2

New Testament Chronology

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Biblical scholars have long recognized the value of knowing the history and chronology of the NT for understanding its texts, but they also recognize the complexity of establishing reliable dates for the books and events mentioned in the NT. Outside of broad agreement that most if not all of it originated in the first century, scholars continue to debate the precise time when the NT documents were produced.

Establishing a reliable NT chronology is not an exact science, and there are many variables involved and many difficult choices to make. In antiquity, calendars and various chronologies were often rooted in the years of a king's rule or the tenure of governors, local rulers, or high priests—as we see in the NT itself (cf. Luke 1:5; 2:1–2; 3:1–2).

Dating NT events involves examining not only the NT writings but also a number of nonbiblical writings, whether Jewish, Christian, or Greco-Roman—writings roughly contemporary with the NT. For example, some persons mentioned in the NT, such as rulers and leading biblical personalities, are also mentioned elsewhere. An important resource for dating many NT events and persons was produced in the last quarter of the first century by Josephus, a Jewish general during the Jewish war against Rome who wrote *Jewish Antiquities* and *Jewish War*, as well as *The Life* and *Against Apion*. A second primary resource is Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History* (fourth century), the first widely recognized reliable history of early Christianity, which shows considerable awareness of ancient sources and events from

the beginning of Christianity and its subsequent development. Along with these, those seeking to date events mentioned in the NT will find helpful the writings of Dio Cassius, Pausanius, Pliny, Suetonius, and Tacitus. Along with these and other classical writings, the context of early Christianity is also considerably clarified by examining the writings of Philo, the DSS (or more precisely, the Discoveries in the Judean Desert [DJD]), rabbinic writings (including the Mishnah, the Tosefta, the two Talmuds [Babylonian and Palestinian]), and the Jewish targumim (expanded Aramaic translations/interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures), as well as the early church fathers, especially Clement of Rome, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen.

Although students will often find these and other ancient sources indispensable in establishing both the chronology and the context of early Christianity, we should not be surprised to find different dates for the same events in the ancient sources and, periodically, different dates for the same event in the same author. This can be seen in Josephus's dating of Herod's temple; in one place he writes that it was begun in the eighteenth year of Herod's reign (*Ant.* 15.380), while in another he refers to his fifteenth year (*J.W.* 1.401). Although we would be at a considerable loss without the writings of Josephus, we should read him with caution, as we do all ancient historians.

Dating the New Testament

Some of the more important NT dates have to do with the stories of Jesus and Paul, but other important and related persons and events are also significant in establishing a NT chronology. Often scholars can come within a year or two of the actual date by the use of nonbiblical sources. For example, the reference to the Roman emperor Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome—which consequently led Aquila and Priscilla to come to Corinth, where they met Paul (Acts 18:1–4)—has several nonbiblical references that allow us to date the event to around AD 48–49. In another instance, because of the discovery of an ancient inscription at Delphi, north of the Corinthian Sea in ancient Greece, we know that Gallio, the governor of the province of Achaia, resided there; the inscription even allows us to say with relative precision when he was governor. The book of Acts refers to him in conjunction with Paul's ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:12–17), and this allows us to date with some assurance when Paul was in Corinth. We will discuss both of these items below.

Biblical scholars regularly acknowledge that the dates they set forth for the writing of the NT books as well as the events to which they bear witness are at best approximate, even if some dates are more likely than others. When some ancient dates are relatively well established, scholars use them as benchmarks to produce a chronology of the NT era. For instance, scholars continue to debate the dating of the NT Gospels, though there is general agreement they were written in the last half of the first century.

Some of the More Established Dates

Some of the more important dates that are relatively certain relate to events pertaining to Jesus and Paul. The following examples are debated among scholars, but an assessment of them allows readers to draw responsible conclusions. They focus mostly on Jesus and Paul, but also on actions of others mentioned in the NT—for example, Claudius, Felix, and Festus. These examples will make clear the importance of using nonbiblical sources to date many NT events.

The Birth of Jesus

According to Matt. 2:1–21, Jesus' birth took place during the reign of Herod the Great. Josephus chronicled Herod's life and concluded that Herod the Great died shortly before April (or March) 12, 4 BC (*Ant.* 17.190–91; *J.W.* 1.665). Since Josephus says that Herod died in April of 4 BC, and if Jesus was born during Herod's reign, then he was born at least before April of 4 BC. If this is the case, then the traditional dating of the birth of Jesus in the year 0 (a year that does not even exist in traditional calendars) needs to be reconsidered. What complicates things is that Jesus' birth was not widely celebrated by Christians until the fourth century, so the keeping of such records was not high on the early church's agenda. If Herod, out of fear of a rival king in Israel, sought to kill all the male children in and around Bethlehem under the age of two (Matt. 2:16), and if he died in 4 BC, then it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus was born sometime around 6–4 BC.

Along with this, Luke dates the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry, Jesus' baptism, and the initiation of Jesus' ministry in the fifteenth year of Emperor Tiberius's reign (3:1–2). The first two years of Tiberius's reign (AD 12–14) reportedly overlapped with the last two years of the reign of Caesar Augustus (Octavius), who died in AD 14. By adding fifteen years to that time, to either AD 12 or 14, we arrive at a date of sometime around AD 27–29 for Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry. Since Luke 3:23 indicates that Jesus was baptized when *about* age 30, we can go backward to *around* 4–3 BC for Jesus' birth.

Further, John's Gospel has a few references that allow us to conclude that the previous dating is likely. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). Jesus' critics respond that the temple has been in the making for forty-six years and question how Jesus could raise it up in three days (2:20). If the temple has been in the making for forty-six years, and if Josephus is correct in saying that construction of the temple began in the eighteenth year of Herod's reign (namely, in 20–19 BC; see *Ant.* 15.354, 380; cf. *J.W.* 1.401), then Jesus, at about the age of thirty during this encounter with his critics (AD 26), would have been born at least around 4 BC (for further discussion, see Finegan, *Chronology*, 346–49). It is true that Josephus offers an alternative date for the beginning of the construction of the temple—during the fifteenth year of Herod's reign (ca. 23 BC; see *Ant.* 15.354)—but the later date is more likely. If

we add John's forty-six years to 19 or 20 BC, then Jesus' ministry began around AD 26 and possibly as late as 27.

Some references are unclear or too confusing to be used for dating Jesus' birth or the onset of his ministry—for example, Matthew's reference to the star in Bethlehem that identifies the location of Jesus after his birth (2:1–12) and the reference to Jesus' age in John 8:57. Both are vague and not easily aligned with the biblical story. We should also note that the dating of Jesus' birth during a registration or census for taxation ordered by Quirinius (Luke 2:1–2) is problematic since there is a significant difference between the dating of this census in nonbiblical sources and Luke's dating of this census. For example, Tacitus claims that Quirinius began his rule *after* Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, was deposed in AD 6 (*Ann*. 6.41). This is similar to Josephus (*Ant*. 18.1–10; *J.W.* 7.253), who agrees with Tacitus that Quirinius ordered the census in AD 6–7 and that it led to a Jewish revolt (mentioned in Acts 5:37). Support for a double reign of Quirinius, namely, an additional one in 7–6 BC, is not supported by the external evidence. Nonbiblical sources do not support Luke's report of a census during Herod the Great's reign and during the rule of Quirinius of Syria, so some caution is in order. Stanley Porter has noted that there is separate evidence that a census was taken in Egypt in 4 BC, and he suggests that a similar one may have been taken in Judea. Roman censuses for tax purposes normally occurred every fourteen years, but some recently discovered evidence indicates that in Egypt the censuses were taken every seven years, and they can be established for the years 11–10 BC, 4–3 BC, AD 4–5, and AD 11–12. This does not mean that the same pattern prevailed in Judea, but it is suggestive (Porter, "Chronology," 202).[1]

In terms of the specific day of Jesus' birth, the familiar date of December 25 may be based on an ancient belief that the conception of Jesus took place on March 25, and that his birth took place precisely nine months later, namely, December 25 (see Finegan, *Chronology*, 320–28). There was considerable debate in the early churches over whether Jesus was born on December 25 or January 6. The later date was celebrated by Christians in the East as the day of Jesus' birth, but now most Christians celebrate the appearance of the magi or wise men coming from the East to visit Jesus in Bethlehem on January 6, twelve days after his birth. Matthew, however, suggests that Jesus may have been two years old at that time and in a house, not in a manger near animals (2:11); however, in Matthew it really is not clear how soon the magi came to the town where Jesus was born. The traditional "twelve days of Christmas" run, of course, between December 25 and January 6. Others have suggested that the celebration of the birth of Jesus on December 25 is rooted in the pagan celebration of the sun, the solstice, when the sun stands still briefly, after which days begin to lengthen. This is "Solis Invictus," the festival of the "Invincible Sun." Some early Christians thought that this parallel

1. Porter depends here on the work of R. S. Bagnall and B. W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Mal. 4:2: "But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings."

There is no mention of birth celebrations of Jesus by earlier Christian writers such as Irenaeus (ca. 130–200) or Tertullian (ca. 160–225).[2] Origen of Alexandria (ca. 165–264) even mocks Roman celebrations of birth anniversaries, dismissing them as "pagan" practices—a strong indication that Jesus' birth was not marked with similar festivities at that place and time (*Hom. Lev.* 8). Apparently, Christmas was not widely celebrated before the fourth century.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 200) made reference to the date when Jesus was born, claiming that several different days had been proposed by various Christian groups, but he does not mention December 25. He writes:

> There are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the twenty-eighth year of Augustus, and in the twenty-fifth day of [the Egyptian month] Pachon [May 20 in our calendar]. . . . And treating of His Passion, with very great accuracy, some say that it took place in the sixteenth year of Tiberius, on the twenty-fifth of Phamenoth [March 21]; and others on the twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi [April 21] and others say that on the nineteenth of Pharmuthi [April 15] the Savior suffered. Further, others say that He was born on the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi [April 20 or 21]. (Clement, *Strom.* 1.21; *ANF* 2:133)

The Ministry of Jesus

All four Gospels agree that Jesus began his ministry during John the Baptist's ministry, of which Luke writes:

> In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod [Antipas] was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. (Luke 3:1–2)

The date of the fifteenth year of the rule of Tiberius is roughly AD 26–27 (28–29 if his sole regency, that is, without the coregency with Caesar Augustus, is in mind). This date is confirmed by Josephus, who discusses Jesus' ministry during the time when Pilate was procurator of Judea (*Ant.* 18.63–64); although Josephus's text was likely later expanded in order to clarify Jesus' messiahship for a Christian audience, the original text almost certainly contained information about Jesus, and this provides an important, independent witness to the presence of Jesus as a teacher and miracle worker during the days of Pontius Pilate, as well as confirmation that his followers continued on even in the generation of Josephus.

2. For much of the content in this section, see Andrew McGowan, "How December 25 Became Christmas," *BAR Magazine*, http://www.bib-arch.org/e-features/christmas.asp#top.

The length of Jesus' ministry is often based on the number of Passovers mentioned in the Gospels. Each of the Synoptic Gospels refers to a single Passover (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:1; Luke 22:1) during Jesus' ministry, but the Gospel of John refers to three (2:13, 23; 5:1 [possibly]; 6:4; 11:55). Christians have generally followed John here, but some scholars suggest that Jesus' tenure of ministry was somewhere between two and three years. Long ago, Ethelbert Stauffer claimed that the stories of John could not be fitted into the timeframe of the Synoptic Gospels, but that the Synoptic Gospels could easily be incorporated into John's.[3] If this is correct, then his ministry may have begun sometime between 26 (at the earliest) and 28 and lasted at least two and possibly slightly more than three years, that is, until around AD 29–31.

The Death of Jesus

Each of the four canonical Gospels provides detailed information about the time of Jesus' death, and all agree that his death took place on a Friday (Matt. 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:31, 42). According to John, Jesus was crucified just as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. This would have occurred on the fourteenth of the Hebrew month of Nisan, just before the Jewish holiday that began at sundown (considered the beginning of the fifteenth day; in the Hebrew calendar, days both conclude and begin at sundown). In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, however, the Last Supper is held *after* sundown, on the beginning of the fifteenth (Matt. 27:62; Mark 14:12; Luke 23:54), unlike John, who places it the day before the Passover (19:14). All agree that Jesus was crucified the next morning, that is, on the fifteenth. All four Gospels place Jesus' death just prior to Passover and coordinate this event with the rules of Pilate as governor of Judea and Caiaphas as the high priest. Luke places Jesus' ministry in conjunction with John the Baptist, during the reign of Tiberius (Luke 3:1–2). Tiberius, as noted above, began his reign as the successor to Caesar Augustus (Octavian) during a two-year coregency in AD 10–12 or subsequently in AD 14. The fifteenth year would then be AD 25–27 or 29–30, and if Jesus had a two- to three-year ministry, then his death would likely be around AD 30–31.

The celebration of Easter, a much earlier development than the celebration of Jesus' birth, was simply the gradual Christian reinterpretation of the Passover in terms of Jesus' passion. Its observance could even be implied in the NT (1 Cor. 5:7–8: "For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival"); it was certainly a distinctively Christian feast by the mid-second century, when an apocryphal text, *Epistle of the Apostles* (*Epistula Apostolorum*) 15, says that Jesus instructed his disciples as follows: "And you therefore celebrate the remembrance of my death, which is the Passover."[4]

3. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 7; this comment is found in Finegan, *Chronology*, 351.

4. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 565.

The Death of Herod Agrippa I

According to the Acts of the Apostles, Herod Agrippa I executed James the apostle and imprisoned Peter (12:1–3), and then he died suddenly and painfully following his pompous display of self-aggrandizement (12:18–23). This same story is reported by Josephus with several similarities and a few variants in the details (*Ant*. 19.344–52; see also 18.195–200, 237, 252), but it is sufficiently close to conclude that the broad details of this event are the same in both sources. Agrippa I was a close friend of the emperor Caligula, who succeeded Tiberius, and Caligula appointed Agrippa ruler over the tetrarchy of Herod Antipas. After the death of Caligula, and because Agrippa helped Claudius succeed Caligula as emperor, Claudius, who ruled from AD 41 to 54, made Agrippa I king over Judea and Samaria as well as the rest of the territory that Herod the Great had ruled, including Galilee, Transjordan, and the Decapolis. Josephus tells of Agrippa I's violent and painful death at the age of 54 after having ruled over all the territory of Israel from AD 41 to 44. Josephus dates this event at the time of the festival of dedication that was begun earlier by Herod the Great (*Ant*. 16.136–41) and in the year AD 44. Later Eusebius tells the story of Agrippa's death in Acts and brings it together with Josephus's account (*Eccl*. *Hist*. 2.10.1–10).

Paul's Conversion to Faith in Jesus Christ

Paul's conversion is more difficult to date with precision. However, Paul's brief chronology of his encounter with the risen Christ and early ministry (Gal. 1:11–2:10) gives us some dates with which to work. If one begins the chronology following his conversion (Gal. 1:18: "Then after three years"; 2:1: "Then after fourteen years"), then, combined with information obtained elsewhere, we can date Paul's conversion as early as 31 or as late as 36. In other words, we have either a total of fourteen years (if both dates mentioned are after his conversion) or seventeen (if they are sequential). Comparing Luke's reports (Acts 9:1–30; 22:3–16; 26:12–23) with Paul's own words, especially Gal. 1:13–2:10, Paul's encounter with the risen Christ (Gal. 1:16) gives us a time of AD 31–36. If Paul's visit to Jerusalem after his encounter on the Damascus road is the same as that mentioned in Acts 9:26–30, and the fourteen years came before the council recounted in Acts 15 (which was held almost assuredly sometime in AD 48 or 49), we have an early conversion date. This presumes a "South Galatian" destination of Galatians.[5] If, however, Paul's letter was written *after* the conference recounted in Acts 15, or during his second missionary journey (a North Galatian destination; see Acts 15:36–41), then it is possible that his conversion was later, though not much later than AD 35–36.

5. This debate and the arguments in favor of each position are conveniently summarized in F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 5–10; and in more detail in Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Nashville: Nelson, 1990), lxiii–lxxii.

The Expulsion of Aquila and Priscilla from Rome

According to Acts 18:2, Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth from Rome following Claudius's edict expelling Jews from the city. Josephus describes this expulsion (*Ant*. 18.65, 80–84), and so does Tacitus (AD 55–120), who claims that the expulsion had to do with disputes over Jewish and Egyptian rites (*Ann*. 2.85). Suetonius (ca. 75–140) describes this event in his *Lives of the Caesars* but claims that the expulsion of Jews from Rome was because of problems among the Jews in the city over "Chrestus," a possible reference to Jesus, the Christ. He writes, "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus,[6] he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome" (*Claud*. 15.4; LCL). Dio Cassius (ca. 150–235) also describes this event in his *Roman History* (57.18.5). Because these other sources date this event essentially the same, we can reasonably place it with some confidence in AD 49, although some scholars place it in AD 41. This also fits well with Paul's coming to Corinth in mid to late AD 49 and his meeting with Priscilla and Aquila.

Paul's Appearance at Corinth before Gallio

According to Acts 18:12, Paul was brought before the proconsul Gallio, who was governor of Achaia and resided in Delphi. His visit to Corinth came during Paul's eighteen-month ministry there (Acts 18:11) and more precisely in the late spring of AD 51. Gallio was the older brother of the well-known poet Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 BC–AD 65; see Seneca's reference to Gallio in his *Epist. mor.* 104.1), and he is mentioned in several places in Roman writings. Gallio's full name was Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus, and Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) addresses him by that name (*Nat. Hist*. 31.31). Gallio is also mentioned in the now-famous first-century fragmented inscription discovered at Delphi in the province of Achaia, in Greece. It reads as follows:

> Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, Holder of the Tribunician Power for the twelfth time, Imperator for the twenty-sixth time, Father of the country, Counsel for the fifth time, and Censor to the city of the Delphians, greetings. For some time past I have been devoted to the city of the Delphians . . . and good will from the beginning; and I have ever observed the worshipping of the Pythian Apollo. . . . But as for the many current reports and those discords among the citizens, . . . just as Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and proconsul of Achaia, wrote. . . . Therefore I am granting that you continue to enjoy your former. . . .[7]

6. Many scholars have suggested that "Chrestus" is a corruption of the word "Christ," a word unfamiliar to Suetonius. F. F. Bruce (*History*, 268) observes, however, that the name "Chrestus" actually means "useful" and was a common name for slaves. The question is whether a slave name fits the context adequately.

7. Everett Ferguson has highlighted the most important parts of this fragmented inscription as follows: "Tiberius [Claudius] Caesar Augustus Germanicus . . . In his tribunician] power [year 12. Acclaimed emperor the 26th time, father of the country . . . [Lucius] Junius Gallio my friend and [pro]consul [of Achaia wrote] . . ." (*Backgrounds of Early Christianity* [3rd ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 585). The text is also conveniently found and discussed in Adolf

Gallio's governorship can be discerned by the twenty-sixth acclamation of the emperor. According to another inscription, the twenty-fourth acclamation took place in the eleventh year of the tribunate, that is, in the eleventh year of the reign of the emperor Claudius, January 25 of AD 51 to January 24 of AD 52 (see *CIL* 3:1977). By means of these inscriptions and others (see *BCH* 11.306–7; *CIL* 6:1256), the Gallio inscription has been dated between January 25 and August 1 of the year AD 51. Since a proconsul's term or governorship normally lasted one year (January 25 to the following January 24), this means that Gallio was governor of Achaia from AD 51 to 52, which overlapped Paul's eighteen-month ministry in Corinth, when he stood before Gallio at the *bēma* (or council seat) in Corinth (Acts 18:12). Because of the inscription found at Delphi, scholars have been able to date Paul's ministry at Corinth as having likely begun in late AD 49 and lasting to 51 or 52.[8] As a result, by adding or subtracting the time mentioned in Acts and in Paul's Letters regarding his ministry before, during, and after Corinth, we are now able to date the beginning of Paul's missionary journeys mentioned in Acts from roughly 48–49 to approximately 58, a period of some ten years. Using the Delphic inscription, we are able to suggest approximate dates for several events related to Paul's ministry, including both before and after Paul's visit to Corinth.

Felix and Festus

According to the book of Acts, after Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, he was taken to Caesarea, where he was imprisoned for two years (21:27–26:32). Paul's time there overlapped the changing of the procurators Felix and Festus, and he stood before both (23:23–26:32), as well as before Agrippa II (26:1–32). Both Felix and Festus are mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.* 20.137–38, 142–44, 182; *J.W.* 2.247, 252–54, 271) and subsequently also in Eusebius, who describes Paul's arrest and imprisonment at Caesarea under Felix and Festus (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.19.1–22.8). Josephus's account of these two procurators fits well within the story in Acts, and similarly, they are also mentioned and dated by Tacitus (*Hist.* 5.9; *Ann.* 12.54). Because of these nonbiblical sources, we can safely date Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea to roughly AD 55–57.

The Death of Paul

Since Acts does not mention the death of Paul, the major hero in the book, some biblical scholars conclude that the Acts account was written prior to Paul's death. Since Acts follows the Gospel of Luke (see Acts 1:1–2; cf. Luke 1:1–4) and at its closing (Acts 28:23–31) Paul was in custody in Rome for two years but with

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Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (2nd ed.; trans. W. E. Wilson; New York: Harper, 1927), 261–86; and Finegan, *Chronology*, 391–95.

8. For discussion, see Lee Martin McDonald, "Acts," in *Acts–Philemon* (ed. Craig A. Evans; vol. 2 of *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*; Colorado Springs: Victor, 2004), 126–27; also Finegan, *Chronology*, 391–94. Finegan places the beginning of Paul's ministry in Corinth in December of AD 49, after his second missionary journey began in the spring of 49 (Acts 15:36–41).

relative freedom to continue his witness, it is unlikely that the death of Paul (likely in 62–64, as we will see) had taken place. If Paul died before the book of Acts was completed, it is difficult to understand why the death of its primary hero is missing from the story. Luke had no trouble mentioning the deaths of Stephen and James, so why not Paul's if it had already happened?

Clement of Rome (ca. AD 90) tells us that, after Paul had witnessed before rulers and reached the "limits of the West," he passed from this world (*1 Clem.* 5.7). Having said this, there is no clear indication that Paul was released from Rome after his first imprisonment and that he journeyed on to Spain and perhaps Crete and elsewhere.

Tertullian, after mentioning the death of Peter in Rome, claims that in Rome Paul won "his crown [see 2 Tim. 4:8] in a death like John's" (John the Baptist was beheaded; *Prescript.* 36.3; *ANF* 3:260). Eusebius later says that the death of Peter and Paul took place during the reign of Nero, noting that "Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified, and the titles of Peter and Paul" were "given to the cemeteries there" (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.25.5; *NPNF*^{2} 1:129). Nero ruled from AD 54 to 68, and Eusebius claims that Nero's persecutions of Christians *began* in his eighth year (i.e., AD 62; see *Eccl. Hist.* 2.25.1; 2.22.1–8), so it is likely that the death of Paul took place sometime near AD 64 and no later than 68 (the year Nero was murdered).

The reference to Paul's "first defense," when no one stood with him (2 Tim. 4:16), suggests to some scholars that there was a second defense and that Paul was freed after the first defense for a time of ministry. Eusebius reports that Paul "spent two whole years" in Rome, was released with freedom to continue his ministry of preaching, but came a second time to Rome, whereupon he suffered martyrdom by Nero. Apparently citing 2 Tim. 4:16–17, Eusebius claims that the "first defense" came during his first imprisonment in Rome. Initially, Nero was apparently gentler with Christians, but according to Eusebius, at Paul's second defense Nero was "advanced toward reckless crime" and "the Apostles were attacked along with the rest" (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.22.1–8; *NPNF*^{2} 1:123–25). After describing the atrocities carried out by Nero against the Christians, Eusebius reports that "Paul was beheaded in Rome itself, and that Peter likewise was crucified," adding that both apostles were martyred at the same time (*Eccl. Hist.* 2.25.1–8; *NPNF*^{2} 1:129–30).

Those who claim that Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles have difficulty fitting them into the chronology presented in the book of Acts or harmonizing them with Paul's other epistles. The ecclesiology appears more advanced in them, and several of Paul's major themes (reconciliation, eschatology, Christology, and pneumatology) are largely missing from these books. If Paul wrote the Pastoral Epistles, and this is debated, it is best to place them after Paul's first imprisonment and before a second.

James, the Brother of Jesus

James the brother of Jesus is mentioned in several NT passages (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:55; Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 21:18; Gal. 1:19; 2:9; 1 Cor. 15:7; and, if he was

the author, in the Letter of James). After Peter's departure from Jerusalem (Acts 12:17), James became the leading spokesperson for the church (Acts 15:13–21; 21:18–26; Gal. 2:9–10). A NT letter attributed to him was written before AD 62–64, when, according to Josephus, Ananus the high priest in Jerusalem executed James (*Ant*. 20.197). Josephus says that James was well known and respected among the Jews, and he tells how Ananus, during the interim between the proconsuls Festus and Albinus in Judea in AD 62, "convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. [Ananus] accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned. Those inhabitants of the city who were strict in observance of the law were offended at this" (*Ant*. 20.197, 199–201 LCL; see *J.W.* 2.166). The priesthood of Ananus lasted only three months; because of his action against James, Agrippa II removed Ananus from office, because he had convened the Sanhedrin without permission. We can therefore reasonably date the death of James, the brother of Jesus, during the high priesthood of Ananus at AD 62. Eusebius retells this same story and adds additional details (*Eccl. Hist*. 2.23.20–24), but less convincing is his report of the Hegesippus account (*Eccl. Hist*. 4.22.4).

Conclusion

The chronology of NT events is complex, but some events and persons can be reasonably dated. We can also approximate dates for some of the NT materials. The chart at the end of this chapter contains some of the most reliable dates for the context and background of the NT, but there is still some uncertainty about some of the listed dates. The chart begins with Alexander the Great, who had a significant impact on the land of Israel for several centuries and whose cultural agenda influenced the social context of early Christianity.

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Testaments. Although some of the dates Finegan offers are contested, this volume gathers a wealth of information found nowhere else. This is a good place to start with any question related to biblical chronology.

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———. *Herod Antipas: A Contemporary of Jesus Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983. Those interested in the Herodian story and the dating of various events in Herod's life can find no better resource than this one. Though dated, it still contains a wealth of useful information.

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Chronology of Major Events Related to the Study of the New Testament

334 BC	Alexander the Great assumes power after the assassination of his father, Philip of Macedon, and begins his conquest of the Persian Empire.
332–330 BC	Alexander the Great conquers Palestine and initiates a long Greek occupation of the land.
323 BC	Alexander the Great dies. Control of the conquered lands, including the land of Israel, is divided among his successors (*diadochoi*). Israel is first under the control of Ptolemy, headquartered in Alexandria.
281–100 BC	Origins of the Septuagint (LXX), the translation of the Pentateuch into Greek (ca. 281 BC), and subsequently other OT and apocryphal books.
198–142 BC	Seleucid control of Palestine passes from the Ptolemies following the defeat of Ptolemy V at Pan (Banias) by Antiochus III (called "the Great").
169 BC	Antiochus IV (called Antiochus Epiphanes) invades Egypt; he ruthlessly subjugates Palestine, including attempting to force the Jews to offer sacrifices to pagan deities.
168–167 BC	Mattathias Maccabeus, a Jewish priest, leads Jews in their revolt against the Seleucid dynasty.
165 BC	Religious freedom is won by Judas Maccabeus, "the Hammer," who inherited from his father, Mattathias Maccabeus, leadership of the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid dynasty.
159–142 BC	Jonathan Maccabeus succeeds Judas Maccabeus as leader of the rebellion against the Greeks.

150–125 BC	Possible time of establishment of the Essene community at Qumran. The Pharisee party comes into prominence.
142 BC	Jewish political independence is secured from Seleucid dynasty under the leadership of Jonathan and Simon Maccabeus.
142–134 BC	Simon Maccabeus establishes the Hasmonean dynasty, which continues in leadership in Israel until the time of Herod the Great (37 BC). He is both king and high priest.
134–104 BC	John Hyrcanus I succeeds Simon and extends the borders of the nation beyond the limits of the territory controlled by Solomon.
104–103 BC	Aristobulus has short rule as Hasmonean king.
103–76 BC	Alexander Jannaeus rules the Jewish people.
76–67 BC	Salome Alexandra succeeds her husband as ruler of the Jewish people, but without the title and role of high priest.
67–63 BC	Aristobulus II rules the Jewish people until Rome invades the nation and the Hasmonean dynasty loses power.
63 BC	Pompey invades Jerusalem.
63–40 BC	Hyrcanus II rules a part of the Jewish people, but with little power.
63–43 BC	Cicero flourishes.
58–44 BC	Julius Caesar flourishes. In 44 BC he is assassinated by Brutus and Cassius.
42–41 BC	Octavian, along with Mark Antony, defeats Brutus and Cassius at Philippi in Macedonia. At this time, the land of Israel comes under the control of Mark Antony.
40 BC	The Parthians invade Syria and help the Hasmoneans struggle in Jerusalem to retain political power.
40–35 BC	Aristobulus III serves as high priest until Herod the Great has him drowned at Herod's spa in Jericho (see Josephus, *Ant.* 15.50–56 and *J.W.* 1.437). This ends the threat of Hasmonean leadership among the Jews.
37 BC	Herod the Great captures Jerusalem and begins his reign as king.
32–31 BC**	Octavian defeats Mark Antony at Actium and unites the Roman Empire. Octavian becomes Caesar Augustus. Herod offers allegiance to Octavian and survives as king over the Jews.
30 BC–AD 10	Two leading rabbis, Shammai and Hillel, emerge and have considerable influence on the religious life of Jews from the late first century BC onward.
20–19 BC	Herod begins rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem.
10 BC–AD 40	Philo of Alexandria flourishes.
6–4 BC**	Jesus of Nazareth is born.
4 BC**	Herod the Great dies in April, and his kingdom is divided among his surviving sons: Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Herod Philip.

4 BC–AD 39	Herod's sons (Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip) rule Palestine.
AD 6**	Augustus (Octavian) deposes Archelaus as ruler of Judea and establishes governors, or proconsuls, in Judea.
AD 12–14**	Coregency of Caesar Augustus and his son Tiberius.
AD 14**	Beginning of Tiberius's reign as sole Roman emperor.
AD 26–27**	Beginning of John the Baptist's ministry.
AD 26–36**	Pontius Pilate serves as procurator or governor of Judea.
AD 26/27–29	Jesus' ministry in Galilee and Judea.
AD 29–30 **	Jesus' death in Jerusalem.
AD 31–32	Stephen becomes the first Christian martyr (Acts 7:54–60).
AD 32–36	The conversion of the apostle Paul (see Gal. 1:13–2:1).
AD 33–44	Paul is in Tarsus for some ten years after his conversion, then he goes to the church in Antioch with Barnabas (Acts 11:25).
AD 40–65	Seneca of Rome flourishes.
AD 41–44**	Herod Agrippa I becomes king of Samaria and Judea. After he dies suddenly, Judea is ruled again by a Roman proconsul.
AD 44**	Peter is imprisoned in Jerusalem; James the apostle is beheaded.
AD 46–48	Paul begins his first missionary journey with Barnabas (Acts 13–14).
AD 48–49**	Jews are expelled from Rome (Acts 18:1–2).
AD 48–49	The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–29).
AD 49–51**	Paul has an eighteen-month ministry in Corinth (Acts 18:11). His Letter to the Romans is produced here, on his second missionary journey (see Rom. 15:24–29).
AD 49–52	Paul's second missionary journey begins (Acts 15:36–41) and ends (Acts 18:20–22).
AD 49–62	Possible period of Paul's correspondence with his churches and coworkers in Christian mission.
AD 52–55	Paul's third missionary journey begins (Acts 18:23).
AD 53–55	Paul is in Ephesus (origin of his Letters to the Corinthians; see 1 Cor. 16:8).
AD 54–68	Nero is Roman emperor. His persecution of Christians begins ca. AD 62.
AD 55–57/58	Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment at Caesarea and Rome.
AD 58–60	Paul goes to Rome as a prisoner for at least two years (Acts 28).
AD 60–69	Possible period of production of the Gospels of Mark and Luke.
AD 62	Peter goes to Rome.
AD 62**	James the brother of Jesus is martyred in Jerusalem.

AD 62–64**	Because of the outbreak of persecution against Christians in Rome, some persecuted Christians leave Jerusalem and settle in Pella, east of the Jordan.
AD 62–64**	Peter and Paul die in Rome under Nero's persecution (end of apostolic era).
AD 64**	Rome is burned, probably by Nero, and Christians are blamed. Persecution of Christians follows in Rome.
AD 65–95	Post- or [sub]apostolic era begins with the deaths of the primary apostles (James the brother of Jesus, Peter, and Paul).
AD 66–73**	The First Jewish War with Rome. Jewish rebellion against Rome ends with the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70. Skirmishes continue until the last stronghold (Masada) is destroyed in 73. Temple worship is concluded, along with animal sacrifices.
AD 68–69	Turmoil in Rome and year of four Roman emperors.
AD 70–95	Sometimes called the "Tunnel Period," since not much is known of events during this time. Likely period during which the Gospels of Matthew, possibly Luke (see also AD 60–69 above), and John are written. Pharisaism and the rabbis emerge as the dominant expressions of Judaism. Likely time of the production of the *Didache*.
AD 70–90	Jews meet at Jamnia (Yavneh) to deal with the reformation of Judaism, especially Judaism without its temple cultus. A rabbinical academy is established there by Rabban Johanan ben Zakkai, son of Rabban Gamaliel (cf. Acts 5:34).
AD 75	Josephus writes *Jewish War.*
AD 81–96	Domitian rules the Roman Empire. Between 85 and 95, outbreaks of persecution against Christians emerge in Asia Minor.
AD 90–95	Rise of docetic heresy (see 1 John 4:1–3).
AD 93	Josephus writes *Antiquities of the Jews*.
AD 95–100	Clement of Rome writes *1 Clement*.
AD 100	Josephus dies in Rome.
AD 115–117	Epistles of Ignatius and his martyrdom.
AD 117–138	Hadrian reigns as Roman emperor.
AD 132–135	Second Jewish War: Bar Kochba rebellion is put down by Rome; Hadrian expels the Jews from Jerusalem and renames it Aelia Capitolina, after his mother.
AD 135	Gnosticism flourishes.
AD 140	*Shepherd of Hermas* likely written.
AD 140–160	Marcion and Valentinus begin their teaching. Marcion writes *Contradictions* and *Prologues*.
AD 156–185	Montanus begins ministry in Phrygia. Montanist controversy emerges.

AD 160	Justin Martyr writes *Apologies* and *Dialogue with Trypho*.
AD 175–180	Tatian produces the *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the Gospels.
AD 178	Celsus writes *True Reason*, the first known major reasoned attack against the Christian faith.
AD 180–185	Irenaeus writes *Against Heresies*, challenging the major heresies of his day.

Note: Dates with a double asterisk (**) behind them are generally recognized as most reliable, but few dates of events in antiquity are uncontested.