
PAUL

Also by Ken Wade

Journey to Moriah

The Orion Conspiracy

By Don Schneider with Ken Wade

Really Living

Really Living 2

PAUL

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

KEN WADE

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Dedicated

to my wonderful wife, Debby,

who is so understanding when I retreat into my “cave” to write,

and to the good folks at Voice of Prophecy who encourage me to do so.

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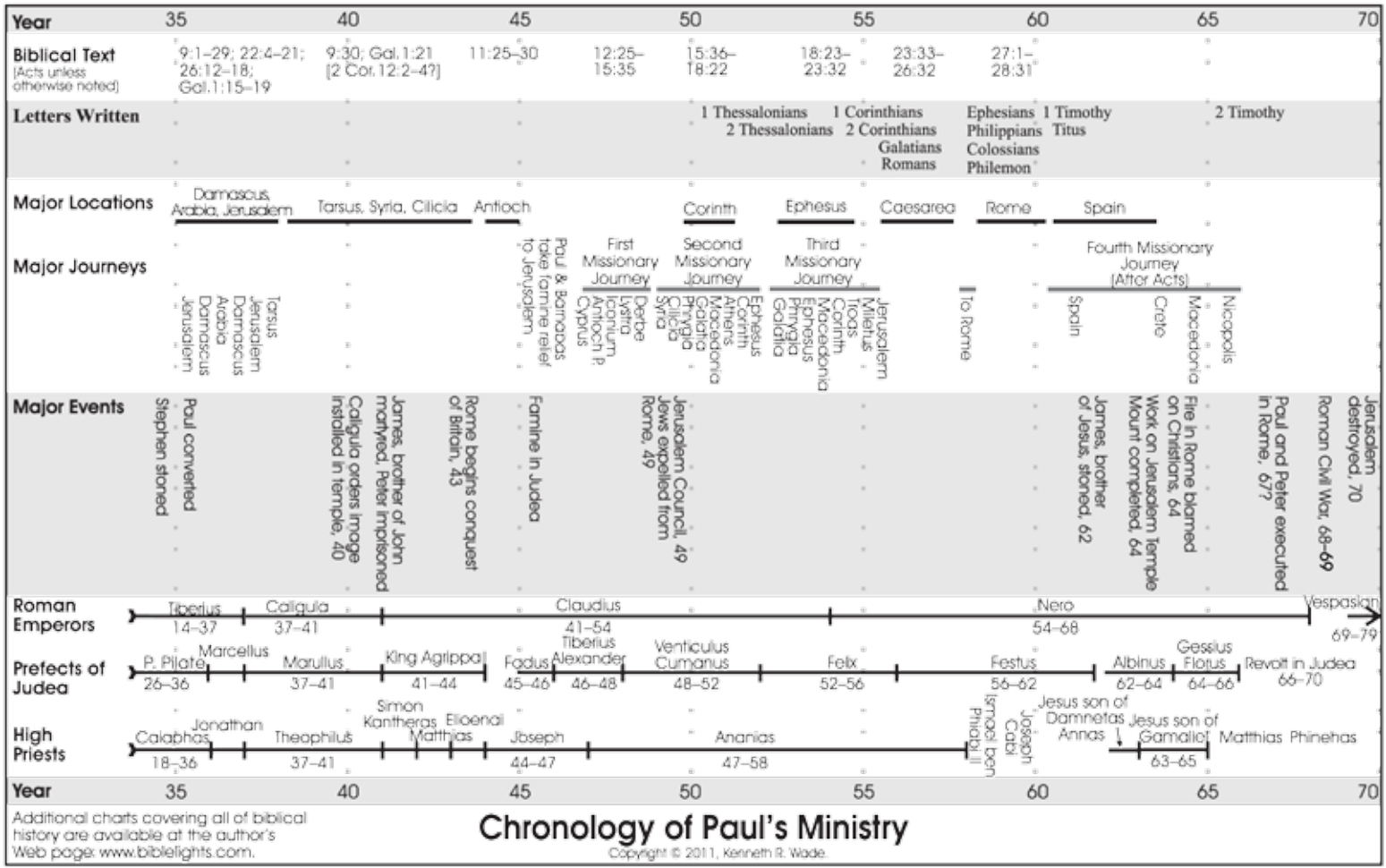

Additional charts covering all of biblical history are available at the author's Web page: www.biblelights.com.

Chronology of Paul's Ministry


Philippi
Thessalonica
Beroea
Troas
Nicopolis
Corinth
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Chapter 1

Would You Hire This Man?

Does having a spiritual experience automatically make you a nice person? I mean, does it make you the kind of person everybody wants to be around and would enjoy sitting next to at a potluck?

This question came to mind recently when I was reading a book about the apostle Paul—a man who certainly had a deep spiritual experience. Reflecting on the amount of trouble that Paul stirred up as he went from place to place, the author of the book I was reading suggested that the great apostle "easily could have made Asia Minor's list of the ten people one least would like to have to dinner."[1]

But I have to admit that it wasn't just this author's comment that set me to thinking about what kind of a neighbor or friend Paul would make.

As I write this, I am serving on the search committee for my local church, where we are discussing what kind of pastor we would like to hire since our former pastor recently took a call to the mission field. During the discussion of characteristics we'd like to see in our new pastor, someone said offhandedly, "It'd be nice if he was just like the apostle Paul!"

"No!" The word popped out of my mouth before I could stifle it, so I had to explain myself. "Paul was a great missionary and evangelist. But I'm not sure he would have made a great pastor. After all, he basically

was ridden out of town on a rail most places he went."

That evoked some chuckles around the table as people thought back over what they knew about Paul. And the committee moved on, tabling the idea of resurrecting the man who traveled the known world in his day, founding more churches than any other apostle, always insisting on moving on to a new territory to spread the gospel where it hadn't been preached before.

My reaction to Paul wasn't just an off-the-cuff remark. I had already spent a lot of time pondering his character and thinking about what it would have been like to try to work with him.

Twenty some years ago, I was serving as one of the editors of *Ministry,* an international journal for clergy, when I was invited to get out from behind my desk and put into practice some of the principles I had been writing about and editing articles about.

In short, I was invited to move to the exact opposite side of the world from where I was living at the time and take up responsibilities as what our church calls a "ministerial secretary."

Despite the word *secretary* in the title, the new job would involve a lot less typing than my work as an editor did.

My job, when I arrived two degrees above the equator in the tiny island nation of Singapore, was to train pastors in how to do their work and to make recommendations about the staffing of churches in the seven countries that comprise the Southeast Asia Union Mission.

I came prepared. I had a wonderful sermon that I liked to preach at gatherings of pastors, based on the apostle Paul's first letter to the church at Thessalonica (which, it turns out, is the first of his letters that we have preserved for us in the New Testament).

I based my sermon on 1 Thessalonians 1:5 and 2:5–12, emphasizing certain aspects of Paul's description of his ministry, and encouraging pastors to be like Paul.

> For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know

what kind of men we were among you for your sake. . . .

For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness—God is witness. *Nor did we seek glory from men,* either from you or from others, when we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. *But we were gentle among you,* just *as a nursing mother cherishes her own children.* So, *affectionately longing for you,* we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for *laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,* we preached to you the gospel of God.

You are witnesses, and God also, *how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you* who believe; as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, *as a father does his own children,* that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory (emphasis added).

I used that sermon over and over, and I hope that those who heard it found it encouraging and inspiring and that they wanted to emulate the good methodology Paul attributed to himself. After all, Paul himself urged the church at Corinth, "Follow my example, just as I follow Christ's" (1 Corinthians 11:1, TLB).

But then something happened that made me change the way I preached that sermon.

I'm a pretty analytical guy by nature. I tend to pick things apart and look at them closely. And I tend to ask questions that a lot of people would never think of. It's a character trait that can be both a blessing and a curse.

But what happened as I studied my Bible more deeply and started focusing in particular on the life of Paul, was that I became a lot less sure that I really understood the man, or that I would want him for a neighbor.

The author I quoted above went so far as to become a bit sarcastic in his next sentence describing Paul: "Eventually Paul was martyred, which is the polite and Christian way of indicating that he truly got on people's nerves."[2]

I never went so far as to become sarcastic about Paul, because I truly believe that he was a man gifted by God and called by God to fulfill a mission that someone with thinner skin and a more retiring (dare we say "less abrasive") personality could not have managed.

Nonetheless, in my role as one whose counsel was often sought when churches were looking for good pastors, I gradually came to the conclusion that if I had had Paul's résumé on my desk when a local congregation was looking for a new pastor, I might not have recommended him.

Having come to that conclusion, I began to ponder how I, as a church administrator, would have handled a man like Paul if he had been a pastor or evangelist serving in my field.

One day during my morning meditations, I sat down and did what any good secretary should do. I began to type a letter. I put myself in the sandals of a first-century ministerial secretary who might try to solve a personnel problem by writing a letter of recommendation and sending it to a ministerial secretary in another field.

Here's the letter:

> Dear Brother Secretary:
>
> We have a worker in our field who has had remarkable success in many of his endeavors. However, he seems to have worn out his welcome in some of the cities where he has worked. We are hoping that you might be interested in calling him to your field to work. We believe that, despite some drawbacks, he could do great things in a new territory. In fact, he seems to prefer to always be working in new places.
>
> The man has many good qualities, but I feel I should be candid with you in admitting that there have been some problems. I would state unequivocally, though, that we consider him to have considerable potential if he can be properly guided.
>
> Educationally, he is well qualified. His diploma is, how-

ever, from an ultraconservative institution. He claims to have left behind much of what he was taught there, but I have seen correspondence in which he expresses considerable loyalty to and love for his professors and former associates.

As a biblical scholar, he is more than adequate, but he does have some, shall we say, creative ways of interpreting the Scriptures. This is one of the reasons we are suggesting a transfer to a new territory. He has aroused enough antagonism in our field that people tend to follow him from place to place no matter how often he transfers and to cause disruptions in his congregations.

Financially, he won't be much of a burden to you since he has no family. However, due to a physical handicap, he does require some professional assistance. But even this does not create a monetary burden because he insists on operating on the "self-supporting" or "independent ministries" model. While some think he does this just to keep from having to answer to the mandates of the organized church, our administration has almost always had cordial relations with him, and we believe that he is sincere in not wanting to be a burden.

He has never made his background totally clear. He is not married, but there are rumors that he may have gone through a bit of a nasty divorce. It is hard to put these rumors to rest because some of his statements about marriage leave the impression that whatever experience he may have had with that institution was not positive.

The fact that he uses an alias rather than his given name is taken by some as further evidence that he may be running from a tainted past. In fact, he has been incarcerated in some of the cities where he has worked, but he has

usually managed to have the charges dropped within a few days. I have taken this as an indication that the authorities have not been able to find any record of serious misconduct in his past.

I would highly recommend him as one who could do excellent work for you in raising up churches in a new field. He works best alone. From time to time, he has taken in young workers to train, but few of them have stayed with him for long. Either they displease him and he tosses them out, or they turn against him and leave feeling angry or disillusioned.

Unfortunately, this pattern does not show much hope of being broken. It seems to spring from the core of his rather impatient personality. But I would hasten to add that this very same impatience lends urgency to his work and leads to quick results wherever he goes.

He can handle a large territory, and the churches he raises up—even in places where he quickly gets run out of town—usually turn into solid, thriving congregations if other, more ameliorative, workers go in and follow up on his work.

It would be wise to assign him to a territory some distance from your administrative office. You won't want to visit his district often. I know from personal experience that it can be a bit humiliating. If he disagrees with anything you say or do, he doesn't mind telling you so publicly in strong, insulting terms.

He bases this self-assured attitude on a vision he had some years ago, in which he believes he encountered the Lord Himself. He holds that his appointment as a messenger of Christ is not based on human authority but on a divine commission. This has made him very confident in his own judgment, and he doesn't always welcome at-

tempts at supervision by the head office. In fact, he has rarely consulted with the conference administration during his term of service with us.

His followers, by and large, have the same sort of self-confidence, no doubt in part because he instructs them that if anyone comes from the office and teaches something other than what he taught them, they should pronounce a curse on the offender and tell him or her where to go.

On the surface, he comes across as quite a meek, gentle, and loving man. I'm not saying that it's all a façade, but his true personality comes across clearly in the letters he writes, in which he can be quite blunt.

He corresponds often with members of churches he formerly pastored. Some of his letters are rather strongly worded, and he has a loyal cadre that sees to it that the letters get wide circulation in the world field.

I've just read back through what I've written so far, and I admit that it does seem a bit negative. I'm not sure I would want to call a man with the characteristics I have described to work in my area. But let me reiterate that our administration overall has been pleased with the work of Saul of Tarsus (alias Paul).* He has raised up many churches and seems to be worthy of continuing in denominational employment. I hope that you will be able to call him to work in your

*This is my second book about a man whose name changed midstream. When I wrote about Abram/Abraham, I elected to use the name *Abraham* throughout the book to avoid confusion. For the most part, I'm going to do the same with Saul/Paul—with a few exceptions at the beginning of chapter 2—for the same reason and because essentially no explanation is given for the change. In the Bible, that change is made in Acts 13:9, which speaks of "Saul, who also is called Paul." In earlier chapters of Acts, he is called Saul, but ever after that he is referred to as Paul. I'll use Paul whenever possible throughout to keep it simple.

field. For further information, don't hesitate to contact me here at the Jerusalem office.

Grace to you, and peace,
Peter

In the twenty years since I wrote that letter for Peter, I've continued to study the life of Paul, and if I were writing the letter today, it would be a bit different.

In particular, as I've made a careful study of the letters Paul himself wrote, I've come to a new appreciation of the man, his gifts, his humility, and, in particular, his ability to learn from his mistakes and to grow under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding Paul better has helped me in my own personal spiritual development. And I'm confident that if you'll join me in journeying with Paul in the coming chapters, you'll find yourself blessed and growing, as well.

We'll be looking at evidence from two main sources: the book of Acts and Paul's letters to churches and individuals. We'll also bring in a bit of historical background. The timeline chart on page 9, and the map printed on page 10 will help you follow Paul and the events in his life as we discuss them.

One more thing before we hit the road with Paul. People often wonder what he looked like. We get no physical description of him in the Bible. The only attempt at describing him comes from a fictional work called "The Acts of Paul," which was written more than a century after his death. It describes him as "a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now, he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel."[3]

While that description is seen by some as so uncomplimentary that it must be true, recent studies have revealed that the description is actually similar to several descriptions of ancient heroes and leaders. Smallness of

stature was considered a positive trait in Paul's day, because it was associated with active people who could really get things done. The hooked nose and meeting eyebrows were also considered positive characteristics for a strong leader.

So, whether we credit this description with any validity or not, at least we know that by the end of the second century A.D., Paul was regarded as an active and effective leader.

So now, let's join him in his spiritual and physical journeys. On our journey, we will discover answers to the question I posed at the beginning of this chapter and to other questions as well, questions such as:

Does being a spiritual person instantly transform your character?

If people are led by the Spirit, do they always "get it right"?

If so, why did things go so dreadfully wrong for Paul in the church at Corinth?

What did Paul learn through his experiences of getting it right and getting it wrong?

And what can the lessons he learned teach us as we seek to fulfill the mission he began, when he set out to carry the gospel to all the world?

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1. Donald Harman Akenson, *Saint Saul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.
2. Ibid.
3. John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 39; citing *Acts of Paul* 3.3 in E. Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha,* trans. and ed. R. M. Wilson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 2:354.