

What the Apostle Paul Wrote & When

by Jerry Lockhart

This is not terribly important. I believe it might be helpful, but then again, it might be confusing. Or you might disagree. You might have your own version of this and I would not in any way begrudge you your opinion. It's probably just as valid as this.

However, the Lord's word IS very important; it is over-the-top enlightening and clears the path of our spiritual vision . If you disagree with me on this I would dearly love to hear from you and have you give me the Scripture to show me where I'm not getting it right. So, with the plain understanding of a school child, no higher form of academia involved, let's think on these things of the Lord and, perhaps, why Paul wrote his thirteen books in this particular order.

With no particular adamancy, Bro. E.C. Moore, a great man of God who was the first true bible teacher from which I learned, taught that **1 & 2 Thessalonians** were most likely the first books Paul wrote. However, something which occurred in Acts leads me to believe the book of **Galatians** was the first. Here's the event:

In Acts 14:21, Paul and Barnabas returned through the Galatian cities back to Antioch from whence they started in Acts 13:13. In verse 26, Scripture says they fulfilled their work there.

The very next thing to occur, ch.15:1, had some people confusing the issue of what Paul and Barnabas had just finished preaching to them. These confusers were not "walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel," and were "to be blamed" for the confusion occurring in Galatia. When Paul wrote **Gal.**, he was settling this issue once for all and describes his trip to Jerusalem which we find in Acts 15. The heavy thing in Gal.2, of course, is that Paul is rebuking Peter, the leader of the Jews at Jerusalem (my reason for the quotation marks above--see Gal.2:11&14) Now these things alone would not automatically bring me to think Galatians was first, were it not for what and how Paul said the words of Gal.1:6-10. What really sticks out at me is the phrase, "so soon removed" in v.6.

If it is so soon after he preached his gospel to them, it obviously fits the problem issue of Acts 15:1 and the Lord's reason for sending Paul to Jerusalem in Acts 15, then it follows that when Paul, Barnabas with Silas and Judas went back to Antioch (Acts 15:34,35- Silas choosing to stay with Paul) they found out the Gal.1:6 problem was raging. So, upon deciding to go back to them to "see how they do," it seems fitting that Paul address their problem in writing them an epistle as well. I believe by Acts 16, Galatians was written.

Book 1==Galatians

In Acts 16 & 17, after the journeying took Paul to gather Timothy and Luke to travel with he and Silas and Titus, they continued into Europe; Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Achaia which is the city of Corinth(Acts 18). He stayed there at the Lord's

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beckoning for more than 18 months and taught “much people.” In **1Thessalonians 3**, Paul sent Timothy to them from Athens, then when Timothy returned to him (see Acts 18:5), he returned to Paul at Corinth and Paul wrote to them 1 Thess. (The Athens in Acts 17 was a relatively short visit--one long speech--and it's doubtful to me he would have written either Thessalonian letter from a place where so few seemed to believe.)

It also seems to me that we have no indication of much time passing between 1 & 2. There's no indication of Timothy going with Paul when he left Corinth(Acts 18:18) and no indication Timothy stayed in Corinth (seeing that Apollos was shown the “way of God more perfectly” by Aquila and Priscilla with no help from the others in Paul's entourage.) So it seems probable that he returned to Macedonia with the second letter to the Thessalonians.

BOOK 2 & 3==1,2 Thessalonians

Paul was in Corinth for about 18 months, give or take a few weeks, and then went to Ephesus for a brief visit, then to Jerusalem for an even briefer visit, then to Ephesus in Acts 19. He stayed there about 2 ½ years. Since he wrote things in 1 Corinthians which are indicative of what he had learned from the Lord (in Jerusalem's short visit), it is likely he wrote 1 Cor. From Ephesus in Acts 19.

BOOK 4==1 CORINTHIANS.

At the close of Acts 19, Paul was ushered out of town while an uproar of considerable magnitude raged around him. Many of his friends, fearing for his life urged him not to get into the fray. So, in Acts 20, he leaves and goes back to Macedonia and then to Greece where he stayed for 3 months. Then, traveling back through many of the places he had preached before, he winds up in Troas. I'm not sure how much time is involved here, but probably during the 3 months in Greece or along the journey is where Paul wrote the last two of the “Acts epistles.”

From personal study and from comparing little things (if there could be any little things in Scripture), it has become my personal belief that Paul wrote Romans *before* he wrote 2 Corinthians.

Consider the lack of references in 2 Corinthians to either Israel or the Old Testament Scriptures. Now, compare that to Romans: some 43 OT verses referenced; showing in Rom.3 how the Jews had the advantage because of the OT; dedicating 3 whole chapters (9-10-11) to a sort of melancholy dismissal of Israel's “last chance” before the Olive Tree applications would be finished.

Now, once again, consider how 2 Corinthians presses the point of ch.5:7; 5:14-16; the special “visit” to the 3rd heaven in ch.12. In fact, the only referencing concerning the Israel of the day was to indicate the reason for having gone to many places during this last tour before heading to Jerusalem with the gifts for the saints. He had foretold of this trip back North through Greece and Macedonia and over to Troas when he mentioned the gathering of goods in Romans 15.

It seems clear to me in many subtle ways that first he wrote Romans, entered into the trip, then wrote 2 Corinthians as he wound up in Troas.

BOOK 5==ROMANS BOOK 6==2 CORINTHIANS

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THE PRISON EPISTLES

From Acts 21 to the end of the book, we have no record of any letters or epistles being written by Paul. It is conceivable that he wrote many. In fact, almost inconceivable that he would not have. Even though he probably did, none of his writings during that time were preserved as Scripture. When we see him, we can ask him why. Sitting in jails and prisons may have been confining, but as a Roman citizen he had access to much and there's little doubt in my mind that he could have written or dictated during that time just as he did later from Rome. But, this era's writings are not Scripture.

It appears to me that the first letter written from "his own hired house"-Acts 28:30, probably would have been

Philippians

This little 4 chapter book covers his attitude about being in prison right at the start (ch. 1:12-26) which it seems to me would be an initial topic for preservation for all the church to know. Then, his emphasis on our "conversation (being) as becometh the gospel of Christ," followed by another great explanation of how our attitude should be-2:5-14. But, the greatest reason I believe this is the first "prison epistle" is that he was speaking to mostly Hebrews. Acts 16 bears this up without any mention of Gentiles amongst the believers, as set in contrast to the other places where it is shown Paul preached "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

And when you look at the order in which the prison epistles appear in your bible, this book sits between the two most pointedly Gentile books, Ephesians to the left; Colossians to the right.

The doctrine covered by Philippians shows what Paul did with Jewish things, "count them but dung, that I may win Christ."-3:8.

Lastly, in ch.4, he mentions a profound difference in the understanding and application of prayer for the Jewish believer (v.4-7) and implores them to follow him in both ch.3 & 4. In short, I believe Paul knew it was time to be certain Jewish saved people knew how things were NOW.

Next, I have come to believe that two of the last 7 books were written at the same time, **Colossians & Philemon**

When Colossians tells us who we are in Christ (1:21-27), it is with a clear picture that he did not know most of these people, having heard about them from Epaphras (1:7). He says he "heard of your faith" in 1:4, and he wanted "as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" to know something about their position and, therefore, about the need to not be carried away by philosophy, etc., in 2:1-9. This would be a primary doctrine for Gentiles not steeped in biblical tradition. He also mentions very clearly that Tychicus was delivering these words to them while including another man pertinent to my belief that Philemon was written at the same time: Onesimus was with Tychicus and he was the (apparent) runaway indentured person of which the book of Philemon was speaking. So, it appears Philemon is written, certainly to exhort Philemon to receive Onesimus as a brother, not just a servant, which Paul would have intended for all Jews to see this about all Gentiles from "now" on.

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It seems from what Paul wrote in the next two books that after he was in prison for the two years mentioned in Acts 28:30 he then was released by Caesar and while at liberty probably wrote **Titus & 1 Timothy**.

Sometimes I get a little wobbly about 1 Timothy being while he was out of prison, meaning that there's a chance he wrote it during that first 2 years imprisonment, primarily by the manner in which Paul "charged" Timothy with the full doctrine, as though he wasn't going to see him again--ch.1:18-20; 4:6-16(v.13 looks like he was going to see him again); 6:13-21. These all seem to sound as though he was in prison at the time. I think 1 Timothy is a toss up.

Titus on the other hand, looks for sure like it was when he was not in prison. He speaks immediately of leaving Titus some place a Gentile could plant roots and preach--the island of Crete. And, in ch.3:12, 13, Paul was in a place he expected to be for a while and looked forward to Titus visiting him. He apparently wasn't expecting to go back to prison right away.

Now comes where I probably disagree with most preachers except a few grace believers. I believe instead of this next book being the first Paul wrote from prison, I believe the last book written from prison to a group of people was **Ephesians**.

By comparing the full doctrine of grace and the full instruction to the Body of Christ about how to live, then taking note that Paul also did not know these people, but had just heard about their faith, adding that in 2Timothy 4:12, Paul mentions that he has sent "Tychicus to Ephesus", and that the book Ephesians explains how anyone, even "strangers from the covenants of promise" can be saved by grace through faith, leaves little doubt in my mind that this is the last doctrinal treatise to a local group.

For, if Paul had written Ephesians as one of the *first* prison epistles, why would he say in the *last* book he wrote that he had sent Tychicus there? In Eph.6:21, it is Tychicus who shall tell the Ephesians how things were going with Paul.

The book is so chock full of wondrous things to the world of Gentiles that it seems a perfect ending for the mysteries revealed. Chapter 3 alone ought to show anyone that he couldn't have said all that too much earlier, in my opinion.

So, that leaves **2 Timothy**

2 Timothy is no doubt the last book Paul wrote. There are several notable things, but the simplest and plainest is chapter 4. He charges Timothy; warns him of apostasy; then, calmly tells him the "time of my departure is at hand." He then declares he has finished what he set out to do in Acts 20:24....and he is finished. (I don't think the fact that he was looking for a good lawyer, 4:13, meant he thought he might be spared--but, it is nice to know there was a good lawyer around, though. Right!!)

With no particular pride in this, I submit it as my ideas and don't claim to be the paramount work on the subject.

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