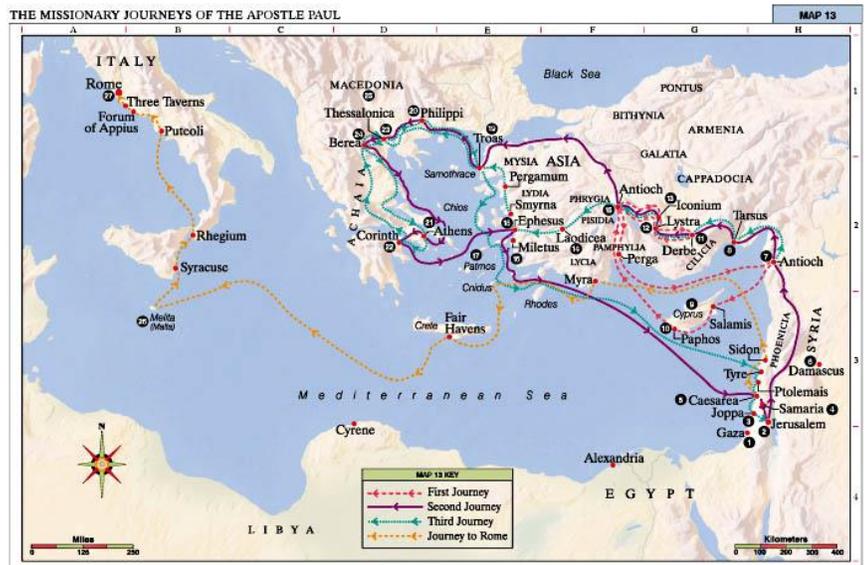




PAULINE EPISTLES



Paul was a **Pharisee** - a non-priestly group zealously dedicated to the protection and promotion of the Law and the purity of Israel. They were experts on the written Law but also believed in oral tradition. They developed a way of interpreting Scripture called **midrash** - applying ancient texts to modern situations. They affirmed the resurrection and the existence of angelic beings and spiritual powers. They embodied an apocalyptic and nationalistic perspective. Paul was Greek-speaking (koine = common); born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Benjamin - a Pharisee of Second Temple Judaism; a Roman citizen under Caesar Augustus. Culture: Greek; Religion: Judaism; Political power: Romans. He had one foot in the Jewish culture and one in the Roman Empire.

The First Temple, built by Solomon, was destroyed in 587 BC; it was rebuilt by the returning exiles under Cyrus [538 BC] - Nehemiah rebuilt the walls and Ezra the priest rebuilt the Temple - this was greatly expanded by Herod the Great in 20 BC; it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. The different Jewish groups were united in:

- ❖ Monotheism
- ❖ Covenant (election)
- ❖ Land
- ❖ Moses
- ❖ The Law (Torah) - love, obedience, and faithfulness to God and love/justice for others
- ❖ Temple and synagogue (not the Essenes)
- ❖ Circumcision
- ❖ Hope for the Messiah when subjugation and suffering would cease
- ❖ Subjugation to Rome
- ❖ Boundary markers: Circumcision, food laws, calendar (feasts and holy days)

Most people of the time spoke, thought, and wrote in koine; Jews used the Greek translation of Hebrew Scripture (Septuagint, LXX). Greek culture permeated the Mediterranean basin, but did not replace local customs - rather, Greek culture merged with each local community.

Mediterranean cultures defined themselves primarily in terms of group identity. **Dyadic** = self is defined only in reference to another: family, religion, city/region, or group values. In dyadic cultures, emphasis is on inheriting and living by the norms and customs of the group; deviation from cultural norms would be disastrous for the person. Culture of honor and shame. For Romans, the criteria were wealth, power, status, education, rhetorical skill, family/pedigree, political connections. For Jews, the criteria were tribe affiliation and religious observance. Peer pressure was the norm.

Christianity was counter-cultural: can you appreciate how radical it was to embrace Christianity? It truly was a sacrificial embrace of the cross.

- ❖ Suddenly, you might lose the support of your family – emotional, physical, financial.
- ❖ You would work on the Jewish Sabbath and worship on Sunday – you could lose customers and/or the ability to shop and do business as you had before.
- ❖ Suddenly, you were mixing with who you previously would have called “unclean dogs” or pagans.
- ❖ This no doubt underlies the reason “the community of believers were of one heart and one mind...they held everything in common.” (Acts 4:32-33) They had to stick together.

In Paul’s time, the one overriding and unifying reality was the Roman Empire (from **27 BC** when Octavian defeated Marc Antony at the Battle of Actium and received from Roman Senate the name “Augustus” - revered one), thanks to Alexander the Great. Aspects of Paul’s social, political, and religious worlds which affected his mission and message.

- ❖ Pax Romana - enforced by Roman army, taxes, and tributes - unified a huge land area of diverse people - similarity of government, military, art and architecture, aqueducts, paved roads
- ❖ Community in the Empire - family was fundamental unit of Roman society, and the emperor was the **pater patriae** - the father of the country. Think of the Lord’s Prayer and how that contradicted this title of the Emperor: **Our Father**, who art in Heaven. Early Christians knew that their true home was in Heaven and that our true Father is in Heaven.
- ❖ Mobility in the Empire due to Roman roads and the Mediterranean Sea - had to be careful of robbers or pirates and inns with bad food, unsanitary conditions, and prostitutes. Think of Paul’s list of dangers in 2 Cor 11:25-27: imprisonments, beatings, and numerous brushes with death. Five times at the hands of the Jews I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I passed a night and a day on the deep; on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my own race, dangers from Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless nights, through hunger and thirst, through frequent fastings, through cold and exposure.
- ❖ Imperial unity through cult and theology - the pagan cult of the emperor- word comes from the Latin *imperator*, meaning “commander.” Julius Caesar called himself “imperator” and his successors took it as their *praenomen* - first name. Caesar’s adopted son Octavian kept Caesar as his *cognomen* - last name. Octavian was hailed as “savior” and the “incarnation of divine good news for the whole world.” He was also known as **god** and **lord**. Christians, of course, used these words to describe Jesus Christ and the Good News - *euangelion*.
- ❖ Dark side to Roman Empire: as the Empire was born, republics died. The army had to enforce the Pax Romana, using conquest, subjugation, humiliation, taxes, tributes, punishments: **peace through war**:

invasion, exile, enslavement, crucifixion (only for non-citizens - this is why Paul was beheaded, not crucified.) Nothing could be more un-Roman than to **honor and deify** a man crucified by the Romans.

- ❖ Many families lived in cities. Within the cities, everyone was aware of the socioeconomic differences between citizens and non-citizens; poor and wealthy. Love of honor or status (Latin: **philotimia**) created a fiercely competitive society to accrue honor and respect for themselves, their city, and/or the emperor.
- ❖ Working class had little status but formed their own **collegia** - clubs with religious overtones, trade guilds, or the burial society to defray the high cost of burials.
- ❖ There was a system of patron-client whereby people of means acted for the benefit of those with lesser means, starting with the emperor.
- ❖ Throughout the Empire, there was a diversity of peoples, cultures, religions, geographical landscapes, and political structures. Cult of the Emperor unified the Empire and permeated the culture - it was a **theopolitical** allegiance, serving to unite people as a social outing, religious belief, and political statement. The cult of the Emperor was one of the most **fundamental cohesive elements in the Empire**. The Emperor was the **pontifex maximus** - the main bridge-builder. **Today, that is one of the titles for the Pope**. The chief priest with incense burned at altars in temples dedicated to the Emperor. Imperial cult was political, social, religious, human, and divine - and **compulsory**. The Jews were exempt because their religion pre-dated the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire.
- ❖ Theology of Imperial cult: Rome was the gods' choice to rule the world, obviously, from the string of victories and the "peace." The divine Emperor was patron, protector, father, and the epitome of Roman power, peace, and security: the savior (*soter*) who brought the *euangelion*, the Good News of salvation to the world since his **epiphanein**, his appearance or epiphany. You see how loaded these terms were which Paul used.
- ❖ This cult spread during the first half of the first century throughout Greece and Asia Minor: Pisidia, Antioch, Corinth, and Philippi. Herod the Great had built and dedicated two cities to the Emperor: **Caesarea Maritima and Sebaste (Samaria)**, three temples for the imperial cult, and numerous statues of the Emperor. He dedicated games to Augustus, even in Jerusalem. These temples were often the largest and most central sanctuaries in a city. Coins now bore the images of Greek or Roman gods **and the Emperor** (Render unto Caesar...)
- ❖ Nearly every public event had religious dimension or undertones. The entire culture was inherently religious. From the gods, people wanted peace and prosperity, health and long life, guidance and protection. The gods were given sacrifices but made no moral demands upon the people. The relationship was **contractual**, focused on **ritual**. Jews and Christians focused on **covenant and morality**. Mystery cults promised access to secret knowledge and rebirth, salvation, or immortality through an initiation rite which involved a sacral meal. Most people were more concerned with surviving the struggle of life rather than living forever. Most pagans did not believe in an afterlife. People used astrology and magic to escape their enslavement to the forces of nature.

Jews - the Chosen People - to be "holy" meant to be set apart for God's purposes, to be obedient to God's commandments. First century Judaism: **covenantal nomism** (keeping of the Law as a way of staying in the covenant). Recent perspectives: (1) Observant Jews kept the commandments in gratitude for being the Chosen People. (2) Paul's criticism of Judaism and Judaizers was its cultural imperialism or ethnic pride. No Jew expected a suffering Messiah who would be publicly executed and rise from the dead.

Six key words describe the frame of reference in which Paul is understood:

- ❖ Jewish
- ❖ Covenantal
- ❖ Narrative - salvation history from promise to ultimate fulfillment (eschatological)
- ❖ Countercultural
- ❖ Trinitarian
- ❖ Cruciform

Boundary markers functioned as ritual signs of their covenant with God and often cannot be separated from the substantive religious and ethical distinctions of their covenant with God.

- ❖ **Ritual boundary markers** - circumcision, calendar, and dietary laws - with righteousness as aim - often repelled Gentiles
- ❖ **Religious/ethical (religio-ethical) boundary markers** - monotheism and morality - Jews worshipped one God exclusively and abstained from the imperial cult and did not participate in Greco-Roman cultural behaviors (exposing children, throwing infants on garbage dump, adultery). These markers often attracted Gentiles. These became “God-fearers” - those who admired Judaism’s religio-ethical markers but did not undergo the ritual markers. These God-fearers would have been attracted to Paul’s circumcision-free monotheistic moral Gospel. In **Romans** 2-3, Paul opines that the Jews maintained the ritual boundary markers but had caved into the pagan culture and transgressed the religio-ethical markers.

Apocalyptic passages - multifaceted dualism, belief in strong pairs of opposites, characterized by cosmic, chronological, and ethical dualism. An apocalyptic mindset is expressed in Ezekiel, Zechariah, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, early Christian literature, and some Pauline epistles. It is important to understand the apocalyptic to appreciate the New Testament. Think of where in Paul’s letters you see these elements:

- ❖ **Cosmic dualism** - the cosmos is a battleground between good and evil. Participants include angels, demons, and people who side with either God or the devil. God will ultimately defeat evil.
- ❖ **Chronological dualism** - history is divided into (1) the present age and (2) the age to come. The present age is beleaguered by evil, injustice, and oppression. The age to come is blessed with righteousness, justice, freedom, and peace. A spectacular Divine intervention will usher in the age to come. - No hope of humans acting in history to resolve the crisis. Apocalyptic is both **optimistic** in the eventual victory of God but **pessimistic** in the view of the present age.
- ❖ **Ethical dualism** - good and evil, God and Satan - no moral gray areas, only black and white, sheep and goats, weeds and wheat.

Large cities Paul visited: Rome, Ephesus, Pisidia, Antioch, Thessalonica, Athens. Modest cities Paul visited: Philippi, Colossae. These cities were the religious and commercial hub of the region, providing regular and rapid exchange of goods and ideas, and were significant trade routes. The churches Paul founded met in homes or small apartments. City neighborhoods were organized according to ethnicity or trade. The elite and the rich lived either in the main part of the city or out in the countryside. Poorer people lived atop one another in the *insulae* in very close quarters. Everybody knew everyone else. Troublemakers could be subdued with mob violence or ostracism. Word spread quickly, so the Good News spread rapidly among the non-elites, creating Christian communities.

Some of Paul's converts would have come from these philosophical schools of thought and could have influenced how Paul presented the Gospel. **Paul spent most of his time in cities**, especially major cities, so the spread of the Gospel far and wide was facilitated. He was an "urban missionary."

Philosophical schools:

- ❖ Cynics (literally, dogs - the name they were disparagingly given) - a radical countercultural group known for frugality, inattention to clothing and bodily care and comfort, brash speech, begging, public sex. Used a confrontational style of preaching the pursuit of freedom. Influenced the Stoics.
- ❖ Epicureans - pleasure: virtue known through the senses - was the goal of human life. They downplayed the existence of gods, denied immortality, fought superstition. Epicureans influenced the people of Corinth.
- ❖ Platonists - the body is the tomb of the soul and was therefore unimportant (gnostic)
- ❖ Stoics - the universe is permeated by Reason, *Logos*, identified with God (or Zeus). A spark of this Reason is within each person, constituting the "true self." The goal of life: to live in harmony with Reason and be unaffected by life. *Apatheia* - indifference to physical pleasure or difficulty - things that cannot affect the true self. Self-sufficiency and contentment are virtues. Philosopher Zeno (333-264 BC) founded it. By the first century, emphasis on ethics. Influenced Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius.

Major influences upon Paul: Judaism, Hellenism, Stoicism - he was well-versed in Hellenistic and rabbinic models of argumentation (due to his tutor, Gamaliel). He was a Palestinian Jew - different from a Jew of the Diaspora - but for all first century Jews, **politics and religion were inseparable** - so opposition to Rome was both on a religious and political level and accounts for the rise of the Zealots.

He was a Pharisee in Palestine - an expert in Scripture who awaited the Messiah.

- ❖ His zeal for the law, both written and oral (tradition) – he wanted to protect and promote the Law – this could lead to intimidation or violence against fellow Jews who violated the Law or anyone who opposed God.
- ❖ He was committed to the purity of Israel - free from Gentile contamination.
- ❖ He believed in the bodily resurrection from the dead and in angels and visions.
- ❖ Apocalyptic view - reworked in light of God's salvation in the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery.
- ❖ Zealously committed to extinguishing the early Christians, apostate Jews - could mean a range:
 - a. Scriptural arguments
 - b. Private reprimands, intimidation, public renunciation
 - c. Lethal violence
 - d. Handing them over to Jewish authorities for 40 lashes minus one
 - e. Handing them over to the Romans for crucifixion
 - f. Role models for his zeal
 - ❖ Phinehas, Eleazar's son, Aaron's grandson, who impaled the adulterous couple
 - ❖ Prophet Elijah, who killed 450 priests of Baal after the battle of the gods
 - ❖ Priest Mattathias and his sons - the Maccabees - killed a Jew about to sacrifice to pagan gods before declaring war on the Romans

- ❖ Reasons for his zeal: the **convictions, conduct, and composition of the community** of the early Christians, who
 - a. Had a relaxed attitude towards the Law
 - b. Had a critical stance towards the Temple
 - c. **Accepted Gentiles** without circumcision - **focus** of his persecution
 - d. Committed blasphemy by calling a criminal the Son of God and Messiah
 - e. Placed Israel at risk of Roman political reprisals by claiming the Messiah's advent

Paul self-identifies as an apostle and considers apostleship to be the most important gift in the Church which came with grave responsibilities and certain rights:

- ❖ Preach the Gospel and form communities/churches
- ❖ Live the Gospel for his own salvation and to set an example - conformity to Christ in His suffering and persecution as the **Suffering Servant and as light to the nations**
- ❖ Stewardship of those new communities
- ❖ He was accountable for the quality of his preaching and parental care of the Church
- ❖ Rights of financial support, companionship, regard for his advice and authority; yet
 - a. He renounced the financial support, working to provide for himself even as he preached and formed new communities of believers
 - b. He renounced personal power/authority and referred everything to Jesus
 - c. He endangered himself by preaching in synagogues, several times being subject to stoning, beaten with rods, mob violence, 39 lashes, and
 - d. He sought to create a multinational network of Gentiles and Jews (to the Jews first, then to the Gentiles):
 - ❖ Who would obey and glorify the One True God of Israel and His crucified, risen Jewish Messiah
 - ❖ By living lives of faith, hope, and love
 - ❖ By the power of the Holy Spirit
 - ❖ Emphasized God's faithfulness and grace, unmerited mercy