

Tychicus

Lisa Marie Belz
 Ursuline College
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Paul's letters mention a number of his associates by name. To some he sends greetings, others are co-workers who send their greetings to the recipients of the letters, still others are leaders in the churches whom Paul recommends to his readers. One of the co-workers is Tychicus. He appears in four Deutero-Paulines: Col 4:7-9, Eph 6:21-22, 2 Tim 4:12, and Titus 3:12. Tychicus is also given an honorable mention in Acts 20:4. Who was Tychicus, what was his role in Paul's churches, and what may be gleaned about him from his five appearances in the New Testament?

Acts 20:4-5 states that Tychicus, an Asian, accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey. While planning to set sail for Syria from Greece, en route to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, Paul learns of a plot against him by fellow Jews. To throw off the plotters, he decides to travel to Macedonia, in the opposite direction. Tychicus and another Asian, Trophimus, then travel ahead of Paul to Troas, a port city on the coast of Asia Minor and a major stopover on the way to points south. Although Acts does not say so, the Asians Tychicus and Trophimus likely went ahead to arrange safe accommodations for Paul, and to scout out any trouble. What Acts implies about Tychicus is that he was a close companion to Paul, at least on Paul's third missionary journey; he had already been with Paul in Greece (likely Corinth), and continued with Paul on his journey. Acts, however, does not tell us for how long or how far Tychicus accompanied Paul, and names only Trophimus with Paul after he reaches his destination, Jerusalem (Acts 21:29). That only Trophimus is mentioned with Paul in Jerusalem is explained by the accusations made against Paul for bringing Trophimus, a Gentile, into the Temple with him. It may be that Paul continued to be accompanied by the others mentioned in Acts 20:1; if so, this would likely have included Tychicus.

Colossians 4:7-9 tells us that Tychicus is a "beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow slave in the Lord." Curiously, of the seven names found in Col 4, several are also found in Philemon, albeit in a different order.¹ Given its differences in style, language, and theology from the acknowledged genuine letters of Paul, a slim majority of scholars do not find Colossians authentic.²

¹Phm 1:23 "Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers;" compare Col 4:7-17 "Tychicus, Onesimus; Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus called Justus (these [three] being "the only ones of the circumcision among my co-workers"), Epaphras, Luke, Demas, Nympha, Archippus" [the last two being addressees and not co-workers]. Since Philemon was a request to free Onesimus, it could hardly send greetings to him, or call him a fellow-worker. He is thus in a sense present in Phm also, and the parallel is greater than it at first appears.

²Dunn **Colossians** 36.

Ephesians 6:21-22 borrows nearly word for word the description of Tychicus in Col 4:7-9.³ In the Pastorals, Tychicus is sent by Paul to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12) or Crete (Titus 3:12).⁴

What all five references to Tychicus agree upon is likely to be true: Tychicus, associated with Asia Minor and perhaps a native, was a reliable and trustworthy associate of Paul who on one occasion sailed around the eastern Mediterranean in service to Paul's missionary efforts. Perhaps, as Colossians and Ephesians indicate, he was Paul's faithful letter carrier on one or another occasion. That he was known as such to the churches of the day would have made reference to him evidence of authenticity for four Deutero-Pauline compositions, and also for Acts, which might itself be listed among the Deutero-Paulines.

Most of Paul's genuine letters are to churches in Macedonia or Achaia; save for Galatians, we have no genuine church correspondence for Asia Minor. That history is thus largely lost to us. It may be that Tychicus became an associate of Paul in that largely unattested period, and served with him thereafter. Though Paul himself never mentions Tychicus, and his role may thus have been less when Paul's missionary efforts moved to Macedonia and Achaia, his existence, and his role as "a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord" would seem to be beyond reasonable doubt.

Works Cited

- James D G Dunn. *The Epistles to Colossians and to Philemon*. Eerdmans 1996
C Leslie Mitton. *The Epistle to the Ephesians*. Oxford 1951

³The earliest manuscript, P46 gives no information about the author of Ephesians, though a number of later manuscripts have superscriptions naming Tychicus as the author, a fact easily explained since Tychicus is the only associate of Paul mentioned in the epistle..

⁴For the dependence of the Pastorals on Ephesians, see Mitton **Ephesians** 173-175.