

Paul & the Ephesian Church

A Comprehensive Chronological Timeline

c. AD 52 – c. AD 95

Primary Source: Holy Scripture · noblemind.study/apostle-paul/


*This is a focused timeline. For the broader chronology of Paul's life, consult the parent timeline
([Paul_Life_Timeline.pdf](#)).*

Phase 1 — First Contact · End of the Second Journey (c. AD 52-53)

~AD 52

Brief Visit

Paul stops briefly at Ephesus on the return leg of his Second Journey

 Acts 18:18-22


Returning from his Second Missionary Journey, Paul sailed from Corinth with Priscilla and Aquila and stopped at Ephesus. He left his companions there, entered the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. They asked him to stay longer, but he declined, saying, “I will return to you again if God wills,” and sailed for Caesarea. The visit is short — perhaps days — but it establishes the first contact and plants the team (Priscilla and Aquila) that will prepare the ground for the major ministry to come.

The Second Journey return is typically dated to mid-to-late AD 52 from the Gallio anchor (proconsul of Achaia, c. AD 51-52, Delphi inscription). Bruce, Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free, ch. 22.

~AD 52-53

Context

Apollos arrives in Ephesus; Priscilla & Aquila instruct him more accurately


 Acts 18:24-28

An Alexandrian Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus — eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and taught accurately about Jesus, but he knew only the baptism of John. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. Apollos then went on to Achaia (Corinth), strongly refuting the Jews in public and showing from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. The pattern is striking: while Apollos is being corrected at Ephesus, the same problem (John’s baptism only) will appear again when Paul returns and finds twelve disciples in the same condition.

~AD 53

3rd Journey

Paul returns to Ephesus; finds twelve disciples knowing only John's baptism

 Acts 19:1–7

Paul made his way back to Ephesus on the Third Missionary Journey, traveling through the upper country (Galatia and Phrygia, Acts 18:23) and arriving at Ephesus. There he found twelve disciples — believers, but in the same partial state Apollos had been in: they had received John's baptism only and had not even heard whether there was a Holy Spirit. Paul explained that John baptized with a baptism of repentance, pointing forward to the One coming after him — that is, Jesus. When they heard, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Paul laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them; they spoke with tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

~AD 53

3rd Journey

Three months reasoning in the synagogue


 Acts 19:8

Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the things concerning the kingdom of God. When some became hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew the disciples from them. This synagogue period at Ephesus is unusually long — three months — compared to his shorter synagogue stays in other cities. Ephesus had a sizable Jewish community willing to hear him out before the conflict reached its breaking point.

~AD 53–55

3rd Journey

Two years in the school of Tyrannus; the word spreads throughout Asia

 Acts 19:9–10; Col 1:7; 4:12–13


Withdrawing from the synagogue, Paul moved his daily teaching to the school of Tyrannus, where he reasoned daily for two years. Luke summarizes the result with one of the most striking sentences in Acts: “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). The churches of the seven cities of Revelation 2–3 — Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, along with Ephesus itself — were likely planted or strengthened during this period, almost certainly through Paul's converts rather than Paul himself. The Colossian and Hierapolis churches (Col 4:13) were founded by Epaphras during this stretch (Col 1:7).

Some manuscripts of Acts 19:9 add that Paul taught “from the fifth hour to the tenth” — c. 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. — when the school would have been free from its usual lectures, a detail consistent with the Greek practice of resting at midday.

~AD 54-55

3rd Journey

Extraordinary miracles; the seven sons of Sceva; magic books burned

 Acts 19:11-20

God worked unusual miracles by Paul's hands — handkerchiefs and aprons from his body were carried away to the sick, and diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. Itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of Jesus as a formula; the seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, attempted to invoke "Jesus whom Paul preaches" over a possessed man. The evil spirit answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know — but who are you?" The man leapt on them and overpowered them; they fled naked and wounded. Fear fell on Jews and Greeks alike. Many who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them publicly — fifty thousand pieces of silver's worth (likely 50,000 days' wages for a laborer). "So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing." Ephesus was a center of magical practice; the Ephesia grammata (Ephesian letters) were famous magical formulae across the ancient world. The public burning of these books represented a direct, visible defeat of the city's spiritual industry.

The Ephesia grammata are referenced in Plutarch (Sympos. 7.5) and Athenaeus (Deipnosoph. 12.548); the magical industry of Ephesus is well-attested in ancient sources.

~AD 55 (Spring)

1 Corinthians

Paul writes 1 Corinthians from Ephesus

 1 Cor 16:8-9; 1:1; 4:17; 16:19 (Aquila & Priscilla, still at Ephesus, send greetings)


Toward the end of the long Ephesian stay, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. He explicitly says he is writing from Ephesus and intends to stay until Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8), because "a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." The letter is composed in the middle of the very ministry described above — the school of Tyrannus is still in session, the miracles and burnings are recent, and the door at Ephesus is still standing wide open even as adversaries gather. The Corinthian crisis is unfolding by correspondence while Paul's daily work continues at Ephesus.

Bruce, ch. 24; Carson & Moo, Introduction to the New Testament, ch. 13.

~AD 55-56

3rd Journey

Timothy and Erastus sent ahead to Macedonia; Paul plans his own departure


 Acts 19:21-22

Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." He sent ahead two of those who ministered to him — Timothy and Erastus — into Macedonia, while he himself stayed in Asia for a while longer. The mention of Rome here is the first explicit signal of the next phase Paul is already planning; the Jerusalem visit will become his arrest, and the journey to Rome will be as a prisoner.

~AD 56

Riot

The riot of Demetrius and the silversmiths

 Acts 19:23-41


A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis (the great goddess of Ephesus, housed in one of the seven wonders of the ancient world), gathered the craftsmen of similar trades. He warned them that Paul's preaching — "gods made with hands are no gods at all" — was costing them not only their craft but the prestige of the temple itself. They cried out for two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The whole city was filled with confusion; the crowd rushed into the theater (a structure that seated around 25,000 and is still standing). Paul wanted to go in among the people but the disciples — and even some of the Asiarchs, friendly officials — would not let him. Eventually the city clerk calmed the crowd by appealing to the lawful courts. The riot did not stop the gospel, but it did mark the end of Paul's freedom of movement in Ephesus.

The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (Antipater, Greek Anthology 9.58). The theater referenced in Acts 19:29 is still extant and seats c. 25,000.

~AD 56

3rd Journey

Paul departs Ephesus for Macedonia

 Acts 20:1; 20:31 ("night and day for three years")

When the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, encouraged them, and embraced them and departed to go to Macedonia. After three years (Acts 20:31), the Ephesian ministry was over. Paul never returned to live at Ephesus, though he would return one more time — briefly, to the harbor at Miletus thirty miles south, to send for the elders.

Phase 3 — Farewell at Miletus (c. AD 57)

~AD 57 (Spring)

Farewell

Miletus farewell to the Ephesian elders

 Acts 20:17–38

Hurrying to be at Jerusalem by Pentecost, Paul deliberately bypassed Ephesus and sailed for Miletus, a port about thirty miles south. From Miletus he sent for the elders of the Ephesian church. When they came, he spoke to them at length — the only recorded address in Acts to a Christian audience rather than to outsiders. He reminded them of his three-year ministry, told them the Holy Spirit had testified that imprisonment and afflictions awaited him at Jerusalem, charged them to guard the flock from the wolves who would come from within their own number, commended them to God and to the word of His grace, and reminded them that he had labored with his own hands rather than coveting silver, gold, or apparel. Then he knelt and prayed with them all. They wept loudly, embraced him, and kissed him — grieved most of all by his statement that they would not see his face again. They accompanied him to the ship.


The phrase “the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28) is one of the most theologically dense statements in Acts.

Phase 4 — Letters from Prison & Pastoral Care (c. AD 60–67)

~AD 60–62

Ephesians

Paul writes the letter to the Ephesians from Roman house arrest

 Eph 1:1; 3:1; 4:1; 6:20–22; cf. Col 4:7–9


From his two years of house arrest at Rome (Acts 28:30–31), Paul wrote four letters traditionally called the Prison Epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. The letter to the Ephesians is the most theologically expansive of the four, addressing the eternal purpose of God to unite all things in Christ, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile in one body, the spiritual armor of the believer, and the household relationships that follow from the gospel. The letter does not address specific local controversies — leading many to believe it was a circular letter sent to multiple Asian churches with Ephesus as the primary destination, though the words “in Ephesus” (Eph 1:1) are absent from the earliest manuscripts (P46, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus). Tychicus carried the letter (Eph 6:21–22), along with Colossians (Col 4:7) and probably Philemon, traveling with Onesimus the returning slave.

The absence of “in Ephesus” in the earliest manuscripts is noted in NA28 and most modern critical editions; the circular-letter hypothesis is widely held but the destination question remains debated. Carson & Moo, ch. 18.

~AD 63-64

Pastoral

Paul leaves Timothy at Ephesus to charge the teachers; writes 1 Timothy

 **1 Tim 1:3-4; 3:1-13; 5:17-22; 6:3-10**


After his release from the first Roman house arrest (the case for a release is reconstructed from the Pastoral Epistles, which describe travels not recorded in Acts), Paul moved through several locations including Ephesus. He left Timothy there, charging him to instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines. From Macedonia, Paul wrote what we call 1 Timothy — a manual of pastoral practice for a young preacher charged with an established but troubled congregation. The letter addresses false teachers, prayer, qualifications for overseers and deacons, the conduct of widows, the honoring of elders, and warnings against the love of money. The Ephesian church Paul had founded twelve years earlier now needs structural reinforcement against the false teaching he had warned the elders about at Miletus.

The post-Acts chronology rests on the Pastoral Epistles' internal references and the early tradition of Paul's release before a second imprisonment. Carson & Moo, ch. 21; Bruce, ch. 36.

~AD 66-67

Final Memory

From his second imprisonment, Paul remembers the Ephesian household of Onesiphorus

 **2 Tim 1:15-18; 4:12, 19**

From his second Roman imprisonment — this time a real prison, awaiting execution — Paul wrote 2 Timothy. He recalls that “all who are in Asia turned away from me” (2 Tim 1:15), naming Phygelus and Hermogenes as examples. But he also names a single household that did not: “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me — the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day — and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.” In the same letter, Paul tells Timothy that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12) — possibly to free Timothy to come to Paul before winter (2 Tim 4:9, 21). 2 Timothy is Paul's last surviving letter. The Ephesian church is in its memory.

~AD 95

Christ's Letter

Christ's letter to Ephesus through John: "You have left your first love"

 Revelation 2:1-7

Approximately thirty years after Paul's execution, the risen Christ dictated seven letters through the Apostle John, the first of which was to the church at Ephesus. The letter is striking in its commendation: the Ephesians' deeds, their labor, their perseverance, their refusal to tolerate evil men, their testing of those who claimed to be apostles, their endurance for Christ's name without growing weary. They had even rejected the deeds of the Nicolaitans — a teaching Christ also hates. And yet: "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love." The command is to remember from where they have fallen, repent, and do the deeds they did at first. The penalty for not repenting is that Christ will come and remove their lampstand from its place. The careful, faithful, doctrinally vigilant congregation Paul had labored to plant and Timothy had labored to protect was still standing — but its love had cooled. This is the warning the Ephesian elders had heard from Paul at Miletus, now arriving on Christ's own authority.

The traditional date for Revelation is c. AD 95, late in the reign of Domitian (Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5.30.3). The Ephesian church continued for centuries; its lampstand was removed only when the city itself was eventually abandoned, gradually, over the medieval period as its harbor silted in.

Compiled from the Holy Bible · noblemind.study/apostle-paul/

Generated automatically — this document mirrors the interactive timeline online.