

The Apostle Paul and the First Urban Christians

February 9, 2006

- An age of expectations (from last time)
- Sources: Acts and the Letters
- Geographical Range
- "The first urban Christians"

Next time: Death, resurrection, and "the Law"

An age of expectations?

- Virgil's Fourth Eclogue: heralding a glorious age
- Third Sybilline Oracle // 350–362
- Decree of the Asian League (Priene ca. 9 BCE)

Third Sybilline Oracle // 350–362

However much wealth Rome received from tribute-bearing Asia, Asia will receive three times that much again from Rome, and will repay her deadly arrogance to her Often the mistress will cut your delicate hair and, dispensing justice, will cast you from heaven to earth but from earth will again raise you up to heaven, because mortals are involved in a wretched and unjust life.



Decree of the Asian League (Priene ca. 9 BCE)

Whereas providence that orders all our lives has in her beneficence granted to us and those who will come after us [a savior] who has made war to cease and who shall put everything [in peaceful order]; and whereas Caesar, [when he was manifest], transcended the expectations of [all ...] with the result that the birthday of our God signaled the beginning of good news (*euangelion*) for the world because of him the Greeks in Asia decreed that the new year begin for all the cities on September 23 [=Augustus' birthday]



Sources: Acts and the Letters

- Acts of the Apostles
- Letters of Paul
- Paul vs. Acts: Why prefer Paul?



Acts of the Apostles

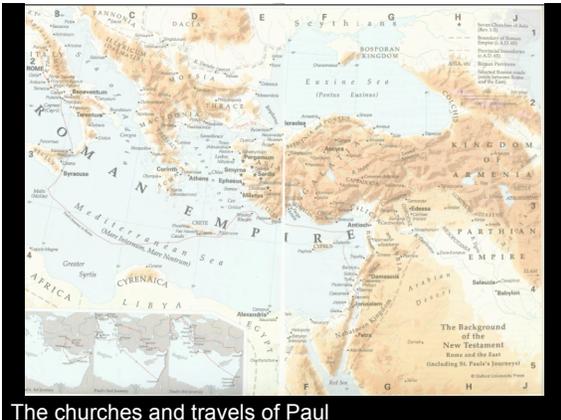
- Continuation of Gospel of Luke
- Source for most **chronology**
- Special authority of (and basic agreement between) Peter and Paul

Letters of Paul

- Letters widely thought "genuine":
Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Philemon
- Letters widely thought "deutero-Pauline":
1&2 Timothy and Titus (Pastoral Epistles)
- Debated:
Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thesalonians
- Criteria:
Language, theology, argument

Paul vs. Acts: Why prefer Paul?

- In Acts (vs. Paul)
 - Apocalyptic, eschatology lacking or diminished
 - Agreement on law for gentiles vs. Jews
 - Paul's ability to echo classical poets
- Preference for Paul
 - Own words
 - Responding to specific contexts
 - Richer insight into conflicts and arguments. E.g.:
 - Galatians 1:6, 2:11
 - Social diversity, hierarchy in 1 Corinthians



The First Urban Christians (i): Alternative social contract

- “Food offered to idols”: rejecting the public cults as impure
- Taking “brothers” to court: rejecting the *polis* as assurer of equity and justice (“do you not know that **we** are to judge angels?” 1 Cor 6:3)
- Stance on marriage: rejection of reproduction, building an *oikos*, as a citizen’s duty

The First Urban Christians (ii): Waiting for the *parousia*

- *parousia*, arrival (Latin *adventus*), as of an emperor.
- Christians living in the eschatological age
- Readiness, refraining from *porneia* (1 Thess)
- Optimally, celibacy; alternatively considered marriage (1 Cor)

The First Urban Christians (iii): Upending social conventions

In Christ there is neither “Jew nor Greek, ... slave nor free, ... male nor female” (Gal. 3:28), **yet**:

- Philemon’s Christianity does not make him less a slave of his Christian master Onesimus (Philem.)
- Jewish claims on practice, and a special place for Jews in God’s plan (a “mystery”) play a strong role in Paul’s teaching (Gal; Rom)
- Precisely the standing of women in the community needs adjudication (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:2-14)
