



Letters & Epistles

Reading the Bible Again for the First Time

The Bible as Sacrament

- The lens through which we may experience the living, breathing, active, present God - believing in God rather than believing in the lens.

“To be Christian is to live within the Christian tradition as a sacrament and let it do its transforming work within and among us.”

The Creation Stories

- God created the heavens and the earth —
Historical origination or ontological dependence?

*“God is the source of everything that is
in every moment of time.”*

- God’s creation & creativity continue to invite relationship and connection and care, and are grounded in the sacred

The Hebrew Bible

- The Pentateuch
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- The Prophets
Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Lamentations, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,
and the minor prophets
- Israel’s Wisdom
Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel,
Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles



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- **Attributed to Paul**
Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians,
1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
- **Attributed to other authors**
Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 & 3 John, Jude

Letters Attributed to Paul

- Strong Consensus of Paul's Authorship
1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Philemon, Philippians, Romans
- Disputed Authorship (Majority Suggest Paul)
Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians
- Likely Not from Paul
1 & 2 Timothy, Titus

Saul's Early Life

- Born in Tarsus (south coast of Asia Minor)
- Educated in the Jewish Tradition (claimed tribe of Benjamin)
- As a young man, went to Jerusalem to study under Gamaliel and was present at the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts)
- Referred to himself as a Pharisee
- Persecuted Christians
- Trade: Tentmaker

On the Damascus Road

- Told in Acts 9, 22, 26;
Referenced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 and Galatians 1
- Roughly 35CE
- Paul had a Vision (companions didn't share his experience)
Acts 9: others heard a voice but saw no-one
Acts 22: others saw the light but heard nothing
- His conversion was his "call story" to the rest of his life-work

Paul's Travels

- Spent 3 years in "Arabia" (present-day Jordan)
- Spent the 40s as a missionary in Asian Minor (incl. Galatia)
- Around 50CE he left for Europe
- Spent the 50s crossing back and forth between
Greece and Asia Minor (and wrote most of his letters)
- Near end of 50s, returned to Jerusalem

Paul Imprisoned

- Arrested in Jerusalem for bringing a Gentile into part of the Temple forbidden to Gentiles
- Imprisoned in Caesarea for 2 years
- Transported to Rome about 60CE
- House Arrest for 2 years
- Biblical account ends
According to early & reliable accounts, he was executed in Rome under Nero in the 60s

Paul's Letters

- Represented him in his absence
- Only half of a conversation
- Cannot always take these letters at the summary of his message

Paul's Message

- Jesus is the Messiah
Proclaimed Jesus as Lord or *kyrios*
- Life "in Christ" is different
Different from life "in Adam"
Justified by God's grace as a gift through Christ made effective in faith
- Jesus was crucified
An indictment of the system under which Christ died
Contrasts wisdom of God vs. wisdom of humanity
Revelation of God's love
Path to transformation

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Regardless of authorship, the purpose of these letters and epistles is to inspire and to challenge

**Shallow understanding
from people of good
will is more frustrating
than absolute
misunderstanding from
people of ill will.
Lukewarm acceptance
is much more
bewildering than
outright rejection.**



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