

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS – Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Year AD	Book of Acts
30	1:1-5:42
31	6:1-7
32	6:8-15, 7:1-60
32	8:1-40
33	9:1-21
36	9:22-31
36-43	9:31
38	9:32-43
41	10:1-11:18
42	11:19-24
43	11:25-28a
44	11:28b-12:25
45	13:1-14:21a
46	14:21b-28
49	15:1-35
51	15:36-17:15
52	17:16-18:11
53	18:12-17
54	18:18-19:8
55	19:9-12
56	19:13-20
57	19:21-20:2a
58	20:2b-24:26
60	24:27-28:9
61	28:10-29
63	28:30-31
64	Nero burned Rome

Since the 4th century the prevailing opinion has been that after 2 years under house arrest in Rome and after giving the gospel to many (Acts 28:30-31), Paul was freed. This study reached the same conclusion – as did Ussher (*Annals*, 2003 edition, p. 871, ¶6915). However, the careful student of Scripture will note that we differ from Ussher’s 63 AD date for Paul’s first incarceration at Rome and place it as AD 61. This is because the two year imprisonment from Ussher’s 63 AD date places Paul’s release in AD 65, which is a year *after* Nero’s AD 64 burning of Rome for which he blamed the Christians (*Annals*, 2003 edition, p. 869, ¶6898-6900). For this author, it is highly too illogical and unreasonable to conclude that Nero would have released one of the leading spokesmen for Christ *after* the great fire incident. Thus, we find it more reasonable that Paul was released prior to the conflagration – in AD 63.

Timothy, who was being kept as a prisoner with Paul during his first incarceration in Rome, was freed (Heb. 13:23). This surely occurred before the city burned and the persecution of the Christians began, else Nero would have had him killed. After Timothy’s release, Paul promised that if he returned to him soon, they both would return to the Jerusalem area (Heb. 13:23-24).

Reasons Paul was released in 63 AD with Nero on the throne since 54: (1) it was God’s plan for Paul’s life, (2) he was a Roman citizen, (3) Julius, the centurion who was in charge of bringing the apostle to Rome and who witnessed the miracles on Malta, undoubtedly gave an excellent account of

him upon delivering Paul to Caesar, & (4) the report from Festus, which would have laid no fault whatsoever against Paul concerning the Empire. It should have also stated that he would have set Paul free had not he, being a Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar because the Jewish leaders wanted to kill him over religious differences (Acts 25:23-27, 26:31-32).

From here, the probable course of events is that upon his release, Paul apparently went to Asia (a province in western Turkey) and stayed for a time with Philemon at Colossae (Phile. 22). It is possible that afterward Paul fulfilled his stated intention and hope of going to Spain (Rom. 15:24 & 28).

Indeed, Eusebius (AD 325) did report that it was a common tradition in his day that Paul made his defense at Rome, was released, resumed his journeys, that he was brought back to Rome where he was slain (*Ecclesiastical History*, Loeb: Vol. 1, Bk. 2, p. 165-167). In addition, Clement of Rome (c. AD 95-96) implied that Paul did go to Spain (as he had intended and so said c. AD 60, cp. Rom. 15:24, 28), when he wrote that in the apostle's journeys "he reached the limit of the west" (1 Clement 5).

However, the most telling factor in favor of two Roman imprisonments with a period of freedom in between is that Scripture demands it. First, Paul's Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus) allude to events which do not fit within the Book of Acts and mention individuals not found in his missionary journeys. Second, and decisive, is the leaving of Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). This could not have happened during Paul's last journey to Jerusalem, for Trophimus was not left then (Acts 20:4, 21:29). Nor could it have been on Paul's journey to appear before Caesar at Rome, for then he sailed past Miletus and did not stopover.

Thus, we logically discern that the Pastorals do not fit *within* the Book of Acts because they are about a period *after* the end of Acts. Paul must have been released (for lack of evidence), followed by a short interval of ministry and travel, during which he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Then Trophimus was left sick at Miletus, a second incarceration took place, Paul penned 2nd Timothy, and was executed in AD 67.

To Spain or not, Paul came to the isle of Crete, preached the gospel, left Titus behind to set in order the things that were lacking and to ordain elders in every city (Tit. 1:5). Paul came to Ephesus, and when he went on to Macedonia he left Timothy behind to oversee the Ephesian church in his absence (1 Tim. 1:3, 3:14-15). In Macedonia, he would surely have stayed with the Philippians, as he had previously promised (Phil. 1:25-26, 2:24) and probably wrote the first letter to Timothy from that city.

Shortly after this, Paul wrote a letter to Titus directing him that when either Artemas or Tychicus were sent to relieve him on Crete, Titus would come to Paul at Nicopolis (on the Adriatic coast of Greece and famous for the 31 BC battle of Actium), for he planned to winter there (Tit. 3:12-13, AD 65). Winter being over (66 AD), Paul rejoined Timothy and went to Troas. There he left his cloak, books, and parchments behind (2 Tim. 4:13; because he fled to avoid arrest or was arrested there?). Paul left (or had already left?) Trophimus sick at Miletus (1 Tim. 3:14; 2 Tim. 4:13, 20).

Paul was arrested in 66 and once again brought to Rome. Unlike the house arrest at his first imprisonment (Acts 28:15-16), this time he was placed in a Roman prison, chained, and treated as a criminal (2 Tim. 2:9). At a preliminary hearing, Paul successfully defended himself "out of the mouth of the lion" but was not released by Nero (2 Tim 4:16-17). He was sent back to prison to await an official trial. He seems not to have believed this would come up until after the coming winter (2 Tim. 4:13 & 21).

On the 29th day of June AD 67 Paul was beheaded at Rome, as the records of both the eastern and western church confirm. Chrysostom affirmed that the day of Paul's death was known with greater certainty than the death of Alexander the Great himself (Chrysostom, II Corinthians, *Homily* Loeb Classical Library: Book 12, p. 402).

In a letter to the Romans, Dionysius the bishop of the Corinthians affirmed that Peter also suffered martyrdom the same time as Paul (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Loeb: Vol. 1, Bk. 2, pp. 181 & 183).