**Paul, Letters (circa 50 CE)**

*Introduction: Paul of Tarsus (died, circa 65 CE), born with the name Saul in a Jewish community in what is today southeastern Turkey, was educated in the Hellenistic Greek culture of his time. As a young man, according to his testimony, he persecuted the followers of Jesus until, about the year 33, on the road to Damascus he was thrown from his horse, blinded and reprimanded by God for his actions. From then on, Paul became the most vigorous missionary of Jesus, traveling throughout the Mediterranean converting non-believers and corresponding with communities of fellow followers. In contrast to the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, Paul spread his gospel to others who were neither Jewish nor had known Jesus, believing that the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus transcended any particular national community. In these selections from his letters to communities of Jesus followers throughout the Mediterranean, Paul emphasizes certain ideas that opened up the religion to non-Jews and aided its spread to new communities. What are these ideas? How would these new ideas or emphases make the early church of Jesus universal in its appeal and potential membership?*

**Romans 2**

25Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. 26So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? 27The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=romans+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-27990c)] written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker.

28A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person’s praise is not from other people, but from God.

# 1 Corinthians 15

### The Resurrection of Christ

15 Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

3For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+15&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28722a)]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+corinthians+15&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28724b)] and then to the Twelve. 6After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

# Ephesians 2

### Made Alive in Christ

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ephesians+2&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29233a)] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9not by works, so that no one can boast. 10For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

THINKING HISTORICALLY

As a Jew, Paul would have been familiar with the Hebrew Bible in Greek translation, though it had not yet been codified in its present form. He would have also had access to stories about Jesus, though the gospels that we have in Greek had not yet been written. Is Paul more interested in presenting the message *of* Jesus or the message *about* Jesus?