

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism
Spring 2009
Handout #4d (April 23, 2009)
“Paul’s Gospel”

Timeline of the Jesus Movement

circa 28: Execution of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas
circa 30: Ministry and crucifixion of Jesus; Jesus’ followers remain in Jerusalem [awaiting his return?]
30s: Continued antagonism with the established Jewish leaders [according to Acts: they are actively persecuted by the Sanhedrin; Paul also describes himself as a former persecutor of the church]; apostles begin preaching in neighboring provinces (Galilee, Samaria, Syria, Decapolis)
circa 35: Paul’s vision of the Risen Jesus leads to his “conversion” in the city of Damascus
37: *Birth of Josephus*
40s: Paul preaches around the province of Syria; at some point, consults with the leaders of the Jesus Movement in Jerusalem [Paul refers to the three “pillars”: James, the Lord’s Brother; Cephas (=Peter); and John]
48 [?]: “Council of Jerusalem” meets to discuss the status of Gentile believers [according to Acts]
50-55: Paul preaches to Gentiles in Asia Minor and Greece (with some trips to Jerusalem)
58: Paul arrested in Jerusalem and sent to Rome for trial
64 [?]: Paul dies in Rome [possibly executed] [according to later tradition, Peter is also executed in Rome]
mid-to-late 60s: Leaders of the movement in Jerusalem also die (or are executed) around the time of the First Jewish War [66-73 CE]
60s-100s: Written accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus are circulated (*gospels*)
circa 100: Collections of Paul’s letters begin to circulate (referred to as *Scripture* in a mid-second-century Christian letter)

Terms related to the early Christian mission

mission/missionary: *mission* in religious studies refers to an organized effort to seek out new members of a religious movement; a *missionary* is someone who participates in this organized activity

apostle: Greek, “one sent out, ambassador, messenger”: the followers of Jesus empowered to act as missionaries

kerygma: Greek, “preaching”; used to refer to the coherent message of Jesus as preached by his followers

god-fearers: a debated category of “affiliates” of ancient Jewish communities (mainly in the diaspora) in the late Second Temple period; Gentiles who attended ritual functions with Jews, but did not become full members of the covenant community

ekklesia: Greek, “assembly”; later, “church”: used to refer to the communities of followers of Jesus in various cities

gospel (evangelion): (1) the message of Jesus as preached by his followers; (2) a written account of the life, sayings, and/or deeds of Jesus

righteousness/justification: “right-standing,” a correct relationship between a human being and God

The Letters of Paul

(in roughly chronological order; all dates are estimates)

50: **1 Thessalonians**

Paul answers questions about the “end-time”; particularly what will happen to believers who have already died; describes the end; enjoins ethical rigors on the Thessalonians; praises their suffering

51/51: **Galatians**

Paul decries a rival group of apostles who demand that gentile believers must be circumcised and follow the *Torah*, and proclaims that Christ must be sufficient for gentile salvation (Paul’s angriest letter)

52: **1 Corinthians**

Paul attempts to clarify his position on gentile renunciation of their “pagan” values, including eating meat of sacrifice and various sexual behaviors (both lax and strict); tries to heal a rift in the community between two factions of believers

54: **Philippians**

While warning the Philippians against false apostles who preach “circumcision and the Law,” Paul also writes about the “emptying out” (*kenosis*) of Christ in human form, and the saving effects of Christ’s death

54: **Philemon**

Paul writes to a believer on behalf of a runaway slave (also a believer), and emphasizes his own authority and the communion of believers

54/55: **2 Corinthians**

Paul follows up on his tumultuous earlier correspondence with the Corinthians, once again defending his own gospel and his own apostleship; contains a request for support for the Jerusalem believers

56: **Romans**

The only letter (probably) written to a community Paul had never visited: in preparation for a trip westward, Paul writes to the Roman believers about the effective salvation through Christ, the faith of gentile believers, and the relation of God’s gifts and the *Torah* (or “law” more generally)

(In the New Testament, seven other letters are ascribed to Paul:

Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians [authorship disputed];

1-2 Timothy, Titus [authorship highly doubtful];

and Hebrews [authorship dismissed];

in addition, Paul doubtless wrote other letters that have not survived)