

# Recent Debate Concerning The Chronology Of The New Testament

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Chronology (that is, the determination of the order and the dates of past events) is obviously very important to a historian, because this information is vital to understanding the significance and interrelationship of past events. Since the Bible is real history, an understanding of the relative and absolute chronology of biblical events is important to students of the New Testament.

A chronology which tries to place events into their proper order is called a *relative chronology*. A chronology which assigns specific calendar dates to past events is called an *absolute chronology*.

The writers of the New Testament do not provide us with either type of a chronology for New Testament events. In fact, the New Testament does not provide an absolute date in terms of a calendar era for a single one of the events which it reports. It does, however provide us with three types of information which enable us to construct a tentative chronology of the New Testament.

*Synchronisms* are references which date one event in terms of another event. An example of a biblical synchronism is Luke 3.1, which tells us that John the Baptist began his ministry during the fifteenth year of the emperor Tiberius. If we can determine the date of the fifteenth year of Tiberius from non-biblical sources, we will also be able to date the beginning of John's ministry and to assign an approximate date to the beginning of Jesus' ministry since it apparently began shortly after John's.

*Elapsed time references* are comments which specify the interval between two events. Examples of elapsed time references in the New Testament are Galatians 1:18 and 2:1. These passages tell us that Paul visited Jerusalem three years after his conversion and that he made a second visit after-fourteen years had passed. If we can date any one of these three events, we will be able to date the other two.

The New Testament accounts enable us to determine the *relative order* of many events in the lives of Jesus and the apostles. If we can determine the dates of a number of the events in these chains of events through the use of synchronisms and elapsed timed references, we will be able to assign at least approximate dates to the intervening events. However, we must be very cautious in doing this, since New Testament narratives may sometimes follow a topical, rather than a chronological order.

Although scholars can construct a chronology of the New Testament by using the synchronisms and elapsed time references which the New Testament provides, this chronology remains inexact and is subject to error. There are two main reasons for this inability to provide an exact chronology for the New Testament. First, the New Testament does not provide enough synchronisms and elapsed time references to provide firm dates for all New Testament events. For example, if a chronologist has absolute dates for two events of Paul's life which happened ten years apart and he knows of five other events of Paul's life which occurred sometime between those two datable events, he can estimate dates for the other five events, but he cannot give exact dates for them. Secondly, many of the New Testament synchronisms are only approximate. For example, the New Testament tells us that Jesus died during the governorship of

Pilate but it does not tell us in which year of Pilate's term. Therefore, if we know the years in which Pilate was governor, we can estimate the year of Christ's death, but we cannot determine it with certainty on the basis of this synchronism alone.

It is important for students of the New Testament to understand how New Testament chronologies are made, so that they are aware of the degree of uncertainty in every New Testament chronology. It is important to realize that every New Testament chronology, including the one in this article, is approximate and that it is possible to disagree on the details of the chronology. This explains why different commentaries and bible study helps disagree in their dating of New Testament events.

This does not mean that chronologies are of no value to students and teachers of the New Testament. These chronologies are good approximations, which enable us to place the events of the New Testament into their historical setting with a margin of error that normally does not amount to more than two or three years. This is close enough to allow us to understand the relationship between New Testament events and their historical surroundings. Although there is uncertainty about some of the details, the basic order of New Testament events is clear.

In this article we will reexamine the chronology of Christ's life with special attention to the year of his birth, the dating of his ministry and the date of his death. We will also reexamine the chronology of the life of Paul. The impetus for this article was provided by the recent publication of Chronos, Kairos, Christos. (CKC), a festschrift honoring chronologist Jack Finegan on his eightieth birthday. This volume provides a fine survey of recent debate about the disputed points of New Testament chronology. This article compares the chronological theories advocated in that festschrift with the New Testament chronology which I prepared as an appendix to the New Testament volumes of Werner Franzmann's Bible History Commentary. Do the viewpoints advocated in the Finegan festschrift provide convincing new evidence that compel revisions in the chronology supplied in Bible History Commentary?

#### **Christ's Birth 7-4 B.C.**

Since our calendar is supposed to be dated in years from Christ's birth, we would expect that his birth would have occurred in December of 1 B.C. (Since numbering changes at the beginning of each year, 1 A.D. would be the first full year of his life. There is no year zero between B.C and A.D.) It therefore comes as a surprise the first time one hears that most historians place Christ's birth in approximately 6 B.C. What accounts for this strange discrepancy? Our system of A.D. dating was developed by a monk named Dionysius Exiguus in about 525 A.D. Before his time events were usually dated by the years of Roman rulers or from the founding of Rome. It is now believed that Dionysius made an error in his calculations and that Christ was born several years earlier than Dionysius had supposed.

A major reason for this belief is a reference by the Jewish historian Josephus to an eclipse of the moon which occurred shortly before the death of Herod the Great. (Antiq. xvii, 6, 4.,167) Astronomers have calculated that this eclipse occurred on March 12/13, 4 B.C. Since Christ was born before Herod's death, his birth must have occurred earlier than 4 B.C. Herod's command to kill all the babies in Bethlehem under two years of age, which he based on his questioning of the wise men concerning the appearance of the star, suggests that Christ's birth occurred in about 6 B.C. A few scholars, such as Ernest Martin and W.E. Filmer, have recently challenged the accepted interpretation of Josephus' eclipse and returned to the traditional date of Christ's birth, 1 or 2 B.C.

The testimony of the church fathers is inconclusive for resolving this dispute. The statement of Tertullian (160-220 A.D.) placing Christ's birth in the governorship of Saturninus

(9-6 B.C.) is the only support for the very early date for Christ's birth. (IV, 19) Most of the church fathers place Christ's birth in 3 or 2 B.C. Clement of Alexandria (153-217 A.D.) and other church fathers place it in the 28<sup>th</sup> year after Caesar Augustus captured Egypt after the battle of Actium in 31 B.C. or in the 41<sup>st</sup> or 42<sup>nd</sup> year after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. (Bk 1,21) Although some claim that Clement dated Augustus' reign from 34 B.C., this belief does not appear to be well founded. Other authors supporting 3 or 2 B.C. are Cassiodorus Senator, Tertullian (second opinion), Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Eusebius, and Epiphanius. Ireneus dates the birth to 4/3 B.C. A second citation of Hippolytus of Thebes dated the birth to 2/1 B.C. The only support for Dionysius Exiguus' date is the anonymous "Chronographer of the year 354." Thus we see that testimony of the church fathers places the birth of Christ earlier than the traditional date, but later than the date determined by astronomical calculation.

Unfortunately, Luke's well-known reference to the census of Quirinius provides no help in solving the problem, since we have no non-biblical information about a census and governorship of Quirinius before 6 A.D. Apparently Luke is referring to an earlier census made during a mission of Quirinius to the East. Tertullian's claim (Against Marcion 4:7) that the census took place under Saturninus (9-6 B.C.) combined with Justin Martyr's claim (Apology 1:34) that Quirinius was not a governor, but only a procurator (i.e. an assistant to Saturninus) may form the basis to a solution of this problem. Consult commentaries on Luke for a more detailed discussion of this chronological problem.

At present the dispute can be resolved only on the basis of the astronomical evidence and the chronology of the Herodian dynasty. Ernest Martin provides plausible evidence that the lunar eclipse of January 10, 1 B.C. would serve just as well as the eclipse connected with Herod's death (CKC, p 87-92). However, the chronologies of Herod's heirs which are derived from written records agree that they all began their reigns in 4 B.C. Martin can only suggest that Herod's sons ruled as coregents with their father before his death, but this does not seem likely in view of Herod's extreme possessiveness of his power.

All attempts to identify the star of Bethlehem are too uncertain to provide decisive help in dating Christ's birth. In recent years most efforts to identify the Christmas star have focused on a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Saturn in 7/6 B.C. Konradin Ferrari-D'Occieppo has recently reargued the case for this position (CKC, p. 41-53). The virtue of a planetary conjunction as the star of Bethlehem is that such an event would be significant to astronomer/astrologers, but it would not be an unforeseen event, spectacular to ordinary people. Ferrari-D'Occieppo argues that some of the terms in Matthew's account can properly be explained as technical terms for planetary movement. The magi did not see the star "in the east," but "in its rising," i.e., its reappearance in the evening sky after a period of absence. It "stood over the house" does not refer to a sudden stop of a rapidly moving star which had led the magi like a lantern, but to the second stationary point which is one phase in the movement of planets. Although the planetary conjunction theory has some appealing features, there are enough unresolved questions to warn-us against becoming too attached to it.

The star of Bethlehem has frequently been identified with a comet. Halley's comet made an appearance in 12 B.C., the year in which Jerry Vardaman places Christ's birth in his drastically revised chronology of Christ's life (CKC, p.55-82). According to this chronology Jesus was born in 12 B.C., conducted his ministry from 15-21 B.C., and died in 21 B.C. This chronology requires too many speculative changes (the emendation of Luke's reference to the

15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius, the redating of Pilate's administration, etc) to be persuasive to this reviewer.

Although Martin's reassessment of the date of Herod's death has some appealing features and produces a date more in conformity with tradition, it seems to falter in its attempts to account for the chronologies of Herod's heirs. Therefore, unless new evidence is forthcoming, it seems best to remain with the current consensus that Jesus was born between 7 and 5 B.C.

### **Jesus' Ministry 26-30 A.D.**

Christ's death has been dated as early as 21 A.D and as late as 36 A.D. However, it seems that the plausible dates fall between 30 and 33 A.D. A strong case may be made for either an early (26-30 A.D.) or a late (29-33 A.D.) dating of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus' death occurred during the governorship of Pontius Pilate. Therefore, the generally accepted dates of Pilate's governorship (46-36 A.D.) set the outer limits for the date of Jesus' death. Some of these dates are allegedly eliminated by astronomical calculations.

Jesus died at the Passover, which is celebrated on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan in the Jewish calendar. Astronomers have calculated that the 14<sup>th</sup> fell on a Wednesday/Thursday in 27 and perhaps in 34 A.D. A Wednesday/Thursday date for the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan seems to agree best with the statement of the synoptic gospels that Jesus ate a passover meal before his death. However, 27 is too early and 34 appears to be too late for Jesus' death.

According to astronomical calculations the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan fell on a Thursday/Friday in both 30 A.D. and 33 A.D. According to some interpreters John's gospel says that the Jewish leaders considered the Friday on which Jesus died to be the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, the day the passover lamb was killed (Jn 18:28 and perhaps 19:31). Some scholars suggest that Jesus and his disciples had eaten the Passover a day earlier than the priests because the Galileans reckoned the day by a different method than the Judeans. However, these interpreters may have created a problem where none exists. The desire of the Jewish leaders to "eat the Passover" on Good Friday may refer to the whole seven day feast of unleavened bread as it does in Dt 16:2-3 and 2 Ch 30: 22.

The claim that the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan fell on Friday, not Thursday, in 30 and 33 is based on mathematical *calculations* of lunar phases, but the months of the Jewish calendar were based on subjective *observation* of the lunar phases, which could be affected by weather conditions and other phenomena. The months of the calendar were therefore irregular and unpredictable. A further complicating factor is the periodic addition of a 13<sup>th</sup> "leap month" to the lunar year, which was necessary to keep the seasons in line. This intercalation was irregular and was based on observation of several agricultural criteria. It is not at all certain that the Passover in Jesus' time had to fall after the spring equinox as it does today. These variables make possible many more viable dates for ancient Passovers than astronomers have usually calculated. (CKC, p. 185-205) It is, therefore, possible that Jesus died in either 30 or 33 (or some date in between), but that the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan fell on Wednesday/Thursday in those years as the Synoptics clearly say and not on Thursday/Friday as some astronomers have calculated. Thus, astronomical calculation cannot determine the date for Jesus' death with any certainty.

A key to deciding between the early and late dating of Jesus' ministry is the interpretation of the statement in Luke 3:1 that John the Baptist's ministry began in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius. Since Tiberius became sole emperor after Augustus' death in 14 A.D, the most natural date for the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius would place Jesus' baptism and the start of his ministry in about 29 A.D. and his death in 33. However, Luke may be dating Tiberius' reign from the time Tiberius became co-ruler with Augustus in 11 or 12 A.D. This would place John's ministry and the beginning of Jesus' ministry in 25/26 A.D. This latter method was not the normal Roman

way of counting emperors' reigns, but the early dating of Christ's ministry appears to fit best with all the other requirements of New Testament chronology.

A secondary argument for the late date is that Pilate's fear of the Jews is more plausible after the execution of Tiberius' anti-semitic advisor Sejanus in 31 A.D., but the factors that led Pilate to fear the Jews may have been operating already before Sejanus' death.

Although a strong argument can be made for the late dating of Jesus' ministry and it is defended by such capable advocates as Harold Hoehner and Paul Maier, I accept the early dating for the following reasons. 1) The early dating fits best with the chronology of Paul's ministry which is discussed later in this study. 2) If Jesus was born in 6 B.C., the statement of Luke 3:23 that Jesus was about 30 when he began his ministry fits best with the early dating. 3) Since Herod began the rebuilding of the temple in about 20 B.C., the statement of John 2:20 that early in Jesus' ministry the rebuilding of the temple had already been going on for 46 years fits best with the early dating. 4) This view receives incidental support from the statement of Eusebius that the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. occurred 40 years after Jesus' death. (Bk 7)

Nikos Kokkinos advocates the very late date of 36 A.D for Christ's death on the grounds that it harmonizes best with the conflict between Herod Antipas and Aretas over Herod's divorce of Aretas' daughter (CKC, p. 133-163), but this chronology causes major problems with the chronology of Paul and Luke's statement that Jesus began his ministry at about age 30.

### **The Duration Of Christ's Ministry**

Most advocates of both the early and late dating agree that Christ's ministry lasted about 3 ½ years. It is John's Gospel which provides the most help in determining the length of Jesus' ministry. Since John 2:13, 6:4 and 11:55 mention three Passovers which occurred during Jesus' ministry, the minimum length of his ministry is two years. There is strong evidence that another Passover occurred between the two mentioned in John 2:13 and 6:4. John 4:5 occurred "four months before the harvest." In Israel this would be in January or February. John 5:1 refers to another feast of the Jews. This probably refers to one of the three major feasts, Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles, which occur in April, May and October. The occurrence of a winter, followed by another major feast, requires another Passover to have come and gone between John 2 and John 6, even if the feast in John 5 was Tabernacles or Pentecost rather than Passover. Events recorded in Matthew and Mark, such as the picking of ripe grain in Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5, also suggest the occurrence of another spring harvest season between the two Passovers mentioned in John 2 and 6.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of all the preceding factors I would suggest the following chronology of Jesus' ministry.

Fall of 26 A.D.	Baptism and Temptation
Most of 27 A.D.	Early Judean Ministry (John 1-4)
28 A.D. and early 29 A.D	The Galilean Ministry of the Synoptics
Spring to Fall 29 A.D.	Special Training of the Twelve
Fall of 29 A.D. to	Last Journeys in Judea and Perea
Spring of 30 A.D.	Death and Resurrection

### **The Chronology Of Paul's Ministry**

The chronology of Paul's ministry is established by arranging the events of Paul's life around a skeleton formed by several synchronisms between events recorded in Acts and Roman history. The limits for the beginning of Paul's ministry are set by Christ's death in 30 A.D. and

the death of Aretas of Arabia in about 39 A.D. Since Paul escaped from Aretas about three years after his conversion, the latest possible date for Paul's conversion is three years before Aretas' death. Paul's conversion must therefore have occurred between 30 and 36 A.D. The persecutions under Nero between 64 and 67 A.D. set limits to the end of Paul's ministry. Important check points between the beginning and end of Paul's ministry are the death of Herod Agrippa in 44 A.D., the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 49 A.D., the governorship of Gallio in Corinth in 51 A.D., and the arrival of Festus in Palestine in about 59 A.D. during Paul's imprisonment. In the following sections we will see how the events recorded in Acts and the epistles can be arranged around these anchor-points.

It is likely that Paul's conversion occurred within a year of Christ's death, which I have dated to spring of 30 A.D. The account of the events of Acts 1-9, especially Gamaliel's argument that the leaders of Israel should wait and see if Christianity would last, suggest that all of these events, including Paul's conversion, took place in a relatively short time, perhaps a year or less. I therefore date Paul's conversion to about 31 A.D. Some commentators place Paul's conversion as late as 34 A.D. (indeed they must, if they follow the late chronology of Christ's life) but this creates considerable difficulty in reconciling the accounts of Paul's visits to Jerusalem as they are recorded in Galatians and Acts.

After his conversion Paul spent about three years or parts of three years in Arabia. The term Arabia probably refers to the area east of the Jordan controlled by the Nabataeans, ruled by King Aretas. In 33 or 34 A.D. Paul returned to Damascus, but was forced to flee because of the threats of Aretas' governor (Gal 1:17, 2 Cor. 11:32). Some have suggested that this return to Damascus must have occurred later than 34 A.D. because Aretas' influence in Damascus must have occurred after Tiberius' death in 37 A.D., but there is no strong evidence for this assertion. Perhaps the reason for Aretas' displeasure and his attempt to capture Paul in Damascus was animosity which Paul had aroused by preaching too boldly while he had been staying in Aretas' territory. After his escape from Damascus Paul visited Jerusalem and met briefly with Peter and James (Acts 9:26-30, 22:17-18, Ga 1:17-20). Paul then returned to his home town of Tarsus, which is located on the southeast coast of modern Turkey. He remained there for about ten years, until about 43 A.D. when Barnabas came and asked him to join in the ministry in Antioch.

It was during his ministry in Antioch that Paul made his second visit to Jerusalem, the visit recorded in Acts 11:30 and Galatians 2:1. The interpretation of this second visit of Paul to Jerusalem is the most difficult (and most disputed) point in establishing the chronology of Paul's ministry. Many commentators agree with my view that the Galatians 2 visit is identical to the Acts 11 visit, but many others identify it with the Acts 15 visit. There is real difficulty in determining the date of the visit. Galatians 2:1 tells us that this visit to Jerusalem occurred "fourteen years later," but it is disputed whether this means fourteen years after Paul's conversion or fourteen years after his previous visit to Jerusalem (that is, seventeen years after his conversion). In Acts this second visit to Jerusalem is recorded before the death of Herod Agrippa, which occurred in 44 A.D. If this visit occurred as early as 44 A.D., Galatians 2:1 must be understood as meaning that it occurred fourteen years after Paul's conversion (31/32 to 44 A.D. = 14 years by inclusive Jewish counting in which a part year counts as a whole year). However; it is more likely that this portion of Acts is not in strict chronological order. In the beginning of Acts 11 Luke finishes a section about the history of the church in Jerusalem during Paul's absence in Tarsus. In the latter part of the chapter Luke presents an account of Paul's ministry in Antioch, which concludes with a visit Paul made to Jerusalem in 46 A.D., fourteen years (by inclusive counting) after his previous visit in 34 A.D. In Acts 12 Luke then updates the

story of the Jerusalem church with the account of Herod's death in 44 A.D. Then in 12:25 Luke resumes the story of the Antioch church as a lead-in to his account of Paul's first missionary journey.

As mentioned above, many commentators solve the problem of harmonizing Acts with Galatians by identifying the Galatians 2 visit with the visit to the Jerusalem council recorded in Acts 15. This makes it very easy to fit seventeen years between Paul's conversion (32 A.D.) and the Galatians 2 visit (49 A.D.), but the circumstances and description of the Galatians 2 visit agree much better with the Acts 11 visit than with the Acts 15 visit, since Galatians 2 seems to describe a private conference, not a public council like the meeting described in Acts 15. The revelation which led Paul to go to Jerusalem (Ga 2:2) may have been the prophecy of Agabus recorded in Acts 11:27. This argument will be developed more fully in the next section. Consult commentaries on Galatians and Acts for a more thorough discussion of this problem and the arguments supporting both viewpoints. For now, it is sufficient to note that my chronology adopts the view that the Galatians 2 visit is identical with the Acts 11 visit and that it occurred in 46 A.D., fourteen years after Paul's previous visit to Jerusalem.

### **The First Missionary Journey 47-48 A.D.**

#### **Acts 13-15**

There are no clear dating indications for Paul's first missionary journey other than the facts that it could not have begun before the late 40's and that Paul's second journey had to be well underway by the early 50's. It does not appear that any of Paul's stops on this journey through Cyprus and Galatia were very lengthy, so it could have easily been accomplished in a year and a half, in approximately 47-48 A.D.

The date of the writing of Paul's epistle to the Galatians is one of the most disputed dates of New Testament chronology. It is most likely that this letter was written very shortly after Paul returned from his first journey, on which he founded the Galatian congregations, but before the council at Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. Galatians was therefore probably written in 48 or 49 A.D. and the Jerusalem council met later in 49. Many commentators believe that Galatians was written several years later, after the Jerusalem council or even after Paul's return to Galatia on his second journey. However, this order of events does not seem plausible for the following reasons. The animosity of some Jewish Christians against the admission of uncircumcised Gentiles to the church which had been simmering since Peter had begun work among the Gentiles (Acts 11:2) was intensified in 46 A.D. when Paul came to Jerusalem, bringing the uncircumcised Gentile Titus with him (Acts 11:30, Ga 2:3). The Judaizers became even more agitated because of the continued success of the work of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch and the expansion of this work into Galatia in 47 and 48 A.D. The determined efforts of the Judaizers to undermine Paul's work in both Antioch and Galatia -provoked Paul to write his letter to the Galatians and then to seek resolution of the matter at the Jerusalem council. Since Paul did not depend on the authority of other men, he wrote his letter to the Galatians without waiting for the ruling of the Jerusalem council. The decision of the Jerusalem council which was reported to Galatia by Paul and Silas (Acts 16:4) confirmed what the Galatians had already heard from Paul in his epistle.

This reconstruction of events seems more probable than the idea that the trouble in Galatia which provoked Paul's epistle occurred much later, after the Galatian Christians had already received the ruling of the Jerusalem council. It is also hard to believe that Paul would not specifically mention the ruling of the Jerusalem council in his letter to Galatia if it had already been in existence when he wrote, since he does mention another time when he had received

approval from the leaders in Jerusalem (Ga 2:9). If the temporary capitulation of Peter and Barnabas to the Judaizers mentioned in Galatians 2 occurred after Paul's first journey but before the Jerusalem council, this incident would have been a further compelling cause for the Jerusalem council and perhaps an unmentioned contributing factor in the separation between Paul and Barnabas before their second journey. It seems more likely that the failure of Peter and Barnabas would occur before the Jerusalem council than afterward. For all these reasons it seems best to conclude that the writing of Galatians preceded the Jerusalem council and that the visit to Jerusalem recorded in Galatians 2 cannot refer to the Jerusalem council, since this council had not yet occurred when Galatians 2 was written.

A more unusual way of resolving the difficulty is that of S. Douckx and others who treat Acts 11 and Acts 15 as two different accounts of the same event. (CKC, P. 209) This does not seem very persuasive.

### **The Second Missionary Journey 49-52 A.D.**

#### **Acts 16-18**

The dating of the second journey is tied down by Paul's meeting with the proconsul Gallio in Corinth late in this journey. Gallio served in Corinth only during 51/52 or 52/53 A.D. Since Paul spent at least a year and a half in Corinth, this whole journey must have lasted two and a half or three years.

1 and 2 Thessalonians were written on this journey.

### **The Third Missionary Journey 53-58 A.D.**

#### **Act 19-20**

The date of the third journey is fixed by Paul's arrest at the end of this journey, which must have occurred in 57 or 58 A.D., about two years before the end of the term of the Roman governor Felix. Since on this journey Paul spent about three years in Ephesus, the journey as a whole must have lasted four or five years.

On this journey Paul wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans.

### **Imprisonment In Palestine 58-60 A.D.**

#### **Acts 21-26**

After his third journey Paul was arrested in Jerusalem during the governorship of Felix. Paul had been in prison about two years (Acts 24:27) when Festus arrived to assume the governorship in 59 or 60 A.D. Paul was sent to Rome shortly after Festus' arrival. Some commentators suggest an earlier date for this event, since they date the arrival of Festus in 57 A.D. or even earlier, but the length of Paul's third journey makes it impossible to date Paul's arrest much earlier.

### **Imprisonment In Rome 61-63 A.D.**

#### **Acts 27-28**

Paul journeyed to Rome as a prisoner, probably during the winter of 60-61 A.D. He remained imprisoned there for at least two years (Acts 28:30). At this point the account of Acts ends. We can only piece together the rest of Paul's life from hints in the pastoral epistles and church tradition. During this imprisonment Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians.

### **Final Travels And Execution 64-67 A.D.**

From 1 Timothy and Titus, the pastoral epistles written during Paul's last journeys, it is clear that Paul was released from prison and that he had an opportunity to visit Crete (Titus 1:5) and his congregations around the Aegean Sea ( Titus 3:12, 1 Tim 1:3). Perhaps he also had an opportunity to make his long planned visit to Spain. From 2 Timothy, written from prison, it is



clear that Paul was rearrested and expected execution. Church tradition places this execution in the reign of Nero, sometime between 64 and 67 A.D.

We know nothing of the lives of the apostles after the death of Peter and Paul, except for the evidence of John's ministry in Ephesus which appears in his epistles and Revelation. This ministry seems to have continued until about the year 100 A.D.

### **Conclusion**

Although the data available for developing a New Testament chronology is subject to different interpretations, and considerable disagreement about details remains unresolved the basic chronology of the New Testament is clear and can be used with considerable confidence. Nevertheless every student of the New Testament should be aware that no chronology of the New Testament is absolutely certain. None of the currently proposed chronologies is without some weak points. One should be cautious not to become too attached to a particular chronology which may be made untenable by new information. The most difficult issues are the census of Quirinius, the identity of the fifteenth year of Tiberius in Luke 3, and the identity of Paul's visit in Galatians 2. However, several other dates which been adopted in this article without the presentation of a detailed defense are questioned by at least a minority of commentators. Many individual points in this article would be worthy of book-length treatments. However, this basic overview should give some impression of the complexity and remaining difficulties of New Testament chronology.

### **For Further Study**

Since this article is intended to give only an introductory overview of the issues of New Testament chronology, I have not provided *detailed footnotes*. Readers interested in a more detailed, scholarly study of the topic should consult the following sources for further information and extensive bibliographic references.

*Chronos, Kairos, Christos* edited by Jerry Vardaman and Edwin Yamauch: for an overview of recent debate on the topic.

For further information on the data used in determining New Testament chronology consult *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* by Jack Finegan.

For further study on the principles of determining the chronology of Christ's ministry see Harold Hoehner's *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. Hoehner adopts the late chronology of Jesus' ministry, rather than the early chronology adopted in this article, but he provides access to all the data and to additional bibliography.

For a survey of the chronology of Paul see George Ogg, *The Odyssey of Paul*.