

Paul in Acts and the Pauline Letters (from Stephen Harris, *Understanding the Bible*)

- Paul creates a “gentile Jesus movement” very different from James’s Jewish Jesus movement
- Narrative of Paul’s life told in Acts, which is written by the author of Luke’s gospel
 - Conversion on the road to Damascus. Name changed from Hebrew name to Roman name
 - 1st missionary Journey: Paul and Barnabus evangelize all over Asia Minor (Modern Turkey)
 - Jerusalem Conference: between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Debate over Torah-keeping, dietary laws, and circumcision. Paul portrays James, Jesus’s brother, as conservative, but Luke shows him to be moderate and orchestrating a compromise. Paul’s contrasting description of Jerusalem Conference is in Galatians; Paul refuses dietary restrictions and says unclean meat is “undefiling.”
 - Luke describes Paul as a wannabee, trying to get in with apostles and being rebuffed. Paul denies he attempted to win over apostles; represents himself as separate but equal.
 - 2nd missionary Journey to Greece: Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth.
 - 3rd missionary tour: Asia Minor and Greek; goes to Ephesus.
 - Arrest in Jerusalem by Jews (Sadducees) and imprisonment in Caesarea for two years. This section of Acts culminates in a courtroom scene that includes a heavenly vision of the risen Jesus.
 - Final section of Acts: Sea voyage, shipwreck, and final arrival in Rome as a prisoner under “house arrest” who continues to evangelize to Roman population.
 - Acts ends with a Lukan theme: Jesus’s message will be preached to the gentiles, where the church lies, and “to the ends of the earth” (that is, Rome). Luke omits Paul’s and James’s eventual execution in Rome.
- Most of Paul’s letters written to congregations after he leaves them; they “represent the new religion’s first—and most lasting—attempt to interpret the meaning of Jesus’s sacrificial death and its meaning.” Outlines a theology of faith instead of works (Torah) that created tension with Jews but was at heart of gentile Christianity.
- Only 7 letters are thought to be genuine: 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, Philippians.
 - 2 Thessalonians and Colossians are doubtful
 - Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews are almost definitely not by Paul
- Thessalonians is first (50 CE) and Romans (60 CE).
- Letters use Hellenistic form:
 - prescript, which contains greeting, writer, read, invoking blessing of God. Includes praise and thanks. Philippians is warm; Galatians is harsh.
 - Principle message
 - Includes additional greetings. Greetings from others. Paul included a benediction.
- Letters dictated to scribe, may have added a few words in his own hand. Scribe usually did not record word for word. (Romans 16:21-22). Usually written to deal with an emergency or specific crisis, or to correct a problem that has arisen. We can see all letters as responses to specific misconduct, except perhaps Romans.
- Major assumptions of letters:
 - Authority is based on “apokalypsos” or private revelation from God. Paul says he got his understanding of Christ directly and not from apostolic authority (contradicts Luke-Acts).
 - Christ exists in Macrocosm (great world of God’s spiritual domain) and microcosm (human consciousness). Jesus has both an objective (transcendent) and a subjective (immanent) reality. Transcendent Jesus will soon come to judge the faithful; subjective Jesus dwells within believer.
 - Mystical: union with unseen reality. Shares Enoch’s aspiration of oneness with the divine and his view of the end-time.
 - Views of marriage, divorce, slavery, celibacy, and human behavior are shaped by expectation of an imminent Final Judgment. Regards his generation as the last.
 - Jesus is (a) God’s revealed Wisdom (Logos); (b) the divine Lord through whom God rules; (c) the means by which spirit dwells in believers. Paul has no knowledge of (?) or interest in Jesus’s earthly ministry or teachings.
 - Jesus as the opposite of Adam—an image of our eternal life, not mortality.
 - Faithful are Christ’s body.
 - Christ as liberator from Sin, Torah, and Death (which he equates). Christ is enough; now, neither angels nor Torah help us achieve salvation.
 - We are justified by faith, not works (i.e. Law).

Romans

- Latest of the letters. Unlike most others, addressed to strangers. Letter to precede his missionary trip. Paul was a Pharisee from Tarsus (urban, largely gentile community). Education included classical Greek concepts of logic, stoicism; exposure to Greek literature and popular “mystery” concepts such as resurrection and union with the divine.
- Epistolary form (prescript, body, postscript)
 - Metaphors of body
 - Syllogisms
 - Use of various “persons” (point of view)
 - Context: circumcision debate, imminent “Day of Wrath”
- Faith vs. works—cf. James 2 (Use of Genesis 15:6)
- Concept of sin and grace
- Literary allusion
- Attitudes toward sex and homosexuality
- Attitudes toward women

Theological Concepts

- Sin (verb) **Hamartano**
- Sin (noun) **Hamartia:**
 - to be without a share in
 - to miss the mark
 - to err, be mistaken
 - to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, to do or go wrong
 - CF; OT Sin **Chatta’ah:** sin
 - condition of sin, guilt of sin
 - punishment for sin
 - sin-offering
 - purification from sins of ceremonial uncleanness
- Law: **Nomos**
 - anything established, anything received by usage, a custom, a law, a command
- Without the Law: **Anomos**
 - without the law, without the knowledge of the law
 - to sin in ignorance of the Mosaic law
 - live ignorant of law and discipline
- Faith: **Pistis:** conviction of the truth of anything, belief
- Works: **Ergon.**
 - business, employment, that which any one is occupied
 - that which one undertakes to do, enterprise, undertaking
 - any product whatever, any thing accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind
 - an act, deed, thing done: the idea of working is emphasized in opp. to that which is less than work
- Grace: **Charis:** grace
 - that which affords joy, pleasure, delight, sweetness, charm, loveliness: grace of speech
 - good will, loving-kindness, favor
- Free, Free Gift: **Charisma:** a favor with which one receives without any merit of his own
- Flesh: **Sarx:** flesh (the soft substance of the living body, which covers the bones and is permeated with blood) of both man and beasts
 - Member: **Melos** a member, limb: a member of the human body
- Spirit: **Pneuma**
 - the spirit, i.e. the vital principal by which the body is animated
 - the rational spirit, the power by which the human being feels, thinks, decides
 - the soul
- Holy Spirit: **Hagios Pneuma**