, with a focus on big questions and what he calls the traditional view, new perspective, and radical new perspective.

Paul and Canon


Bruce, F.F. *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2018).

