

St. Paul's Letters

Apart from Acts, the letters of St. Paul to the churches he had founded or with which he was familiar are the other main source for our knowledge of his apostolic work and of course, for the Apostle himself. These letters also make up for the compressed text of Acts and thus help us to understand what is missing about his journeys. Written to his followers at virtually the same time as events with which they deal, they are the earliest works of the New Testament.

St. Paul's surviving writings constitute a small corpus of nine letters addressed to particular churches, one private letter, and three letters to Timothy and Titus, known as the "pastoral letters". Three of these letters were written to communities in Anatolia: Galatians, Colossians and Ephesians; whilst scholarly opinion is divided as to whether the latter two are genuine, Galatians is indisputably so. Acts and the letters seem to be independent of each other, even though the letters were in existence when Acts was written. St. Paul seems to have regarded himself as responsible, in addition to the churches he established, for "all the churches" he knew (2 Cor 11:28) and corresponded with them. He may have also visited most of them once or more. This was a period during which, except for the military postal service, people had to rely on other people going in the direction of their letters to correspond with others. In the social and commercial world of the first century, which did the Roman, peace there seems to have been no shortage of such people, make possible. St. Paul wrote (dictated) his letters in Koine or common language, the Hellenistic Greek of his day. This was the lingua franca, the international language needed by any man in public life or one traveling or writing, spread by the armies of Alexander and the Hellenistic kingdoms, which succeeded his empire. However, St. Paul's Greek was not as distinguished as that of St Luke, the author of Acts and in accordance with the practice of the time professional scribes composed his letters. St. Paul's words that there was "a letter allegedly from us" (2 Thes 2:2) in circulation shows that even his letters were forged. This is the reason that as he mentioned (2 Thes 3:17) he signed his letters by his "own hand". His drawing attention to the extra large script (Gal 6:11) to show the authenticity of his letter, was mistakenly interpreted as his having bad eyesight.

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