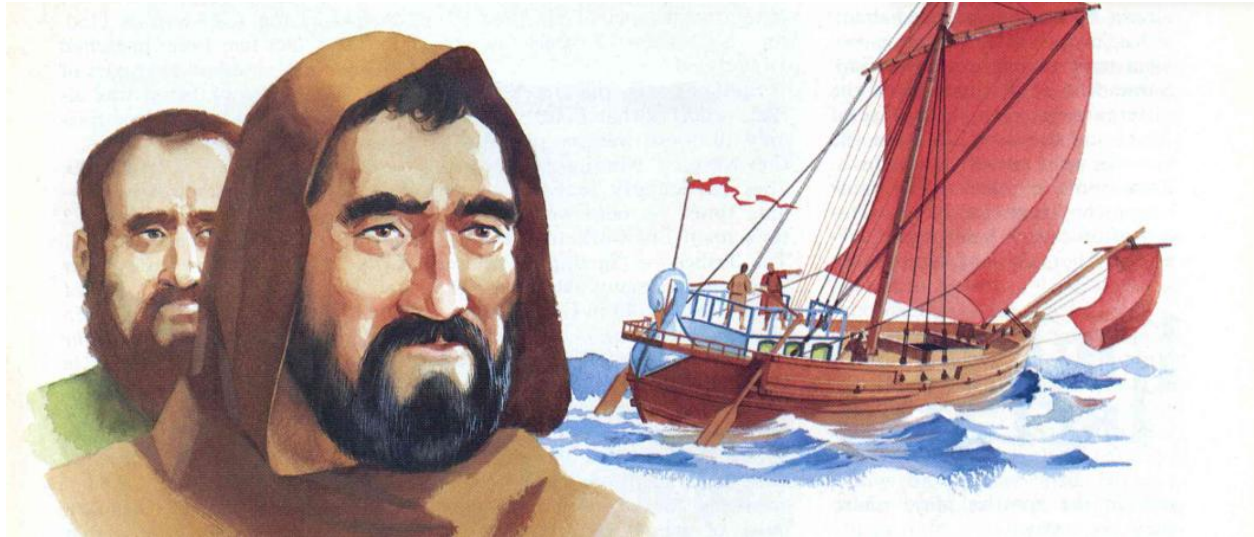


Were the Apostles Poor?

By Peter Salemi

www.British-Israel.ca



“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none;” (Acts 3:6)

Were the Apostles a group of poor men that absolutely had no money to feed themselves-run a business, nor take care of their families? Many people believe that the Apostles and Jesus Christ himself were poor, living day to day just getting by, citing scriptures like the one above to prove that they were. But were they? What does the Bible say?

Evidence from the Bible

We know from the pages of the New Testament that the Apostles travelled and wrote the 27 letters and books of the New Testament. At that time many do not realize that travelling and writing materials and other things they had took money, and lots of it.

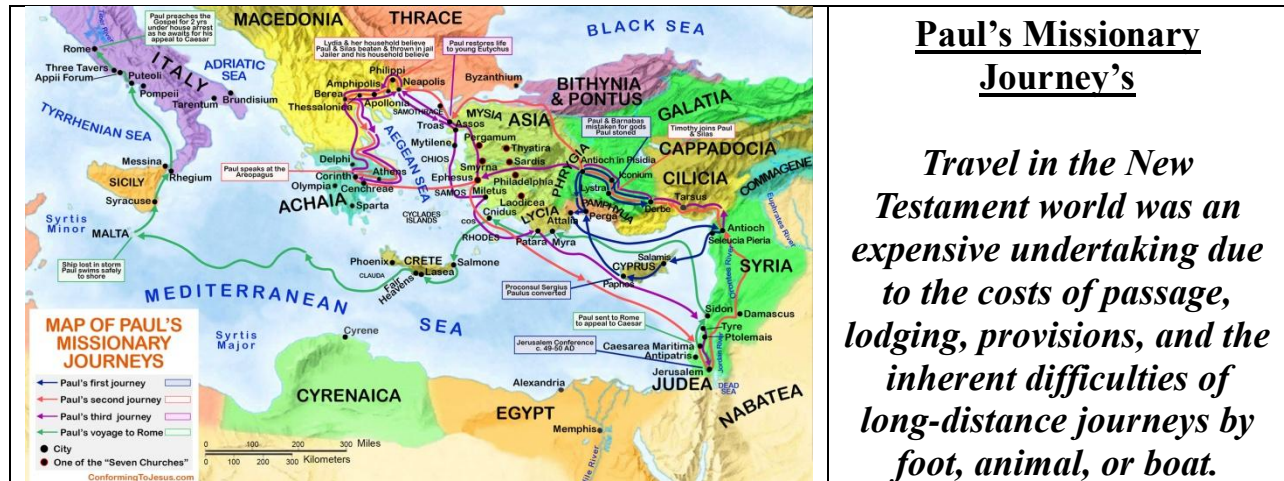
Many don't realize *that just writing letters* in those days “were *not* free to produce. Expenses included the price of materials, such as parchment, the need to pay a secretary for several drafts and copies, and the cost of transportation. E. Randolph Richards estimates the cost of writing the letter to the Romans at \$2,275.00 in

current dollars. And that does *not* include the cost of transporting the letter[s] to Rome” (Article; “The Apostle Paul’s Income and What It Means for Today by Les Bridgeman, emphasis added). This would be equivalent in our day of broadcasting the gospel on T.V, Radio or the internet and buying ads. To buy air time costs in the thousands of dollars.

In today’s money, “Adding the costs of supplies and labor together, the costs for a single, new copy of each of the Gospels would be as follows:

- Matthew: 20.35 denars (\$2,238)
- Mark: 12.54 denars (\$1,379)
- Luke: 21.61 denars (\$2,377)
- John: 17.35 denars (\$1,909)

These costs are, “only the beginning. We still have to consider the *costs of producing and launching the Gospels.*” (Article: The Cost of the Gospels and the Synoptic Problem, by Jimmy Akin). Some estimates of the total costs of the production and distribution of the Gospels are estimated around 20-30 thousand in today’s dollars.



Travel during the time of the New Testament was quite costly. Stanford University recently unveiled ORBIS, a site that lets you calculate the time and cost required to travel by road or ship around the Roman world in A.D. 200. It takes into account a lot of factors-it models ancient sea routes based on historical sources and wave height.

The Apostle Paul went on three missionary journeys from A.D. 46 to 57, traveling around much of Asia Minor and Greece. In A.D.60, he was also taken to Rome. ORBIS allows us to calculate how long these journeys would have taken in pure travel time (excluding time spent at each destination) and how much they would have cost. Below the chart shows the cost:

	Journey Distance (miles)	Travel Time (days)	Cost per Person (denarii)*
First	1,581	53	237
Second	3,050	100	314
Third	3,307	92	481
Rome	2,344	36	699

(Source: Calculating the Time and Cost of Paul's Missionary Journeys by OpenBible.info)

In today's money from denarii to USD it would be:

- 237=10309.50 USD
- 314=13659.00 USD
- 481=20923.50 USD
- 699=30406.50 USD

(source: <https://testamentpress.com/ancient-money-calculator.html>)

And this is *just* the Apostle Paul! What about the others that made their journeys around the Roman world and other places? Obviously this takes money. Were the Apostles Poor? Where did they get the money to pay for all of this and more?

Apostle's Occupations

What did the Apostles do for a living help fund the work of God?

The first obvious one was of course fishing. Jesus called Peter and Andrew, James and John, they were “fishers” (Luke 5:1-3; Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20), “by occupation, this was their trade and *business*, by which they got their *livelihood*,” (Gill's Commentary, emphasis added).

Notice what this source says about Peter and his business:

“The Sea of Galilee (also known as Lake of Gennesaret) is a fresh water lake in Israel 13 miles long and seven miles wide. Since biblical times the lake has been an important source of protein for the surrounding land and beyond. *The fishing industry flourished in the time of Jesus with the ruling tetrarchs Herod and Philip, sons of King Herod, who made great investments in the industry and provided a stable political environment for it to grow.* The ancient Jewish historian Josephus states that there were more than 230 fishing boats working the Sea during that period.

“The Apostles Peter and Andrew and their cousins were part of this highly successful industry. They owned their boat and had a house in the city of Capernaum, an extraordinary accomplishment in a land dominated by large estates and menial labor. The apostles fished for three main species: St. Peter’s fish, carp, and catfish. The Jews did not eat catfish because it was considered ‘unclean,’ as it did not have fins and scales (Leviticus 11:19). However they were able to sell catfish to Greek communities on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.” (Article: Biblical Fishing 101 Reeling in the First Fishers of Faith by James Campbell, D Min, emphasis added; see also Cyclopedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature under article “Peter.”).

Key details about Peter’s fishing enterprise:

- **Business partners:** Peter and his brother, Andrew, were in business with James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Luke 5:10).
- **Operation size:** The partnership was large enough that the company hired other workers to help with the fishing boats.
- **Two Ships:** There were at *least* two Ships, “Or two fishing boats; which were, as the Arabic version renders it, ‘detained by anchors at the shore of the lake’; the one belonging to Peter and Andrew, and the other to Zebedee, and his two sons, James and John:” (Gill Commentary) that we know of. They could have had more than two.
- **Home base:** Peter and his brother operated out of the cities of Bethsaida and Capernaum, both located on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.
- **Daily tasks:** As a fisherman, Peter’s work included casting and mending nets, cleaning and maintaining the boats, and taking the catch to market.

Although Peter became a full time preacher of the Gospel, he most likely used the profits from his business still to fund the travelling expenses and writing materials he used in the ministry. The Apostles knew they were to continue to work to earn

their keep. Peter, James, Andrew, and John, were fishermen and Paul made tents to pay their way. They never became a burden to the people even though it was lawful for them to take the tithes for them to do the work (see 1 Corinth 9:1-14). They worked for everything they received. *Most* of their missions were paid for by their own labor, but *also* from the tithes of the church as well. These men *sacrificed* their own money for “the furtherance of the gospel;” (Phil 1:12).

The Apostles told their brethren to imitate them, as Paul says, “For yourselves know how ye ought to *follow us*: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

“Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; *but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you*:

“Not because we have *not power*, [they could have used the tithes; but Paul did not want to] but to make ourselves *an ensample unto you to follow us*.

“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, ***that if any would not work, neither should he eat....*** Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.” (2 Thess 3:7-10, 12). So along with the Tithes, the Apostles used their business to fund the work. (For more detail read our booklet “How the Work is financed?”); and told the church of God to do the same, to be business people, to live, work and *eat of the fruit of their own labors* and fund the work of God with their tithes.

The Apostle Paul, a man of wealth

What of the Apostle Paul? Many believe that Paul was not a man of means. “Paul was not a rich man,” we are flatly told (How Rich Was Paul?...And Why It Matters by. John W. Welch, p.426). But this is simply *not* the case!

Studies into the Apostle, his writings, and taking into account the historical setting of the New Testament reveals that, “...it seems that on every count Paul was *quite rich* throughout his life, *and perhaps even very rich indeed*.” (How Rich Was Paul?...And Why It Matters p.430 by John W. Welch, emphasis mine).

Notice the Apostle Paul’s background, “Paul went on to receive his highest formal education in Jerusalem under the tutelage of Gamaliel, a scholar of Jewish law and a rabbi of great repute and influence among the Jewish people (Acts 5:34; 22:3). How would an ordinary Jewish boy from Tarsus ever manage to get admitted into the educational care of such an instructor?...Speaking of Paul’s extraordinarily privileged educational background, ‘both religious and secular,’ Murphy-O’Connor concludes, ‘This was an *expensive* privilege, and was *not* available to the vast

majority of Jews. Someone, presumably his parents, had to pay for it....Paul clearly *did not have to go to work either as a child or as a young man.*” (ibid, p.431).

Some speculate that Paul, as a tentmaker, could not possibly be conceived of as a well-educated and literate person, but at best a simple laborer of the lower classes who wrote clumsily with “a workman’s hand deformed by toil.” However, this view is now rejected. “Tent making was an *important* business in the world of the New Testament.”

“Tent-making was no small-scale profession in ancient times. Because inns were filthy or nonexistent, *tents were luxury items for wealthy travelers* and, more importantly, they were standard equipment for Roman legions, especially during the winter. *Tents were large and expensive*, measuring ten Roman square feet inside and housing eight men” (ibid, 434, emphasis added).

What of Paul’s Roman citizenship? “The *greatest potential evidence for the wealth and status of Paul and his family*, however, is the Roman citizenship that Paul claimed to have held from birth (Acts 22:25–28). His family’s economic standing was probably consistent with the rare procurement and maintenance of Roman citizenship, and that privilege probably translated into *further economic advantages*, especially for the pre-Christian Paul.

“Roman citizenship was undoubtedly the most *highly coveted symbol of wealth and status in the Roman world at this time*; especially in the eastern Mediterranean where one can estimate that only 1 percent of males were citizens....very few Jews in the first half of the first century held Roman citizenship. This was an extraordinary and powerful social privilege. *Obtaining such status either came at great cost or was due to high-profile connections.* It could be bestowed as a reward for a large-scale act of civil service *or through the intercession of a wealthy and influential patron.* Only a *family of great importance in a prominent eastern city would have had means and influence enough to gain such a distinction.*” (ibid, p.436). Paul’s Roman citizenship supports the assertion that his family was one of very significant means and status.

As noted above when it comes to writing materials-and of course the Apostle Paul wrote the bulk of the New Testament, was *not* cheap, “All through his ministry, Paul was *apparently able to afford parchment and ink.* Paul had access to books and written materials and had the means to hire a scribe by which he wrote lengthy

letters. *His habitual writing is characteristic of a man of means.*” (ibid, p.440, emphasis added).

He also, “He maintained himself in the impressive urban center of Corinth for a year and a half, and in the metropolis of Ephesus for a significant period of time (Acts 18:11; 19:10). He knew how to handle and transmit international transfers of money, and he was able to organize and direct several branches of the church. Paul even converted wealthy people such as Erastus, a major benefactor of public works in Corinth (Romans 16:23), and he ‘had wealthy and powerful friends at Ephesus.’ Paul seemed fully at ease in such upper-class roles and environments.” (ibid, pp.440-441).

When the Apostle Paul speaks of “labour and travail,” “labouring night and day” (1 Thessalonians 2:9), and “working with our own hands” (1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 9:19; 2 Corinthians 11:7), proves, “that Paul’s language about ‘labor’ testifies to his upper-class origins, not to his impoverishment” (ibid, p.442). Paul’s lack of funds on these occasions may, of course, have been a *temporary* problem caused by being on the road for such a long period of time.

In the end, looking at all of the, “...evidence, however, supports the idea that Paul came from a family of significant means. His education and background, his profession, and his status as a Roman citizen all indicate that Paul was accustomed to prosperity and unfamiliar with destitution and subsistence living, *despite the long-held beliefs of some to the contrary*. If this is so, I draw one overarching conclusion: *Paul made enormous social and financial sacrifices in becoming a Christian*. His own declaration, ‘I have suffered the loss of all things’ (Philippians 3:8), implies that *he started out with much to lose*. He probably consecrated a vast amount of money to enable him to travel and correspond extensively, and he certainly exhausted his very significant social capital to win audiences among important people of wealth and status.” (ibid, p.452). The Apostle Paul sacrificed much for Christ. Here is a man that sought the “Kingdom of God” *first* above all things.

Luke, the physician who wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts, travelled with the Apostle Paul, was, “*well-off himself*. This occasional traveler with Paul was known as ‘the beloved physician’ (Col. 4:14), not a meager profession now or then. Moreover, Luke shows evidence in his writing of being well-educated, well-traveled, and well-connected—a cosmopolitan Gentile convert and probably a person of some means.

“Luke was *not* a poor man writing to poor people that together they might denounce the rich. It’s much closer to the truth to say *Luke was a rich man writing to another rich man (and people like him) in order to show how the rich could truly follow Jesus.*” (Article: Luke: Evangelist to the Rich by Kevin DeYoung, emphasis added). (for more details read our article; Was Luke the Evangelist Rich?).

Other Apostles: The Bible doesn’t state what Judas did prior to hooking up with Jesus, and also provides no information on the actual professions of Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Thaddaeus or James, the son of Alphaeus. However looking at the teachings of Christ, and how God wants *producers*, people who will take their “talents” and multiply them, it is obvious that the other Apostles too were most likely men of enterprise and business.

In the church many wealthy people gave to the church and the church organized and handled great resources to fund the work, “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as *many* as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, “And laid *them* down at the apostles’ feet: *and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.*” (Acts 4:34-35).

The Pulpit commentary writes, “A significant token of the place occupied by the apostles (as later by the bishops of the Church) as the trustees and dispensers of the Church’s funds as well as of the Church’s doctrines... We have, too, here an instance of the way in which Church institutions rose gradually as occasion gave birth to them. So the institution of deacons (Acts 6:2, Acts 6:3), of presbyters or priests (Acts 14:23), of bishops (1 Timothy 1-3.), of Confirmation (Acts 8:14-17),” The “need” was not just giving *relief* to the poor, but also to establish the work in many places so they could operate and function as well.

Peter had no money?- So what did the Apostle Peter mean when he said, “Silver and gold have I none;” (Acts 3:6). He said this *not* because he was a poor man. But for the simple fact that “...it was *unlawful* by Rabbinical ruling to carry a purse into the Temple.” (Bullinger’s Companion Bible, emphasis added). However, Peter offers something better than money-healing. The beggar’s *immediate need* was *not* money but physical healing and that is what he gave him, “Peter and John wanted something greater than supporting the man in his condition. They wanted to transform his life by the power of the risen Jesus Christ.” (Dave Guzik Commentary).

As in other articles about wealth, we show that great wealth shows that we can handle the responsibility in today's world, and this carries over into the Kingdom of God. As the parable of the talents shows, those who do nothing with the gift will lose even what they have. It matters what we do in this life, as Jesus says, "Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:21). We are to develop the "divine nature" and doing the "Father's business" *No* Christian should be a non-producer! God is abundant, and he wants us to be the same-just like the Apostles were! *No* Christian should be an "unprofitable servant." (Matthew 25:30).