

Dating the New Testament



Introduction

This study was first produced as a series of two Bible Class talks which were given in a small number of towns in the Northwest of Britain in 2003/04. The first version of these was long and detailed and supported by overhead projector slides; the series was then improved by removing some extraneous material and some of the detail, and by upgrading the graphics for a data-projector. While this improved the delivery there were some who found the detail overwhelming for two hours of talks and preferred to read the study in their own time. I therefore typed out the text, inserted some graphics (partly from the OHP version and partly from the data projector version) and tidied the result up a little. The result is what you see.

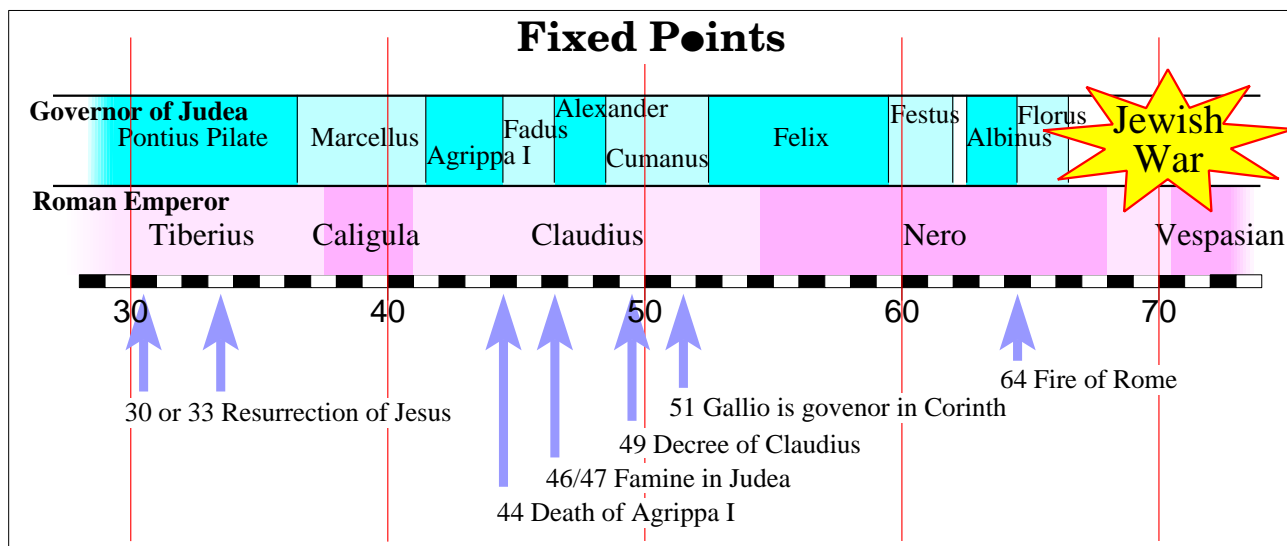
My intention is to augment the current version by adding a further section dating the Johannine writings and the Synoptic Gospels. This, however, involves slight departure in methodology from the dating of the Pauline and Petrine epistles. The Pauline and Petrine epistles can essentially be dated from Acts. The Gospels are much more difficult to date from references in Acts, and an approach which includes *Sitz im Leben* arguments alongside other information is required. The dating of these books is also much more controversial than the dating of the various epistles.

Anyway, here is the study, such as it is. Please remember that it was originally two addresses, and that the style is therefore a little different from what one would expect from a paper intended to be read from the page rather than delivered verbally to a congregation.

- Section 1 is an examination of the dates of Paul's journeys recorded in Acts and the associated epistles.
- Section 2 is an investigation of the travels of Paul after the end of the Acts narrative and a consequent dating of the Captivity Epistles and the Pastoral Epistles. Hebrews can also be fitted into this dating framework.
- Section 3 is a study of the movements of the Apostle Peter and adds the dates of the Petrine Epistles. Jude is associated with 2 Peter, so this is dated here as well.

1. The Acts Period

It is commonplace that the Old Testament prophets fit into a chronological framework which is provided by the histories of Kings and Chronicles, and that one can add to the understanding of both by fitting them together so that they can be studied in one another's context. It is less commonplace, though equally useful, to fit the New Testament books together into a chronological sequence. The Acts of the Apostles provides a convenient framework into which many of Paul's epistles can be fitted. The remaining books can be matched together to form a sequence outside the Acts narrative.



The start of the New Testament period is, of course, the birth of Jesus. This happened shortly before the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC. However, none of the New Testament books was written until after the resurrection, so this chart begins in 30AD. One can argue that the New Testament period was brought to an end by two significant events, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and the fire of Rome in 64AD with its subsequent persecution.

In the 40 years between the resurrection of Jesus and the fall of Jerusalem there are a number of fixed points. These appear in the New Testament and their dates can also be calculated from secular history. They include:-

- The death of Herod Agrippa I in 44AD
- Famine in Judea and the consequent famine relief visit, probably in 46AD
- The edict of Claudius which expelled Jews from Rome in 49AD
- The start of Gallio's term of office as deputy of Achaia in 51AD
- The start of the Judean governorship of Festus, probably in 59AD

Notice that some of these have fairly well fixed dates while others are rather more uncertain. We'll take a look at the evidence for the fixed dates as they appear in the address.

Notice also that there are two possible dates for the crucifixion. These are the two years in which the Passover could have been on a Saturday, 30 and 33AD, so that the crucifixion could have been on a Friday if it was in either year. If there was no intercalated month the crucifixion could have been on a Wednesday in 30AD, or it could have been on a Wednesday in 31AD.

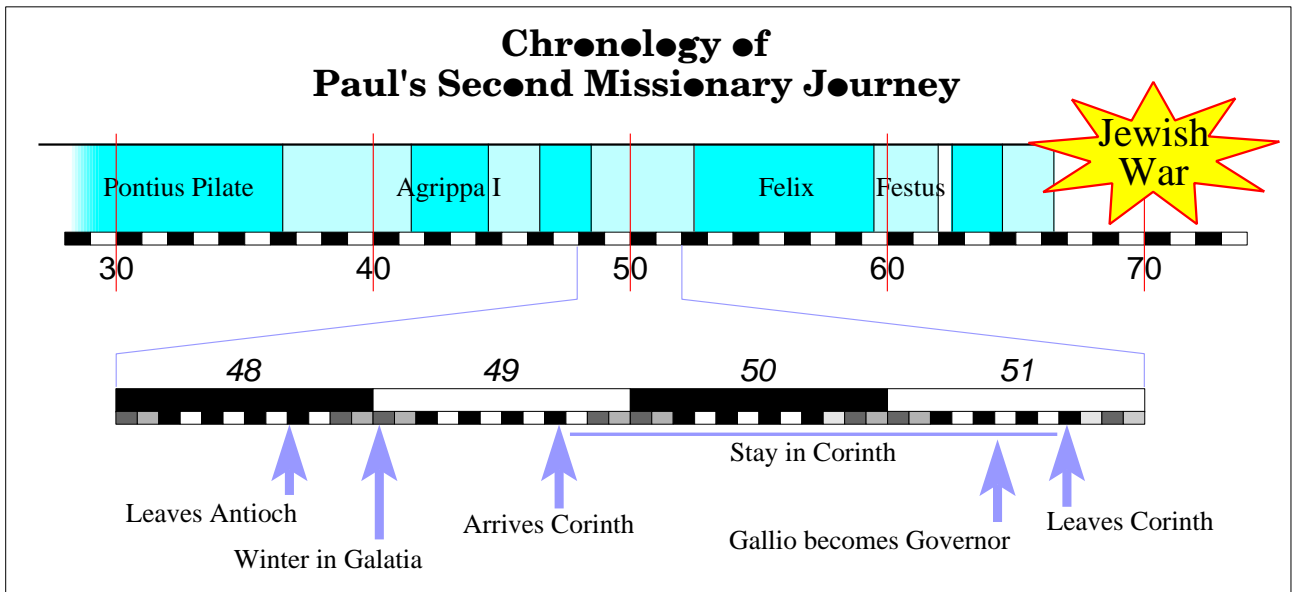
One other point about the secular background is the existence of a closed season. From October to early March it was impossible to travel by sea, or by land through mountainous or rough country. There were storms to sink ship and snow and rain blocked passes and made rivers impassable. This may have been what the Apostle Paul was referring to as "*in peril of waters*" (2 Cor 11:26). Paul was a seasoned and resourceful traveller, but even so he would need to lie up for the winter. If we can work out where we have the basis for a chronology.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey



The easiest part of Acts to date is Paul's second missionary journey, so we'll begin here. "*After these things he left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.*" (Acts 18:1,2) This describes how Paul arrived at Corinth shortly after Aquilla and Priscilla, who had been expelled from Rome by the decree of Claudius. This means that Paul arrived in Corinth in 49AD. Given the length of his journey from Antioch this must have been at the end of the travelling season. "*And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*" (Acts 18:11) Here we read that Paul stayed in Corinth for 18 months, which would bring us to the spring of 51AD. This coincides with another of our fixed points. "*But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,*" (v12) We know when Gallio became Deputy (Proconsul) of Achaia because he left an inscription at Delphi, and the start of his term was, indeed, in 51AD. Paul remains in Corinth for a little longer and then leaves (v18) going first to Ephesus and then leaving rapidly in spite of the obvious opening there. This fits in with the lateness of the season; Paul is anxious to reach Caesarea before the closed period makes this impossible.

Putting this together, Paul sets off from Antioch in the spring of 49AD, or even more likely in the autumn of 48AD, walking through Asia Minor to Macedonia and from there to Athens and Corinth, arriving in Corinth late in the travelling season of 49AD. He then spends two winters and much of a third year in Corinth, leaving late in the season and arriving at Antioch for the winter of 51/52AD.



Paul's Third Missionary Journey

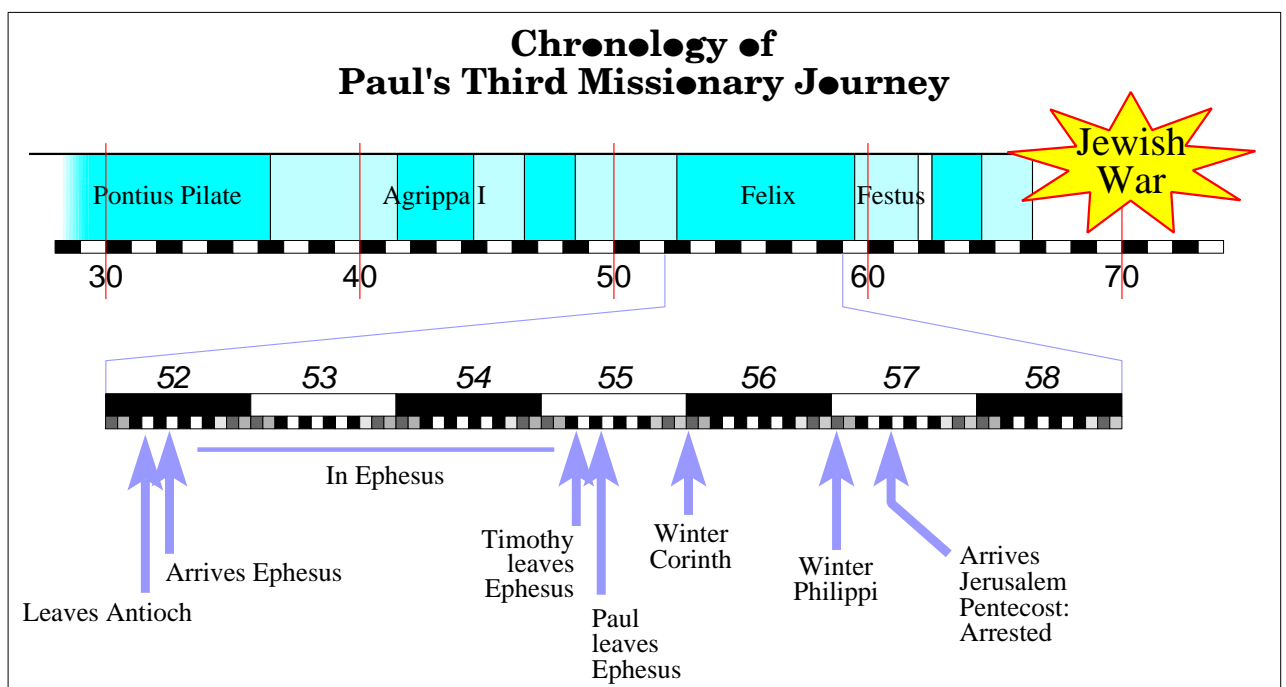


Having wintered in Antioch, Paul sets out on his Third Missionary Journey in the spring of 52AD, probably arriving at Ephesus in the early summer. He stays at Ephesus for a considerable time. *“But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”* (Acts 19:9,10) Paul spends two years teaching in the School of Tyrannus. However, he has already spent three months preaching in the Synagogue (v8) and in v22 he sends Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia. *“And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”* Probably Timothy and Erastus start off in the Autumn of 54 or the spring of 55 and Paul sets off after them in the Spring of 55; as we shall see later he probably left Ephesus at around Pentecost.

The journey is much more than a quick hop across the Aegean. *“After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece. And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.”* (Acts 20:1-3) Paul *“goes over”* Macedonia, a phrase which implies a thorough visit. He then spends three months in Greece, which probably means Corinth. On his return journey he again goes through Macedonia and ends up wintering in Philippi. *“We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.”* (Acts 20:6) The reference to the days of unleavened bread shows that Paul left Philippi at Passover, determined to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost.

The first part of the journey involves a visit to Illyricum, which is mentioned in *Rom 15:19* *“”* One would expect a full year’s travel, therefore, to arrive at Corinth, and one would expect the three month’s stay in Corinth to be the winter of 55/56AD. The winter in Philippi is therefore the winter of 56/57.

Paul then hurried back to Jerusalem to arrive by Pentecost. *“For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.”* (Acts 20:16)

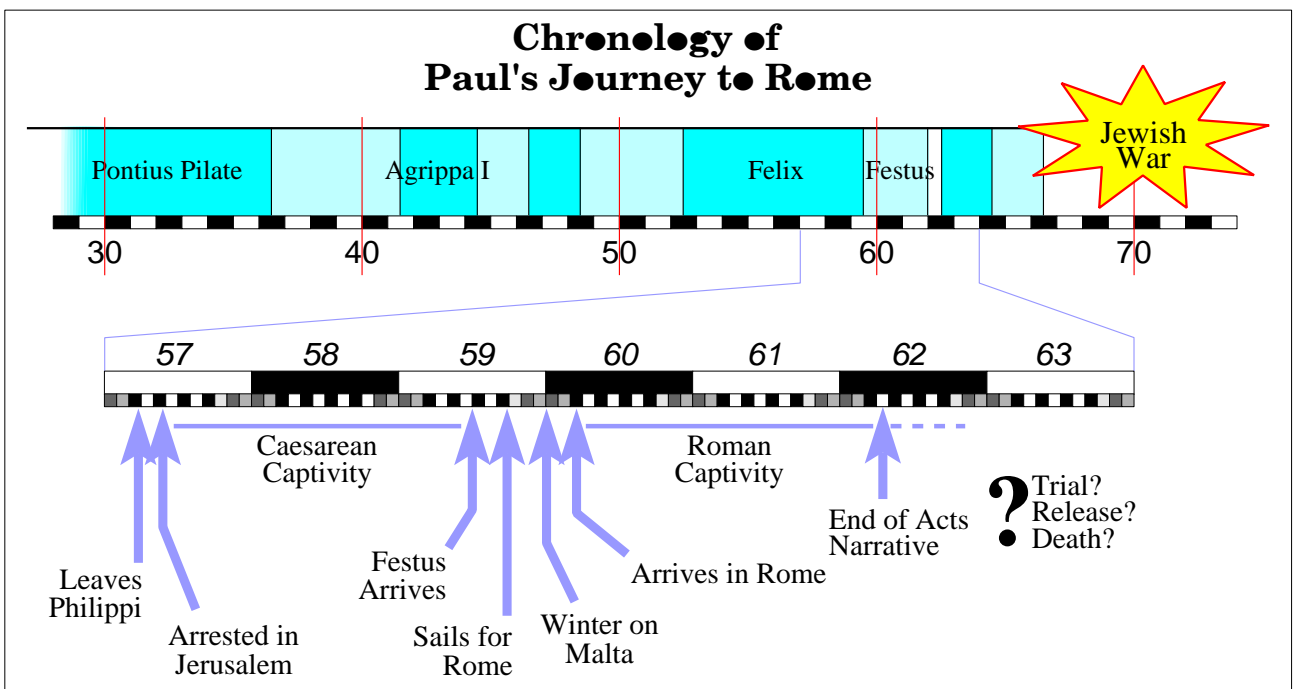


He is arrested there in 57AD and arrives in Caesarea in the late spring. He is imprisoned for two years in Caesarea under Felix (*Acts 24:27*) before Festus takes over. This handover would occur in 59AD, which is within the period during which secular history shows that it must have taken place. Unfortunately the dating of Felix’s recall is rather vague, so the correspondence doesn’t help to fix the date very well.

Paul's Journey to Rome



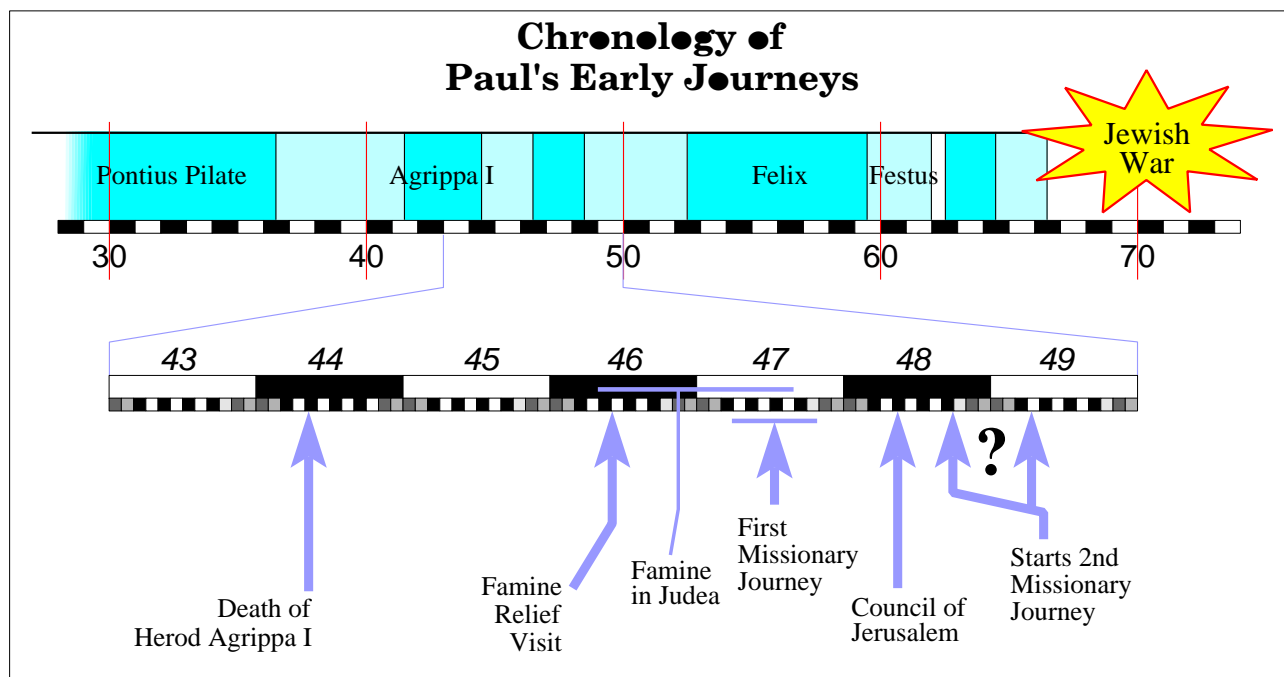
Paul leaves for Rome towards the end of the travelling season of 59AD. On the journey he is shipwrecked and forced to spend the winter on Malta. The next spring he arrives in Rome; this is the spring of 60AD.



“And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him,” (Acts 28:30) This passage states very clearly that Paul spent two whole years in Rome, which brings us to the spring of 62AD. Acts doesn't give any event at this point, it merely ends. The best explanation for this that I can find is that the narrative ends at this rather inconclusive point because it was when the book of Acts was completed. If not, one would have expected it to continue until the trial of Paul in Rome. We therefore have our first date for a New Testament book, Acts, written in Rome, 62AD. In section 2 I show that Paul must have been released shortly after.

Paul's early journeys and famine relief visit.

We have looked at the chronology of Paul's progress from Corinth to Rome. Lets now look at the period earlier than the stay in Corinth to produce a somewhat looser chronology for the first half of Acts.



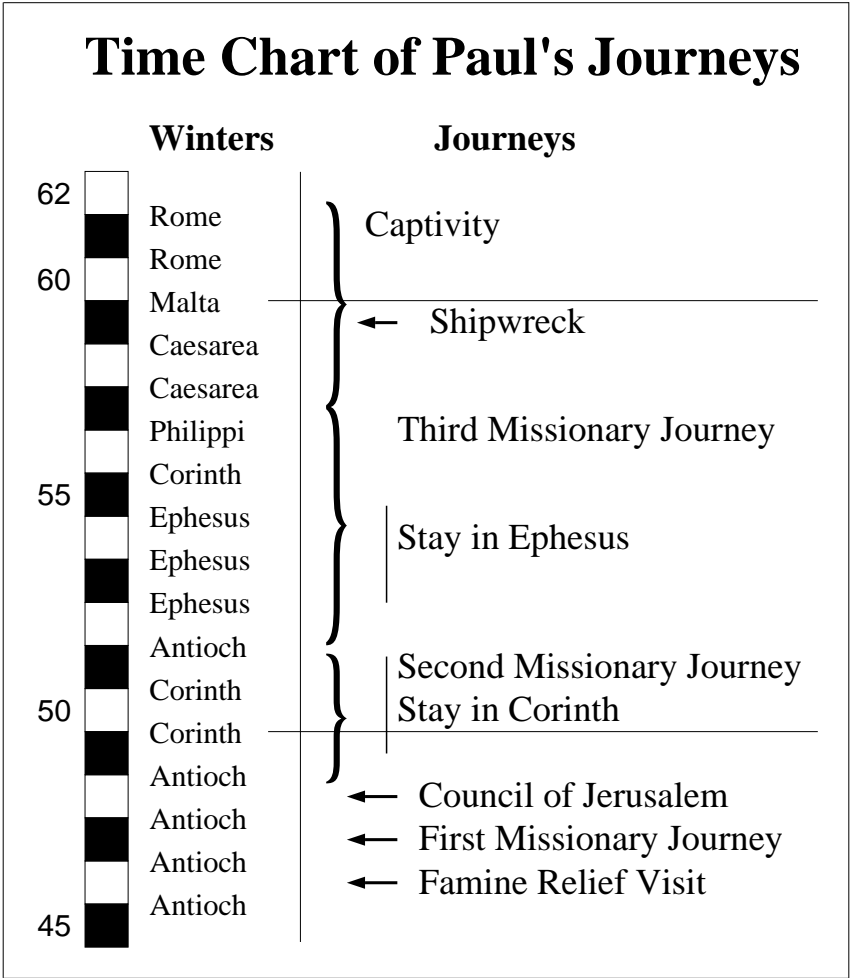
Going back to *Acts 11* we have a visit to Judea. *Acts 11:28-30* “*One of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. And in the proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea. And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.*” This visit is known as the “famine relief visit” as it provided relief from a famine which raged through the area in 46 and 47 AD. Probably the visit was in 46AD, early because of the prophetic warning. Note, by the way, that this visit to Judea included a visit to Jerusalem (*Acts 12:25*). The Apostles then returned to Antioch, probably spending the winter there before setting off on the first missionary journey in 47, a journey that would easily be completed within a single year. This leaves a year between the end of the first missionary journey and the start of the second in 48/49AD. This year contained the council of Jerusalem.

Acts 15:1-3 “*Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue. Therefore, being sent on their way by the church, they were passing through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and were bringing great joy to all the brethren.*” This journey to Jerusalem is taken along the coastal routes, with calls at the various ecclesias of Phoenicia and Samaria on the way. This would mean that it could be undertaken early in the year. The trouble could already have been brewing by the time that Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch as Mark left Paul at Perga in Pamphilia (*Acts 13:13*) and returned to Jerusalem, no doubt taking the news that Paul had been converting Gentiles. The men who came from Judea could therefore have arrived in Antioch even before Paul did. The Council of Jerusalem could therefore have been early in 48AD.

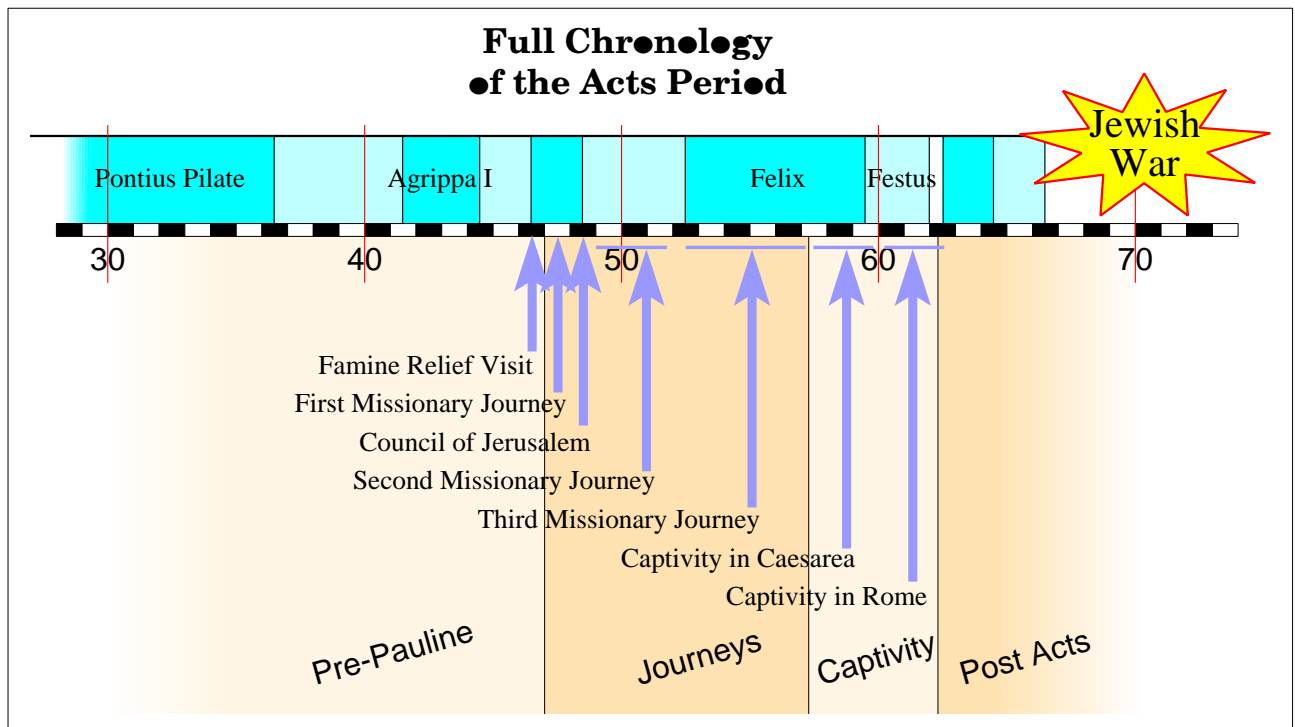
It is therefore possible that Paul left Antioch for the Second Missionary Journey in the autumn of 48AD, although it could have been the spring of 49. However, it seems more likely to me that he would set off fairly promptly with the news for the Galatian ecclesias that they need not keep the law. Notice that one of his companions on the second missionary journey was Silas. Silas appears in the letter sent from the Council of Jerusalem: “*Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.*” (Acts 15:27) It seems likely that the initial purpose of Paul’s second missionary journey was to deal with the same problems as the council of Jerusalem, and it is likely that Silas was chosen by him for this reason. Paul would no doubt be keen to ensure that the news was carried without delay, which argues in favour of a departure in the autumn of 48. This being the case, he would have spent the winter of 48/49 in Galatia.

The other event in this period is the death of Herod Agrippa I in Caesarea (Acts 12:20-25). The account of this appears at about the same time as that of the famine relief visit. There are several possibilities here. One is that Josephus, the secular source from which the date is calculated, is mistaken. It is also possible that Acts is recounting events out of chronological order. Finally, there may have been another, earlier famine, of which we know nothing. This makes the chronology of the early period rather less solid than the chronology for the second half of Acts.

We therefore have a full chronology of the Acts period from the Famine Relief Visit to the end of the Acts narrative. This includes the place where Paul wintered for every year from 45/46AD to 61/62AD. As every winter is accounted for we can be certain that there are no protracted wanderings not accounted for in the Acts narrative. It is possible, for instance, that Paul made short journeys away from Ephesus in 53 or 54 AD but these cannot have been longer than a month or two; they could certainly not last a year, or extend over a winter.



Summary of the Period



To summarise again, one can divide the New Testament period after the resurrection into four sections based on Acts. The first of these is the pre-Pauline period when Acts concentrates on the doings of Peter and the other Apostles and Evangelists rather than on Paul. In 48AD this changes with Paul's First Missionary Journey in that year, and the journeys period begins. This lasts until Paul's imprisonment in 57AD and we then have the captivity period to 62AD. Finally there is a post-Acts period which generally runs out in the mid 60's AD.

Having laid this foundation one can move on to look at individual books. This section concentrates on the Pauline epistles from the journeys period because of their contact with Acts.

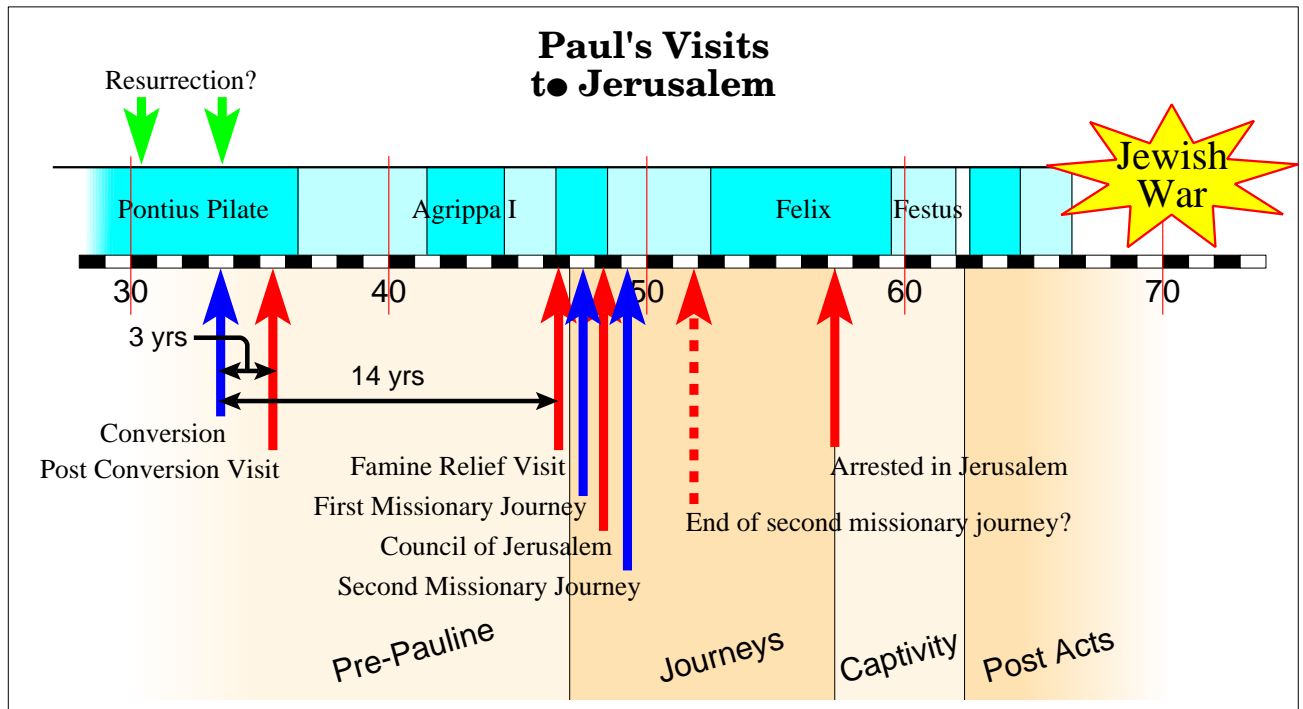
Galatians

- **There were Ecclesias in Galatia** The destination of the epistle is given in *Gal 1:2b* as: "*To the churches of Galatia.*" To risk stating the obvious, this epistle was written to the ecclesias of Galatia. These were founded on Paul's First Missionary Journey in 48AD, so the letter is later than this.
- **Paul lists his visits to Jerusalem** Paul's argument about his own authority is based on the lack of contact between himself and the Apostles in Jerusalem. "*For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*" (*Gal 1:11,12*) Paul then goes on to describe his visits to Jerusalem after his baptism.

"*Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.*" (*Gal 1:18*) This is the visit after Paul's conversion when he is accepted by the Jerusalem Apostles, but then sent to Tarsus. "*Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.*" (*Gal 2:1*) This is Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, which would have to be the famine relief visit. No other visits are listed, which tells us that Galatians was written before the Council of Jerusalem.

Incidentally, the account of Paul's two visits to Jerusalem allows us to date his baptism (*ch 2:1*) The fourteen years here must be dated from the baptism of Paul, not from the earlier visit, or

Paul would have had to have been baptised before the crucifixion! The famine relief visit was late 46AD, so Paul's baptism must have been in 32 or 33AD. This would mean that the resurrection of Jesus was most likely in 30AD.



Other points that support this dating are the fact that Galatians deals with exactly the same issues as the Council of Jerusalem. If the Council had already taken place one would have expected some mention of it. Further support comes from *Gal 2:11,12* - “*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.*” As both Peter and James were at the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts 15:7*) it is difficult to see how Peter could have stood against Paul once the Council was concluded; and as the letter giving the findings of the council was sent out by James it is difficult to see how anyone would claim that James had decided in favour of requiring circumcision and obedience to the law.

The letter to the Galatians must therefore have been written in 48AD before the Council of Jerusalem, and probably early in the year.

Romans

- Paul has not visited Rome** *Rom 1:10,11* “*always in my prayers making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;*” We can see here that Paul has not yet visited Rome. This means that the letter was written before 60AD, when Paul finally arrived there.
- Paul Expects to visit Rome** We saw that Paul was planning to come to Rome. He was given this mission when he left Ephesus on his Third Missionary Journey, which suggests a Third Missionary Journey context for the letter. In addition, Romans describes the collection that Paul took to Jerusalem as he returned from the third Missionary Journey.
- Paul expects to travel Peaceably** In addition, *Rom 1:11* told us that Paul was hoping to come peaceably to Rome in his own way. He is therefore not a captive, and this sets the date of the epistle before Paul's arrest in the Spring of 57AD.

- **Paul is in Corinth** There is a string of connections between the Epistle to the Romans and Corinth.
 - Rom 16:3 Priscilla and Aquilla lodged in Corinth;
 - v5 Epänetus is from Corinth.
 - v23 Gaius is the recording brother in Corinth and Erastus was the city treasurer of Corinth.
 - vv1,2 The letter is written on the occasion of the transfer of Phoebe from Corinth to Rome.
 Paul must have written the letter as he stayed in Corinth on his Third Missionary Journey.
- **Paul's route is fixed** Paul is expecting to leave Corinth and go to Jerusalem via Macedonia: Rom 15:26 "*For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem....Therefore, when I have finished this [ie. looking after the collection], and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.*" Compare this with Acts 20:2,3 "*When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece. And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.*". Indeed, as he changed his mind at the last moment and left on foot for Macedonia, the plan reflected in Romans, the letter must have been written at the end of his stay, in the early spring of 56AD.

Romans was therefore written from Corinth, at the end of Paul's stay there on his Third Missionary Journey. This places it in the early spring of 56AD.

Corinthians

There is an Ecclesia in Corinth The letters were written after there was an ecclesia in Corinth, which means that they were written after 51AD (there would have been no point in writing a letter to Corinth while Paul was actually staying there).

1 Corinthians

- **Written from Ephesus** 1 Cor 16:5,8 "*But I will come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia;....But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost;*" This tells us that the letter was written from Ephesus, that Paul was planning to leave Ephesus to travel through Macedonia and that he was expecting to leave at Pentecost.
- **Timothy had already left** (see 1 Cor 4:17a "*For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord*"). This matches the narrative of Acts 19:21,22 "*Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.*"

The Epistle is written to Corinth as Paul leaves Ephesus on his Third Missionary Journey, which would be in 55AD, between Passover and Pentecost.

2 Corinthians

- **2 Corinthians is written after 1 Corinthians** This can be seen from the fact that there are themes that begin in 1 Corinthians and are carried on in 2 Corinthians. For example, there was the young man who was to be excluded from fellowship in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 5:11) but who had repented by 2 Corinthians (2 Cor 2:6-11) and was to be readmitted to the congregation.

- **Paul writes from Macedonia** *“Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor 8:1 - see also 2 Cor 2:12,13; 7:4-6; 9:2-4)* After 1 Corinthians was written Paul visited Macedonia twice before being imprisoned, once immediately and once on the return from Corinth.
- **Paul is ready to Visit Corinth** and he is ready to visit Corinth again *“This is the third time I am coming to you.” (2 Cor 13:1a)*. Paul visited Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey and again after he left Ephesus on his Third Missionary Journey. This indicates a third visit after leaving Corinth and passing through Macedonia in 56AD. At some point he must have doubled back briefly to visit Corinth, and 2 Corinthians was written shortly before this visit.

This map shows the journey - one can see where each of the epistles must have been written, 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, shortly before Paul left in 55AD, Romans from Corinth in the early spring of 56AD and 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in the summer of 56.



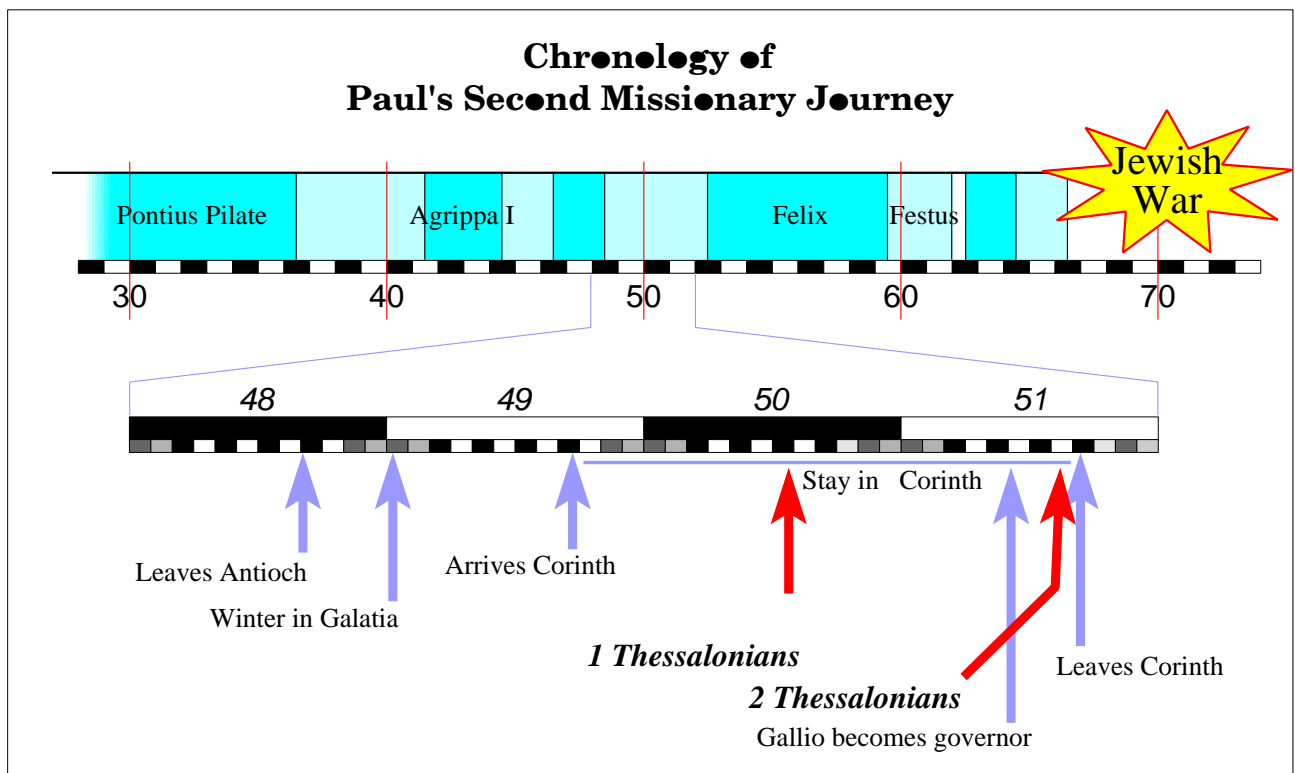
Actually, there is another possible solution to the dating problem, that Paul had already made a visit to Corinth in 55AD so that the visit in Acts is 20:2,3 is, in fact, the third visit described in 2 Corinthians. However, as Paul had a thorough progress through Macedonia and visited Illyricum in this year it is difficult to see how he would have found the time to go to Corinth, while in 56AD he has a remarkably short journey from Corinth to Philippi; the slow progress on this journey would fit in well with a need to go back and visit Corinth again.

The remaining journeys period epistles are the two Thessalonian letters.

Thessalonians

- Paul is with Silas and Timothy** The first point here comes from the opening words of both letters: *1 Thess 1:1a* “*Paul, Silvanus and Timothy...*” (also *2 Thess 1:1a*). Timothy and Silas were with Paul on his second missionary journey but Silas was with him at no other time.
- 1 Thessalonians was written first.** This letter spends a large proportion of its subject matter explaining about the return of Jesus, which it describes in basic terms, emphasising the urgency of Jesus’ coming. 2 Thessalonians addresses the problems of those who not only believe that Jesus will return, but have gone overboard and taken the teaching much too far. This would only fit if 2 Thessalonians was written after 1 Thessalonians.
- The Letters are Spaced in Time** Not only that but there must have been a reasonable gap between the two letters, long enough for the first epistle to have been carried to Thessalonika, for it to have affected the beliefs and behaviour of the brethren in Thessalonica, and for a message to have been sent back to Paul.
- There was an Ecclesia in Corinth** *1 Thess 1:7,8* “*so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything.*” Here Paul writes of believers in Macedonia and **Achaia**. This means that there was an ecclesia in Corinth.
- Paul had been in Corinth for some time** *Acts 18:5* “*But when Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul began devoting himself completely to the word, solemnly testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.*” Paul did not start to proclaim Jesus in Corinth immediately on his arrival there; instead he waited some time for Timothy and Silas to join him first.

Thus 1 Thess can’t have been written until the middle of Paul’s stay in Corinth, which is the late summer of 50AD and 2 Thessalonians was probably written towards the end of his stay there, in the late summer of 51 AD. This gives a long enough gap between the two epistles.



2. Paul after Acts

In the previous address we looked at the chronology of Acts from the resurrection to the imprisonment of the Apostle Paul in Rome, and dated the epistles written in that period from Galatians to 2 Corinthians. In this paper I shall go on to look at the Captivity Epistles, the Pastorals and at the Epistles of Peter.

To recap, we placed the resurrection in 30AD and the conversion of the Apostle Paul in 33 AD. The journeys of Paul start with the famine relief visit to Judea and Jerusalem in 46 AD and the First Missionary Journey in 47. The missionary journeys continue until Paul is arrested in Jerusalem in 57AD. He spends two years in captivity in Caesarea under the governor Felix and is then sent by sea to Rome, where he arrives in the early spring of 60AD. The Acts account ends abruptly at this point and we concluded that this is the date at which Acts was completed and published. What happened to Paul afterwards has to be deduced from his epistles.

As we are to deal with the period after the end of Acts, it is important to consider the two events that mark the end of the Apostolic Age.

The first of these is the Jewish War of 66-73AD, which reached a climax in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD and with it the Temple. By any standard this was a major event. It brought an end to the Jewish world of Judea and Galilee which is described in the Gospels. It appears in much of the literature of the time. No fewer than three Roman Emperors issued coins with the words “*Judea Capta*” on the reverse. However, the events of 70AD appear in the New Testament only as predictions of the future, and we can therefore conclude that the New Testament was practically complete before then.

The other major event which marks the end of the New Testament period is the Fire of Rome which occurred in 64AD. This changed the status of the Ecclesia throughout the Roman world because it led to the persecution of Christians. It is sometimes assumed that Nero’s persecution was restricted to the city of Rome, and that it was merely a punishment for assumed incendiarism. In fact the accusation made by the emperor was a charge of “*odium humanae generis*” “hatred of the human race”, which was not restricted to Rome. From this time Christianity became a “*religio illicita*”, a forbidden religion, and was thus under threat throughout the empire. True, many governors, and even emperors, were lax in persecuting Christianity, but Christians could no longer look to the law for protection in the way that the Apostle Paul so often had. Writings from the Didache to the Epistles of Ignatius and the second century church fathers like Irenaeus of Lyons all reflect this lack of protection and sporadic persecution. However, there is very little mention of these persecutions in the New Testament, which suggests that the New Testament was complete before the persecution started.

Acts reaches an end with Paul in captivity in Rome in 62AD. In order to date the epistles from the captivity period we need to know whether Paul was released, and if so when he was released.

There are three events from the Pauline epistles which indicate that Paul was released from his captivity in Rome.

- *Phm* :22 “*At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.*” Clearly Paul expected to be released soon, as he asks Philemon to get a room ready for him. This is an urgent request when compared to other hopes of making visits, eg. “*I trust that I myself shall also come shortly.*” (*Phil* 2:24)

- *Titus 3:12* “... *make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.*” This passage has Titus in Crete while Paul is wintering at Neapolis, a city on the Adriatic coast of Greece. We know where Paul spent the winter every year from 46 to 61AD. Nicopolis doesn’t feature in this list of winter quarters, which means that Paul must have been there after the completion of Acts.
- *2 Tim 4:20* “*Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus.*” Paul did visit Miletus in Acts 20, on his return from his third Missionary Journey. However, on that occasion Trophimus was not left behind, as one can see from Acts 21:29 “*For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.*” This means that 2 Timothy was written on a journey outside the journeys of Acts.

Taken together these are fairly comprehensive proof that Paul was released after his Acts captivity and that he then went back to the Aegean for another journey. The extent of this journey can be seen from references in the Pastoral and Captivity Epistles.

I have found ten references for Paul’s last journey.

- ❖ *Phil 2:24* Paul plans to visit Philippi
- ❖ *1 Tim 1:3* Paul leaves Timothy in Ephesus
- ❖ *1 Tim 1:3* Paul goes into Macedonia
- ❖ *1 Tim 3:14,15; 4:13* Paul plans to revisit Ephesus
- ❖ *2 Tim 4:13* Paul leaves books and cloak in Troas
- ❖ *2 Tim 4:20* Paul leaves Trophimus sick in Miletus
- ❖ *2 Tim 4:20* Erastus stays in Corinth.
- ❖ *Titus 1:5* Paul leaves Titus in Crete
- ❖ *Titus 3:12* Paul plans to winter in Nicopolis
- ❖ *Phm :22* Paul plans to visit Colosse immediately

Of these, one, the proposed visit to Philippi, is questionable; Paul proposed to go there but made no definite arrangements and may have changed his plans. The rest of the references are either arrangements to meet someone at a specific place or descriptions of past events.

These references can be put together on a map which shows the places visited by Paul on his last journey.

Paul's Last Journey, the Pastoral Epistles and Hebrews



When you look at the references to Paul's last journey, one thing is immediately obvious. All the references are to places in the Aegean area. I can't find enough information to produce a definitive route, but it is possible to suggest a tentative order for the journey.

Paul seems to have started by going to Colosse. From there he went into Macedonia, probably calling at Philippi. At some point he left Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete, but it is not clear whether these were before he arrived in Colosse or after he left it. I would guess that the visit to Crete was made on the way to the Aegean; it would be rather a detour on the leg of the journey from Colosse to Macedonia. Ephesus could have been visited briefly on either the way to Colosse or on the way from Colosse.

From Macedonia Paul made his way to Nicopolis. *Titus 3:12* “*When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.*” This reference is especially important as it establishes where Paul spent the winter, and winters are very important in putting together a chronology.

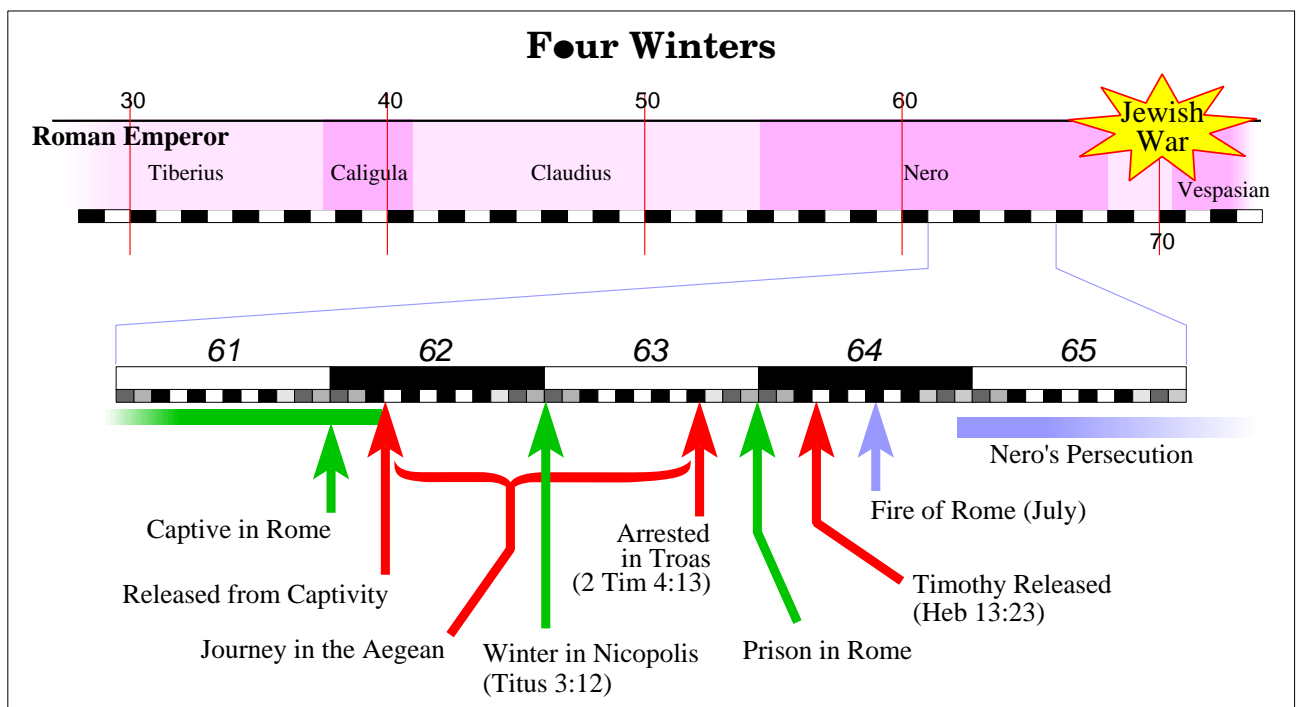
The end of the journey comes in a reference in 2 Timothy. *2 Tim 4:9* “*Make every effort to come to me soon;*” The letter calls for Timothy to leave Ephesus and come to visit Paul, who is back in prison (*2 Tim 1:8* “*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner...*”). Paul has clearly left Troas precipitately - *2 Tim 4:13* “*When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments.*” Given the fact that Paul was an almost constant traveller, these probably formed a large part of his entire personal possessions. He would only leave them behind in extremis - after all he was a seasoned and resourceful traveller. The obvious reason is that he was arrested at Troas and therefore had no opportunity to pack his cloak or his books.

The timing of the letter is further down the chapter: *v21a* “*Make every effort to come before winter...*” The letter is written as winter approaches. Paul expects to spend the winter in prison.

There is a sequel to this in Hebrews. It is not certain who wrote Hebrews, but it is clear that whoever did write it was close to the Apostle Paul. *Heb 13:23* “*Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you.*” It seems that Timothy did collect the cloak and the books and took them to Paul and that he was then arrested for his trouble as the known associate of a criminal. The location of Paul’s imprisonment is given in *v24* “*...Those from Italy greet you.*” Paul is in Italy, which would almost certainly mean Rome.

This gives us a convenient chronological handle for the epistle. The fact that Timothy was released shows that the persecution of Nero had not yet started; indeed it can’t even have been in preparation or Timothy would never have been released alive.

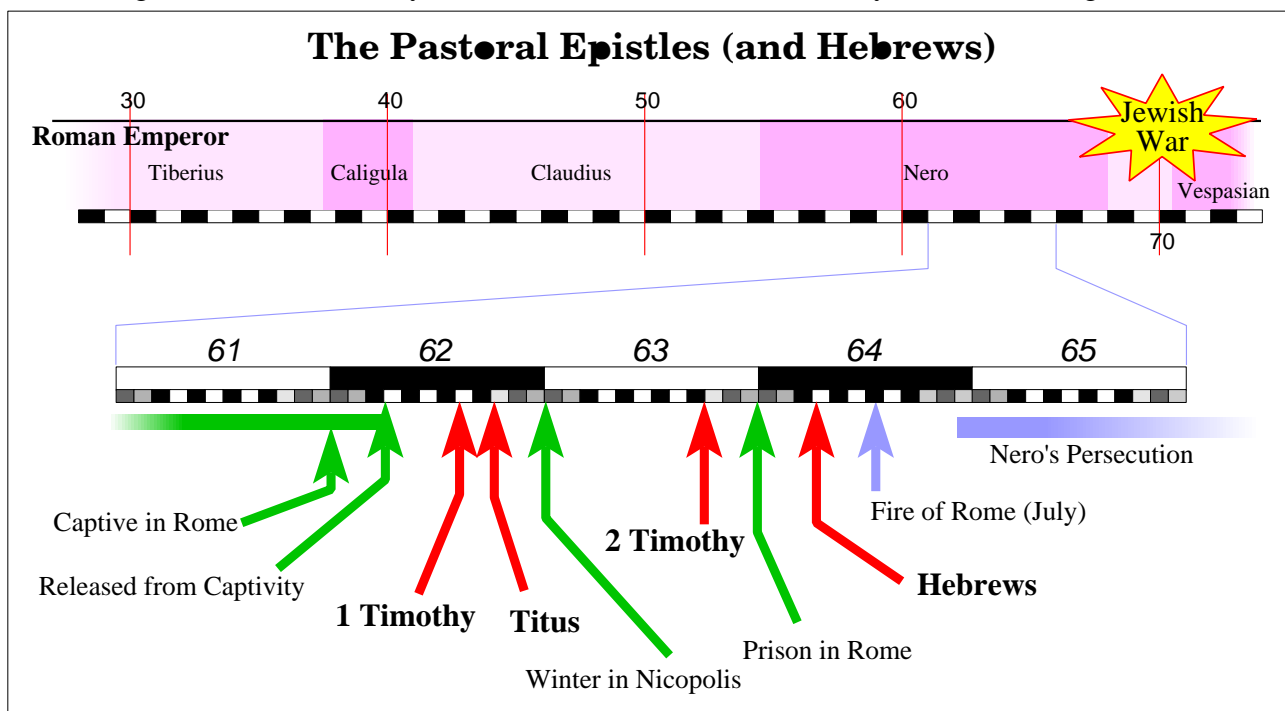
This tells us that there are three winters to consider: the winters of 61/62 AD, 62/63 and 63/64.



In 61/62 AD Paul was captive in Rome in his own hired house, according to Acts. There are two winters left. In one, Paul was in Nicopolis, as we read in Titus, and in the other he was in prison in Rome and expecting death. We can thus assign the winter in Nicopolis to 62/63 and the final Roman imprisonment to 63/64. This means that Titus was written in the autumn of 62AD and 2 Timothy in the autumn of 63AD. Hebrews would be written early in 64AD as travel became possible again.

1 Timothy fits into this framework quite easily. There are many correspondences between 1 Timothy and Titus, similarities of phrase and of subject matter which suggest that the two were written at about the same time. *1 Tim 1:3* “As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines,” 1 Timothy was written when Paul was in Macedonia and Timothy was in Ephesus. There is no such time in Acts. All this suggests that 1 Timothy was written from Macedonia in the summer of 62AD as Paul headed to Nicopolis for the winter. It was probably written slightly before Titus as Titus contains a definite reference of where Paul is to winter.

Note that Paul must have been released quite early in 62AD for him to be able to undertake the full journey that we can see he made on his release. Some commentators have suggested that he was released when the charges lapsed, no-one having come to Rome to accuse him. In this case he would be discharged on the anniversary of his arrival, which would be early in the travelling season.



The Captivity Epistles

Having decided the timing of the end of Paul’s captivity in Rome it is feasible to place the Captivity Epistles in the chronology. These epistles fall naturally into two groups. The first of these is Philippians, which seems to have been written independently of the others, while Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon form an inter-related group together.

Philippians

There is no doubt that Philippians was written while Paul was in prison, and there is evidence to show that he was in prison in Rome and not in Caesarea at the time of writing.

Phil 4:22 “*All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household.*” This verse tells us that Paul was in Rome, because there was no access to Caesar’s household in Caesarea. Not only that, but Paul has been in Rome for some time, long enough for some people in Caesar’s household to have learned the Gospel and been baptised.

Phil 1:12,13 “*Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else,*” This passage refers to Paul’s chains, which confirms that he is in captivity. However, it also tells us that Paul has been in Rome for a considerable time, long enough for it to have become apparent that his misfortunes have “*turned out to the furtherance of the Gospel.*” and for the whole of the Praetorian Guard to have become aware of Paul’s bonds, as he puts it.

The affair of Epaphroditus also shows that Paul had been a long time in Rome. *Phil 2:25-27*:

25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;
26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.
27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow.

This requires enough time to have passed for the news of Paul’s arrival in Rome to have reached Philippi, for Epaphroditus to have been sent, for him to have fallen seriously ill and recovered, for the news of his illness to have reached Philippi, for them to have sent an enquiry about his health to Rome and for this to have been delivered, all in days when the official postal service was restricted to official mail.

Finally, Paul expects to be released, although not immediately. *Phil 2:24* “*and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly.*”

All this points to a date in early 62 or, more likely, in late 61 heading towards the end of Paul’s Roman captivity but not right at the end of it.

Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon

The remaining Captivity Epistles (Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon) were sent together as a group. Let’s look at the evidence for this:-

Eph 6:21,22a “*But that you also may know about my circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make everything known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose...*” Tychicus is going with the epistle to Ephesus.

Col 4:7 “*As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.*”. Again, the letter is going with Tychicus.

If you now read on down the page in Colossians, you will find a list of Paul’s companions: *v9* Onesimus, who is going with the letter, *v10* Aristarchus and Mark, *v11* Jesus Justus, *v12* Epaphras, *v14* Luke and Demas. In Philemon we have exactly the same people - *Phm :23,24* “*Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers.*”. Not only that, but Philemon is about Onesimus (*v10*) whom Paul has sent back (*v12*) and who is therefore also travelling with the letter. Ephesians and Colossians also share a large numbers of coincidences of phrase and thought which suggest that they were written together.

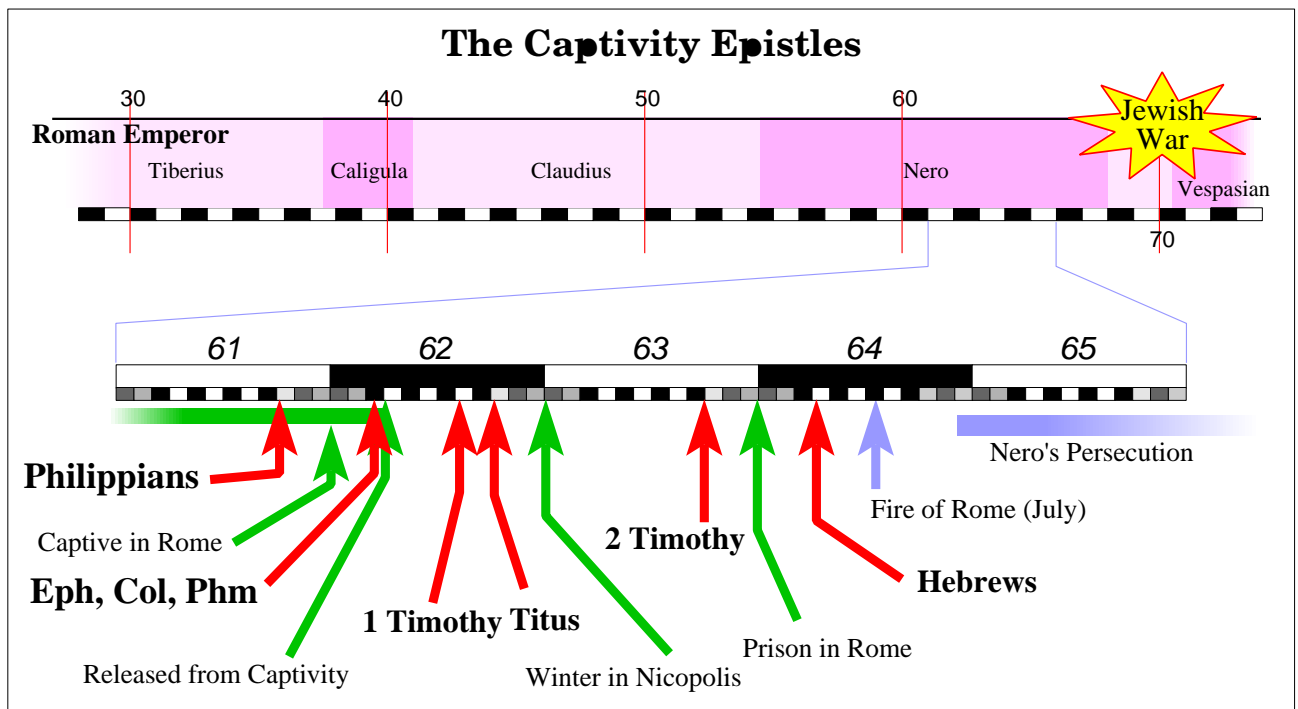
Having established that these three letters should be taken as a group it is relatively simple to set a date for them.

Eph 3:1 “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—” Paul is in captivity. There is little more information about this in Ephesians, but we can add to our knowledge of the situation from Colossians. Col 4:10

“Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas’ cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);”

Here we find that Aristarchus was with Paul. Paul doesn’t seem to have been captive with Aristarchus in Caesarea, but both of them were sent to Rome on the same ship (*Acts 27:2*). This would indicate that the group of letters was written while Paul was in the Roman stage of his captivity. Finally *Phm :22* “At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.” Paul clearly expects to be released very soon. This would place Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon in 62AD, right at the end of Paul’s captivity in Rome.

Person	Ephesians	Colossians	Philemon
Tychicus	6:21,22	4:7	
Onesimus		4:9	:10,12
Aristarchus		4:10	:24
Mark		4:10	:24
Jesus Justus		4:11	
Epaphras		1:7; 4:12	:23
Luke		4:14	:24
Demas		4:14	:24



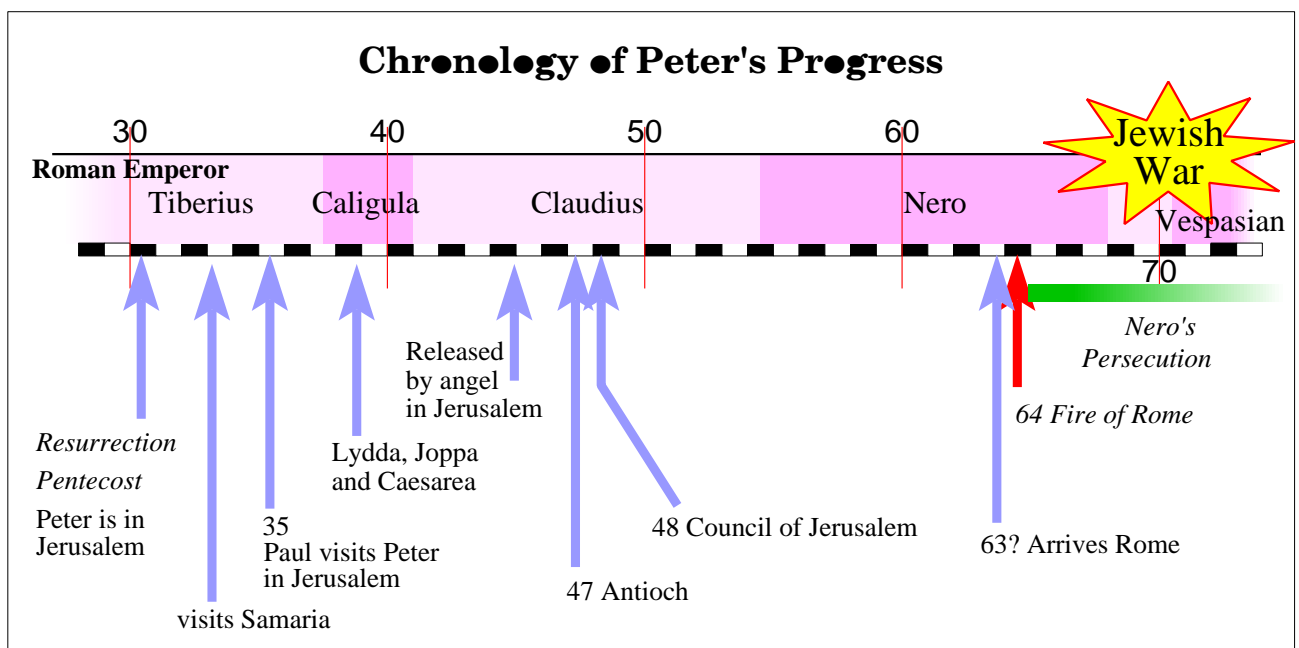
3. The Petrine Epistles and Jude

Having found the dates of all the Pauline and Pauline related books, we can now go on to take a look at the Petrine Epistles. It is a much more difficult proposition to date Peter's movements after the middle of Acts because Peter didn't have a chronicler for the last part of his life in the way that Luke chronicled Paul's travels. However, there are some elements of Peter's life that we can place.

The most clearly dated events of Peter's career are that he was in Jerusalem at the ascension, and then at Pentecost. When Paul visited Jerusalem three years after his conversation, Peter was there. Galatians mentions that Peter was in Antioch at the end of Paul's first missionary journey 47AD and he went to the Council of Jerusalem in 48AD. His visits to Samaria, Joppa and Caesarea are undated, as is his release from prison in Jerusalem by an angel.

All of these events are in the first half of Acts. It is likely that, having escaped from prison there, Peter would stay away from Jerusalem for the most part. This is presumably why Paul found him in Antioch; he would be taking a risk by returning to Jerusalem for the council there. After the council of Jerusalem we know almost nothing. Some of the church fathers, Ignatius of Smyrna (c100 AD) and Irenaeus of Lyons (c200 AD) place his death in Rome; later tradition indicates that he was crucified there during the persecutions of Nero.

There is one reference in the letters which has a bearing on this. *1 Pet 5:13* "*She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.*" This verse refers to "She who is in Babylon". This could well be an elliptical reference to the ecclesia in Rome, Rome having taken on the spiritual condition of Babylon, as in the Revelation. All this, and the content of 1 Peter itself all point to a origin from Rome. As we know quite a good deal about the ecclesia in Rome, this is a great help in dating the Petrine Epistles.



1 Peter

The first point in dating 1 Peter is that there is no reference in Acts to any visit of Peter to Rome. This would mean that Peter did not visit Rome until after Acts was published, so if 1 Peter was written from Rome, as seems likely, it must have been written after the spring of 62AD.

The second obvious point is the tremendous number of references to persecution in the epistle. For example, consider *1 Pet 4:12-19*:-

- 12 *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;*
 13 *but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*
 14 *If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.*
 15 *Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;*
 16 *but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.*
 17 *For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*
 18 *And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?*
 19 *Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.*

This is just one of the persecution passages. There are some others in the box alongside

Note that the persecution is a **future** threat rather than an existing condition. However, it is clear that anti-Christian sentiments are being expressed by those outside the ecclesia. This suggests a period when persecution was looming but had not yet begun, which would point to the period between the Fire of Rome and the start of Nero's persecution. The fire took place in July, 64AD, and there would then be a gap while rumours of Nero's involvement grew and Nero attempted to divert them onto the ecclesia. 1 Peter fits exactly into this situation. One can therefore conclude that 1 Peter was written in 64AD, after the fire of Rome and before the start of Nero's persecution.

2 Peter

2 Peter would be difficult to date were it not for the obvious dating of 1 Peter. The important verse here is 2 Pet 3:1 "*This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder;*" 2 Peter was written after 1 Peter, which means that it must have been written very close to the start of the persecution in which Peter almost certainly died. This would fit the general teaching of the letter, and especially of ch 3 where the picture of the world being destroyed by fire would resonate in a time when Rome had just been destroyed in that very way.

The date of 2 Peter is useful because it also fixes the date of Jude. The "*Angels that sinned*" passage of 2 Pet 2:4ff parallels the similar passage in Jude :5-11 in a way which indicates that 2 Peter and Jude must have been written at about the same time.

Other Points

There still remains the dating of the Johannine writings and of the Gospels, but we haven't really time to do them justice. The Gospel of John must have been completed before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD - "*There is in Jerusalem a pool which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda*" (Jn 5:2). This is written in the present tense (*there is*) but Jerusalem was destroyed in 70AD and everyone knew it. Luke must have been written before Acts was completed "*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus*" (Acts 1:1) and as Acts was completed in 62 AD, Luke must have been written either earlier in Rome, or even in Caesarea while Paul was in prison there and Luke had access to many eyewitnesses and Apostles. 2 Peter apparently quotes from Matthew (2 Pet 1:17 || Mt 17:5) which would give a date of before 64AD to Matthew. Unfortunately the text of the 2 Peter text is not quite certain; the UBS text differs significantly in this passage, so that although the English translation is the same, the Greek would not be a citation of Matthew. One cannot therefore, use this citation as rigorously as one would like.

Summary

The earliest books are Galatians and James in 48AD; this is working on the assumption that James was written by James the Brother of Jesus; I'm afraid that we haven't had time to discuss James in detail. The last epistles are 2 Peter and Jude, both in the Autumn of 64AD. More books are written towards the end of the New Testament period than at the beginning; virtually all of the non-Pauline epistles appear after the end of the Acts narrative, which puts them after 62AD. The Gospels start with Mark, written before 57AD and end with Matthew or John, probably written before 64AD and certainly before 70AD.

However, more important than the actual dates of the books is the way that they interrelate to one another and with Acts. By putting them all together we can derive much more accurate information of what is going on in them and hence produce better exhortation and teaching and a more thorough understanding of Scripture.

Book	Date	Book	Date
Galatians	48 Spring	Colossians	62 Spring
James	48 Summer	Philemon	62 Spring
1 Thessalonians	50 Summer	Acts	62 Spring
2 Thessalonians	51 Summer	1 Timothy	62 Autumn
1 Corinthians	55 Spring	Titus	62 Autumn
Romans	56 Spring	2 Timothy	63 Autumn
2 Corinthians	56 Summer	Hebrews	64 Spring
Luke	57-59-62?	John, & Johannine	64?
Philippians	61 Autumn	1 Peter	64 Autumn
Ephesians	62 Spring	2 Peter, Jude	64 Autumn