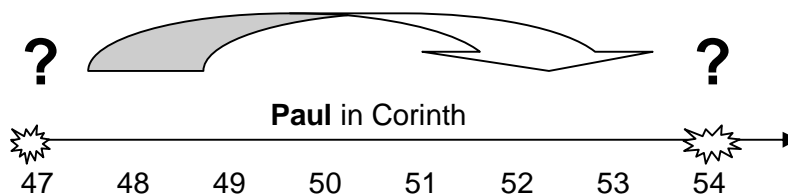


## Paul, Dating, and Corinth:

The Gallio Inscription and Pauline Chronology  
by Gardner Gordon

Let's take a quick quiz: what do dating and Paul have to do with Corinth? Oh sure, there are the passages about "better to marry than burn" and other such gems of sexual purity found in the Corinthian correspondence. But that's not the kind of dating we want to look at. We're after *historical* dates. No, not the kind of dates that *you've* had in the past! We want to know *when* did Paul do what he did. So if you're interested in hooking up Paul to a timeline, keep reading. If you're just interested in *hooking up*, well, you should keep reading, too. There are some things out there more important than getting a date.

Most of what we know of Paul's timeline comes to us from Luke in the book of Acts. Here we can trace the missionary journeys, Paul's trips to Jerusalem, and his ultimate arrival in Rome. Luke fixes no specific dates to his narrative, only the occasional seasonal timeframe.<sup>1</sup> Combining Luke and Paul's own writings leaves us with a *relative* chronology, simply *what* occurred before or after what. The *when* was still guess work. Until a century ago, what was lacking in Pauline studies was a tie into the *general or absolute* chronology of the world at large. As one author puts it, "there always remained a margin of uncertainty amounting to at least five years," between AD 47 and 54 say some, that would not allow us to pin Paul down.<sup>2</sup>



But much of that changed with the unearthing of a Roman inscription in the 1880s which gave a window onto the world of Paul. Though Paul is not mentioned in this inscription, a man whom Paul encountered is mentioned. That man was Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeus (or Gallio), a Roman appointed proconsul to Achaia, the region of Corinth. Therefore it is Gallio that Paul, dating and Corinth have in common.

### ***Archaeological Considerations: Context and Text***

Let's briefly look at ways that historical dates are assigned. One major way of dating people and artifacts (cultural relics) is by their **context**, where they are found and in relation to what they are found with. When an object is found *in situ* (in place), there is the possibility of assigning a more precise date. Think of, if you will, your own garbage can. This illustration isn't too far afield, for often what archaeologists traffic in is age-old garbage: items dropped, buried, tossed away, or left behind. So, let's say you throw away a tea bag in the morning, an apple core at lunch, and a Twinkie wrapper after your midnight snack. The tea bag is lower, and therefore *older* relative to the other items; the apple core is next, and then the wrapper is *youngest* in the trash heap.

This order can easily be disturbed. Perhaps, in an attempt to recycle a Coke can, you rummage through the garbage down to the “mid morning level,” disturbing all but the tea bag. In so doing, the Twinkie wrapper ends up under the apple core, and now your chronology is all mixed up! Surely you wouldn’t eat a Twinkie mid-morning?! Worse still, your cat gets in the can and digs around for the smelliest thing it can find, leaving quite a mess ...at least archaeologically speaking.

So archaeology is an incredible detective game, figuring out when one item was “deposited” relative to surrounding items next to, above, and below it. Compound this not simply over one day’s trash, but decades, centuries and millennia of accumulation of trash, soil, construction, destruction and natural forces. This is **context**.

Another major and indispensable way of dating artifacts is **text**. Here is the realm of written history, including the Bible, or other documents that may point to definitive or relative dates. As mentioned earlier, Acts and the Pauline letters give us wonderful relative dates for Paul, but no definitive dates *outright*. None of Paul’s letters have a date written in the upper right hand corner...in fact, we have none of the original letters. We have no birth certificate, no *credible* grave marker, nothing that would give us a *direct* date on the Apostle Paul and when he did what. We can be thankful that Luke had a penchant for historical settings and detail, for it is from his writings that we know what we do of Paul’s *where*-abouts and *when*-abouts. Luke, in fact, is the only writer to connect the birth of Jesus with historical figures in the Roman world at large (see Lk 1).

So, just as Luke’s writings in Acts give us the best relative chronology, it is there, too, that we must turn to find clues about dating Paul absolutely. In particular, it is Acts 18:11-12 that brings us within striking distance of an absolute chronology. Here we meet Gallio.

<sup>11</sup>And he [Paul] settled there [Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. <sup>12</sup>But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat.

The Jews take advantage of the arrival (perhaps) of the new proconsul <sup>3</sup> and use Paul as a test case for him. As the Acts account reads, Gallio seems quite put off by the incident and wants nothing to do with the “in house” Jewish argument of the law. He would rather that the Jewish community handles the issue itself (Acts 18:13-17).

### ***The Inscription: Caesar and Gallio***

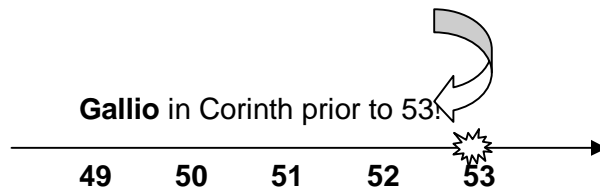
We now look to the Gallio Inscription, as it is called. Found in excavations of Delphi (45 miles NW of Corinth as the crow flies) in the 1880s, the significance of the artifact was not realized until around 1907. The inscription is as much a puzzle as the question of Paul’s timeline: initially, four fragments were unearthed, then three more, then two more. <sup>4</sup> Many speculated that some fragments belonged to a different inscription, and therefore various translations have been offered. Much of the original work was done by German, Russian and French archaeologists and historians, making many early works inaccessible to monolingual Americans. Current scholarship accepts all nine fragments as from the same inscription.

The intact tablet, originally over 1.4 meters (55 inches) long, was set up on the outer wall of the temple of Apollo at Delphi <sup>5</sup>, and read something close to the following:

*Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, 12<sup>th</sup> year of tribunician power, acclaimed emperor for the 26<sup>th</sup> time, father of the country, sends greetings to [...].*

*For long have I been well-disposed to the city of Delphi and solicitous for its prosperity, and I have always observed the cult of the Pythian Apollo. Now since it is said to be destitute of citizens, as my friend and procunsul L. Iunius Gallio recently reported to me, and desiring that Delphi should regain its former splendour, I command you (singular) to invite well-born people also from other cities to come to Delphi as new inhabitants, and to accord them and their children all the privileges of the Delphians as being citizens on like and equal terms. For if some are transferred as colonists to these regions...*<sup>6</sup>

Pivotal in understanding the inscription's impact on dating is Claudius' opening pronouncement. The emperors were engrossed with themselves and their achievements, so all reference to time pertains to them and their reign. Claudius was no exception. Terms such as "tribunician power" and "acclaim" were benchmarks for dates. An emperor's tribunician power began the very day they ascended to the throne. For Claudius, this was January 25, AD 41. His first year then ran through January 24, AD 42. Therefore, his 12<sup>th</sup> year, the year of the inscription, was between January 25, AD 52. to January 24, AD 53. This, therefore, pins Gallio as proconsul prior to January AD 53.<sup>7</sup>



### ***Narrowing In On Gallio's Date: Details, Details, Details***

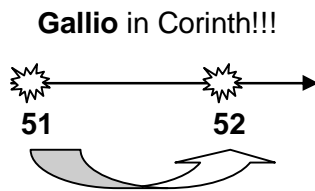
This rather tight window of one full year can be shut a bit more, allowing in even less wind of chance. Key to understanding this is Claudius' "acclaim" as emperor "for the 26<sup>th</sup> time." Acclaim was public recognition, a figurative "standing ovation" of the Roman world, marking the military victory or prowess of their emperor. Undoubtedly, an emperor wanted to amass as many acclaims as possible, so multiple acclaims could be accumulated in any given tribunicial year, if the Caesar was war-minded enough.

There is record of Claudius' 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and 24<sup>th</sup> acclaims occurring in his 11<sup>th</sup> tribunician year (Jan AD 51 to Jan 52). There is also a record of his 27<sup>th</sup> acclaim, found inscribed at the dedication of an aqueduct, which came somewhere between Jan 25, AD 52 and August 1, 52. Missing are records of his 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> acclaims and their significance. But from the above dates, we can see that they both fell at some point between Jan AD 51 and August 52.

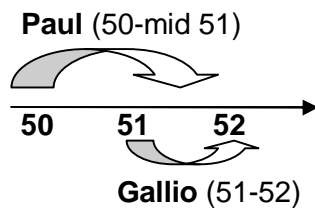
This 18 month window can be shut a little more with a proper understanding of Roman war practices, a bit of speculation and probability. Military exploits typically took place between late March to early November. As acclamations were linked to military triumph, it is likely that Claudius' 26<sup>th</sup> acclaim came between the Fall of 51 (to allow for acclaims 22-25 in Spring and Summer) and the Spring of AD 52. This gives us about an eight month window, and now again finds Gallio as proconsul no later than AD 52. But here we are pushing the envelope with a hand of speculation.

Perhaps most important in narrowing the possibilities is the fact that proconsuls served for one full year, beginning in July through the following June. With this information, we could say that Gallio was proconsul from July AD 51 to June 52. This

accords with the writing of the ascription according to Claudius' tribunician year and 26<sup>th</sup> acclaim.



According to Acts 18:11, Paul was in Corinth for 18 months. Then verse 12 notes he was brought before Gallio. Should we take Luke to mean (as does Deissmann) that Paul was there 18 months immediately *after which* he appeared before Gallio? If Deissmann's theory holds, Paul arrives in early AD 50, and leaves in late summer /early fall of AD 51.<sup>8</sup> Or does Luke mean that Paul spent a total of 18 months in Corinth, and was brought before Gallio *during* that time. In Acts 18:18, immediately after the Gallio fiasco, Luke does mention that Paul "remained many days longer" before leaving Corinth, imply some chronological flow. The interpretative issues are, for many, fraught with precision that the text does not necessarily imply.



### **Gallio, the Man**

There is much behind the tale of Gallio that becomes rather operatic...soap operatic, that is.<sup>9</sup> It is worth a look at some of the details of the man's life that not only shed light on his period of service as proconsul, but also paints a portrait of a man to whom Paul undoubtedly gloried in witnessing.

One must ask, could Gallio not have been proconsul prior to this period of AD 51-52? Perhaps, but not by much, and here's why. Gallio's younger brother, Seneca, was a philosopher, and apparently an inflammatory one. In AD 41, Emperor Claudius exiled this young thinker to the isle of Corsica. Usually, such disgrace tarnished the entire family. Whatever political ambitions Gallio may have had were effectively derailed by his brainy brother's banishment. But in AD 49, Seneca was ushered back to Rome with a grand purpose: he was placed in the imperial court as the tutor to Claudius' nephew and royal successor, a young, impetuous Roman named Nero. Undoubtedly, it was at this time that Seneca was instrumental in helping to secure a political post of proconsul for his older brother, Gallio.

Even more interesting is that Gallio did not appear even to serve out his entire year term. In a letter written by Seneca, Gallio acquired "not a malady of the body but of the place (Achaia)," and used this illness to take leave of his post by literally sailing off. What fraction he served of his term we cannot say, But this potentially cuts his service short to half its length from July AD 52 to Fall 52. How can we say this? Sailors considered the months from November to March as the *mare clausum*, the "closed sea,"

because of frequent and fierce winter storms. Only the most serious and necessary of voyages would be undertaken at this time. Therefore it is doubtful that Gallio, in his “ill” condition, would have risked such a treacherous voyage to calm himself at sea.

Perhaps even more curious than sharing a stint together in Corinth, Gallio and Paul’s paths intersect again (so to speak) in the tragedy that was Nero’s psychosis. It is held that Paul suffered martyrdom under Nero’s evil reign. Here, too, Gallio found his end, not in martyrdom, but forced suicide. His brother, Seneca, was implicated in an assassination attempt on Nero, his former student, and paid with his life. Gallio, a year later, was “allowed” to take his own life, his hand forced by Nero’s paranoia.

### ***Where Does the Dust Settle?***

This takes us back to Paul, still waiting for us in Acts 18, standing before Gallio. Perhaps Gallio’s indifference to Paul’s case was due to his growing indifference or “malady of the place.” Perhaps it was a malady of the people as well, caught between the testy Jews and followers of the Way. Whatever the case may be, Gallio appears to have served in Corinth from July AD 51 to Fall 51 at his earliest departure, or until July AD 52 if he fulfilled a complete term.

If we read Luke as placing Paul in Corinth 18 months prior to Gallio’s proconsular term (Acts 18:11), we find Paul arriving in the Winter of AD 50, and remaining until the Summer or Fall of AD 51, then departing for Syria (Acts 18:18). Despite exhaustive examination of the evidence, some authors view such dating as wholly speculative. They hold that we can never move beyond the nineteen-centuries-long doubt of getting within five years of pinning Paul down to any one date at any one place.<sup>10</sup>

As we have seen, when it comes to dating Paul, **text** wins the day as an official Roman inscription (text!) intersects with the Biblical record (text again!). **Context**, however, verified the position of this inscription in a first century setting. Text and Context are inseparable when the archaeological record offers us both.

### ***What is the importance of this to the Christian faith?***

Why all the fuss over dust and dates? Is it not enough that Luke tells us Paul was in Corinth when Gallio was there? Does any of this matter? One might say that such matters are taken on faith, and whether it was as early as AD 47 or as late as AD 54, not only do we not know, but we need not know.

These responses may sound fair enough from within the faith. But all the more we must concede, if not *glory in*, the fact that we have a God who works redemption in time and space. There is theological relevance here, for from such seemingly insignificant details from the dirt we bolster a theology of history. God’s sovereign direction over the least of the Apostle Paul’s footsteps was no less precise an act of unfolding redemption than when sending His Son in the fullness of time. The same God who thundered from Sinai rapped the window of Caesar’s empire by placing his messenger before a Roman proconsul. Can we doubt, then, that this very same “divine historical meddling” overshadowed the excavations that unearthed the long buried inscription defining Gallio’s term of office, and therefore Paul’s date in Corinth?

He is God over all history, be it inscripturated or secular, relative chronology or absolute. That He has allowed us to peer deeper into the details of such things once again shows His gracious condescension to our curious minds. And in so doing, He reveals for the slow of heart and dull of ear that He is indeed who He claims to be.

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<sup>1</sup> See Acts 27:9, which refers to “the fast” of the Day of Atonement which fell in September or October. Sea travel at or after this time was hazardous due to storms. Also Acts 28:11.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Deissmann, *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, Trans by Lionel R. M. Strachan (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912): 236. Dixon Slingerland, “Acts 18:1-18, the Gallio Inscription, and Absolute Pauline Chronology,” *JBL* 110/3 (1991): 449.

<sup>3</sup> Deissmann, 238.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, frontispiece. The author thought enough of this find to place a photograph of the four pieces initially excavated immediately inside the books cover, next to the title page.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>6</sup> This is a compilation of the possible reading when all nine fragments of the inscription stone are considered. For the Greek text and translation see Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*. Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987): 153-154; also Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, Good News Studies, vol 6. (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987): 141-152 and Appendix (p173-176). The latter offers an insightful and detailed account of various investigator’s renderings of the inscription, comparing and contrasting their views, whether they include four or nine fragments in their translation.

<sup>7</sup> It is noted that the Greek text has Gallio in the nominative case. As it is standard to have the recipient of a letter or inscription in the dative, Gallio is not believed to be the one to whom the inscription was sent, but rather the predecessor of the actual recipient.

<sup>8</sup> Deissmann, 256.

<sup>9</sup> Murphy-O’Connor, 146-152. The author has a compilation of interesting information about Gallio the man, to which this author is indebted.

<sup>10</sup> Slingerland is one such author. He brings redaction critical methodology into the debate and wages exhaustive criticism against the attempt of an absolute chronology. He states that Luke writes “with a lack of interest in or ignorance of even relative chronological relationships (442).” We are left, says Slingerland, with Paul arriving in Corinth somewhere between December AD 47 and April AD 54 (449).

## **Resources**

### **On the Web:**

The following websites have interesting archaeological information and/or images pertaining to Corinth and Paul, but none have an actual photo of the Gallio inscription. Try searching under the following: Delphi, Corinth, Gallio, Athens Museum, Greek Artifacts, Paul and Corinth, etc.

[kchanson.com/ANCDPCS/greek/gallio.html](http://kchanson.com/ANCDPCS/greek/gallio.html)

[faculty.smu.edu/dbinder/archaeol.html](http://faculty.smu.edu/dbinder/archaeol.html)

may need to further search here under “Delphi”

[holylandphotos.org](http://holylandphotos.org)

[ntimages.com/Corinth-tns.html](http://ntimages.com/Corinth-tns.html)

### **Between the Pages:**

*Biblical Archaeology Review* vol. 14, #3 (1988): 14-27. Though there is no discussion of Gallio, this article contains some excellent pictures of the excavations and artifacts of Corinth.

Conzelmann, Hans. *Acts of the Apostles*. Hermeneia. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987. Includes the inscription in Greek along with a working translation in the commentary on chapter 18.

Deissmann, Adolf. *St. Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History*, Trans by Lionel R. M. Strachan. New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912. Deissmann’s was a (the?) major initial contributor to examining and compiling the general historical evidence with the Biblical text.

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Much of his work was embraced and unchallenged, except for some scholars such as Slingerland (see below). Deissmann offers the only photo of inscription pieces that I could find (in works in English, that is).

Luedemann, Gerd. *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology*, Trans by E. Stanley Jones. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984. The title says it. An extensive work forged on the anvil of Biblical chronology. He briefly considers Gallio in the midst of the entire timeline. Extensive endnotes and bibliography.

Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome. *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, Good News Studies, vol 6. Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1987. The best treatment, by far, of Gallio the man, and the date of the inscription. Takes into account a vast number of biblical and non-biblical sources. Appendix dedicated to the Gallio Inscription. A great source for a holistic understanding of Corinth, with maps and diagrams pertaining to archaeological structures.

Jewett, Robert. *A Chronology of Paul's Life*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979. Like Luedemann, a full, though less detailed, chronology of Paul. Slightly better treatment of the controversy surrounding the Gallio date, but also pales compared to Murphy-O'Connor. At the end of the book, does have a helpful pull-out graph of times and dates comparing externally determined dates with internally Biblical dates and the resultant Pauline chronology.

Paphatzis, Nicos. *Ancient Corinth: An Illustrated Guide*. Full of color photos of the site and artifacts, but no discussion of Gallio.

Slingerland, Dixon. "Acts 18:1-18, the Gallio Inscription, and Absolute Pauline Chronology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 110, #3 (1991): 439-449. This is an extensive and scouring look at the literature from a redaction-critical perspective. Slingerland doubts that any move toward an absolute Pauline chronology can be made with the current evidence, i.e. he feels that the last century of debate on the issue has been unprofitable and that the Gallio Inscription adds nothing, in short, to pinning a date on Paul.