



Paul's Final Years

I will summarize Paul's final years under **five major headings**. **First, there is strong scholarly consensus that Paul was found innocent of all charges and released after his two-year imprisonment in Rome.** While Scripture does not explicitly state his release, it is strongly implied in the closing verses of Acts:

“He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” (Acts 28:30–31, ESV)

This passage suggests freedom of movement and ministry, which aligns with the view that Paul was not under harsh confinement. Supporting this conclusion, several extra-biblical sources affirm that Paul was released. For example:

- **Eusebius**, writing around 300 AD in *Ecclesiastical History* (2.22.2), states: “**After pleading his cause, Paul is said to have been sent again upon the ministry of preaching.**”
- **Jerome**, writing in 392 AD, notes that at the end of his first imprisonment, “**Paul was dismissed by Nero, that the gospel of Christ might be preached also in the West.**”

These sources, along with others, provide both biblical and historical support for the view that Paul was released from the house arrest described at the end of Acts. In conclusion, based on all the scholarship I've reviewed, Paul was likely released around 62–63 AD.

Second, every scholar I've studied agrees that, for several reasons, both 1 Timothy and Titus were written after Paul's release from house arrest in Rome.

a. 1 Timothy

The events described in 1 Timothy do not align with any point in the Acts timeline. There Paul writes:

“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.” (1 Tim 1:3 ESV)

This reference to Paul traveling to Macedonia while urging Timothy to stay in Ephesus doesn't match the third missionary journey. In Acts 19:21–22, we read:

“Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem... And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.”

On the third missionary journey, rather than leaving Timothy in Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy ahead to Macedonia. This discrepancy suggests that the events in 1 Timothy occurred after Acts concludes.

b. Titus

Similarly, the events in Titus do not fit within the Acts narrative. Paul briefly visited Crete en route to Rome, as recorded in Acts chapter 27, when he wanted to winter in Fair Havens but was overruled by the ship's captain and others. That visit was brief and circumstantial. Yet in Titus, Paul writes:

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.” (Titus 1:5 ESV)

This implies a more intentional and extended ministry in Crete, which is not recorded in Acts. Furthermore, Paul adds:

“When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there.” (Titus 3:12 ESV)



Again, this wintering in Nicopolis is not mentioned in Acts, reinforcing the view that these events took place after Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment. Most scholars agree that the pastoral epistles reflect a period of ministry not covered in Acts.

Third, every scholar I've studied agrees that 2 Timothy was written during Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, and several internal clues support this conclusion.

a. Paul is clearly imprisoned when writing 2 Timothy.

He refers to himself as “bound with chains as a criminal” (2 Tim 2:9), and speaks of Onesiphorus who “was not ashamed of [his] chains” (2 Tim 1:16). These references make it clear that Paul is

not under house arrest, as he was during his first Roman imprisonment, but is now in a harsher, more restrictive confinement.

b. The tone and circumstances are far more severe than in Acts.

Unlike the relative freedom Paul enjoyed during his first two-year imprisonment (Acts 28), 2 Timothy reflects a grim reality. Paul writes with a sense of finality:

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.”
(2 Tim 4:6)

He anticipates death, not release. The loneliness of his situation is also evident:

“Demas... has deserted me... Luke alone is with me.” (2 Tim 4:10–11)

c. The logistical details do not fit within the Acts timeline.

Paul asks Timothy to bring his cloak and parchments from Troas (2 Tim 4:13), and mentions leaving Trophimus sick in Miletus (2 Tim 4:20). These movements and events are not recorded in Acts, further suggesting they occurred after the book’s conclusion.

Most scholars date the writing of 2 Timothy to around **AD 64–67**, shortly before Paul’s execution. This raises a natural question: *What happened between Paul’s release around AD 62–63 and his re-arrest around AD 65?* The answer likely involves a shift in the political climate under Emperor Nero, whose persecution of Christians intensified after the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64. Paul, as a prominent Christian leader, may have been targeted during this crackdown, leading to his final imprisonment and martyrdom.

Fourthly, the great fire of Rome in July 64 AD turned Emperor Nero against the Christian community. While historians continue to debate who actually started the fire and why Nero chose to blame Christians, the reasons are ultimately secondary. What is historically clear is that Nero did blame Christians and initiated a brutal wave of persecution against them.

a. Tacitus’ Account

Roman historian Tacitus (56–120 AD) records that the public suspected Nero himself had ordered the fire. Writing in 117 AD, Tacitus noted:

“Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace... Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired... Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty, that they were being destroyed.”

This context makes it likely that Paul was re-arrested simply for being a Christian, and under Nero’s persecution, his execution was almost inevitable.

b. Extra-Biblical Testimony

Several early sources outside the Bible affirm Paul's martyrdom:

- **Tertullian** was the first church father to state that Nero had Paul beheaded in Rome.
- **Eusebius**, writing in the early fourth century, confirmed this tradition.
- **Clement of Rome** (bishop from 88–99 AD) wrote:

“After preaching both in the east and west, he gained the illustrious reputation due to his faith... and suffered martyrdom under the prefects.” (1 Clement 5.6–7)

- **Jerome** later wrote:

“He then, in the fourteenth year of Nero on the same day with Peter, was beheaded at Rome for Christ's sake and was buried in the Ostian way, the twenty-seventh year after our Lord's passion.”

It's important to note that while Jerome's account is valuable, most scholars disagree with his dating of Paul's death.

Fifth, the lingering question is this: If Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment and later re-arrested, where did he go in the interim? Where did he travel, and what did he do?

It's important to note that there is no scholarly consensus regarding Paul's movements after his release. While we can piece together fragments from **1 Timothy**, **2 Timothy**, and **Titus**, the picture remains incomplete. These letters offer glimpses into his activities, but not a definitive itinerary.

As we close this point—and this paper—it's worth mentioning that some believe Paul traveled to **Spain** during this period.

a. Paul's Desire to Go to Spain

Paul clearly expressed a desire to visit Spain:

“I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you...” (Romans 15:23–24 ESV)

“When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.” (Romans 15:28 ESV)

However, a desire to go does not confirm that he actually went.

b. Early Christian References

Some ancient Christian writings suggest Paul may have reached Spain:

- **Clement of Rome**, in *1 Clement* chapter 5, wrote:

“...having taught righteousness unto the whole world and having reached the farthest bounds of the West...”

This phrase is often interpreted as a reference to Spain.

- The **Acts of Peter**, an apocryphal second-century text, claims Paul left Rome, traveled to Spain, and later returned—though the reliability of this account is debated.

Ultimately, it’s up to the reader to interpret what Clement meant by “the farthest bounds of the West” and to assess the credibility of these sources.

In conclusion, the first four points are well-supported and largely uncontested, including the fact that Paul was martyred in Rome, likely by beheading. Whether he ever made it to Spain remains uncertain, though many scholars I’ve read believe he did. We have hints about what his post-release travels may have looked like, but that exploration is best saved for another time.