

ministry: growing deep in one's own convictions and understandings is necessary for a fruitful ministry.

18–24 Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Messiah; but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they were glorifying God because of me.

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Paul is intent upon giving his readers a careful, orderly description of his visit to Jerusalem, and thus his early connection with the leaders of The Way who resided there. He uses the word "then" (ἐπειτα, *epeita*, "then") three times in the immediate context: v. 18, 21, 2:1). Apparently we are to understand that the listing of events is chronological.

"Three years later" actually translates "after three years." This could denote an interval of fully three years, or could indicate that he traveled to Jerusalem in the third year, so perhaps after two years plus some time. His apparent point, however, is that there was a sufficient gap between the "revelation" of Yeshua on the road to Damascus, and his first visit to Jerusalem after acknowledging Him as Messiah.

The reason this is important to Paul must be related to his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Already, by the time of the writing of Galatians (for dating issues, see above, p. 6f), there must have been a question about the propriety of the Gentile mission. Paul may have felt that there was a growing animosity toward the Gentile mission, and that perhaps even some of the leaders in Jerusalem may have had misgivings. It would appear that the influencers may have been suggesting that Paul, in his Gentile mission, and particularly in his presentation of the gospel as not requiring them to become proselytes, had failed to submit himself to the "pillars" in Jerusalem. As such, his authority was undermined, and he was acting on his own initiative. Such a position would surely weaken his message.

But Paul has taken the position that he did not receive his commission to the Gentiles from the Jerusalem leaders in the first place. His commission came directly from Yeshua, and thus he was confirmed in it. If anyone was to suggest that his commission was not on track, they would have to reckon with the Master Who gave it.

I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas – Cephas (כִּפְּאִי, Κηφᾶς) is the normal Aramaic name of the Apostle, with Peter (Πέτρος) being his Greek name. The majority of manuscripts have "Cephas" here⁶⁹ while some later manuscripts changed this to "Peter."⁷⁰ There is little doubt that "Cephas" was original.

It is for the purpose of "getting to know" Cephas that Paul traveled to Jerusalem. The wording is chosen carefully. The word translated "to become acquainted with" (ἱστορησαι, *historesai*, from which we derive our word "history") is used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures. The translators are not sure how to understand the word: NASB, "become acquainted with;" NIV,

69 $\text{p}^{46,1}$, s , A, B, *pc*, *sy*^{p,hmg}.

70 D, G, *pl*, *latt*, *sy*^h.

“get acquainted with;” ESV, “visit;” CJB, “make Kefa’s acquaintance;” NJB, “meet;” NRSV, “visit.” In the Classical Greek, the word means “to inquire into, or about, or from.”⁷¹ Thus, the word Paul uses might convey the idea that while he went to get to know Peter, it does not necessarily imply that he went there to seek approval from him, nor to garner support for his work and mission. It would appear that he went up to Jerusalem, rather, as an equal with the Jerusalem apostles.

That he should single out Peter indicates Peter’s acknowledged position within the leadership of The Way. Paul stayed with him 15 days, a period of time in which he not doubt relayed to Peter what he had received directly from Yeshua, and what his mission to the Gentiles was. The period was long enough to become well acquainted with Peter, but not sufficient to be called his disciple.

Paul regularly refers to Peter by his Aramaic name Cepha (2:9, 11, 14; 1Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5, note “Peter” in Gal 2:7-8 however). This might be an emphasis upon Peter’s status within the Jewish segment of the Way, even as his own preference for “Paul” marked himself as the apostle to the Gentiles.

But I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother – This most likely means that the rest of the Twelve were not visited on this initial trip to Jerusalem, save James. Here again, Paul is countering what must have been an underlying attack on his apostolic commission, made by the influencers to the Galatian congregation. That he simply writes that he “saw” James means that he only had casual contact, but not an extended time of being schooled or disciplined.

One might wonder why he did not see the rest of the Twelve. The answer may be either that they were not in Jerusalem at the time, or that they avoided him, still fearing that he was intent upon persecuting The Way (cf. Acts 9:26). On the other hand, Paul may have been “sheepish” about meeting the rest, for his former actions against them were still too current in the memory of the sect, and he may have purposefully avoided them.

That James is referred to as “the Lord’s brother” is a clear indication that this had become a well used adjective describing James, and the recent ossuary which has inscribed “Ya’acov, son of Yosef, brother of Yeshua” may therefore have additional credibility by this text.⁷² Here, “Lord,” (*κύριος*, *kurios*) has taken on the function of a title, so that for Paul, “the Lord” refers to Yeshua. Mark 6:3 lists James first, which might indicate that he was the next born after Yeshua. While some (particularly Roman Catholic scholars) would teach that James and the others mentioned were sons of Joseph from a previous marriage, there is no hint anywhere in the Apostolic Writings that James and the others in Mark 6:3 were anything other than legally full brothers of Yeshua, that is, legally Joseph and Mary were their parents.

James apparently was unsympathetic to his brother’s claims of messiahship during His life (Mark 3:21, 31-5; John 7:5), but the fact that he was among the first witnesses of the resurrection (1Cor 15:7) and named among the disciples following the resurrection (Acts 1:13) indicates that James had

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71 Liddell & Scott, ad. loc.

72 See *Biblical Archaeological Review*, Nov/Dec 2002. Subsequent debate over the authenticity of this find has drawn a shadow over its usefulness. However, some still maintain its authenticity, and have good reason to do so. See Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries* (Baylor Press, 2003), pp. 112–22.

come to believe Yeshua was, indeed, the Messiah. By the time of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) James has arisen as one of the primary leaders in the Jerusalem community of The Way.

The syntax of the clause leaves in question whether Paul included James as one of the Jerusalem apostles or not. It could just as well be read: “I did not see any of the other apostles (that is other than Cephas), the only one I did see was James,” (that is, James is not to be counted as one of the “other” apostles.” Perhaps Paul found it difficult to label James an “apostle” (one sent out) since he remained his life-time in Jerusalem.

In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! – Paul pauses to take an oath regarding the veracity of his statement. Some translations actually leave out a word that is in the Greek, the word “behold” (note the KJV). This word (ἰδοὺ, *idou*) corresponds with the Hebrew הִנֵּה, *hineh*, and is used to arrest attention (much like our English “Look!”). Its inclusion here would indicate that Paul intends his readers to reckon fully with his willingness to take an oath before God.

In 1st Century Judaisms, the taking of oaths was a means of verifying the testimony of a witness.

Two [in court] lay hold of a cloak—this one says, “I found it!”— And that one says, “I found it!”— This one says, “It’s all mine!”— And that one says, “It’s all mine!”— This one takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than half, and that one takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than half. And they divide it up. This one says, “It’s all mine!” And that one says, “Half of it is mine!” The one who says, “It’s all mine” takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than three parts. And the one who says, “Half of it is mine,” takes an oath that he has no less a share of it than a fourth part, This one then takes three shares, and that one takes the fourth.⁷³

The point is that if a person is willing to take an oath that his testimony is true, then he must be believed (barring other issues, which the Mishnah goes on to delineate). The thinking is that no one would take an oath before God and willingly lie, because to do so would incur the Divine wrath. If, however, in the instance above, one of the two who claim ownership of a single object is unwilling to take the oath, then the ownership is awarded to the one willing to swear an oath.

This only gives an indication of how important an oath was within the 1st Century Judaisms. And thus Paul’s use of the oath formula makes certain that his readers would receive his testimony. I might also mention that Paul’s willingness to include an oath might appear to contradict the teaching of Yeshua where (as some interpret) He prohibits the use of oaths entirely.

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil. (Matt. 5:33–37)

But what Yeshua here denies is not the taking of oath entirely, but the taking of

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⁷³ m.Bava Metzia 1:1.

oaths using “legalise” that will later render the oath void. In other words, taking an oath is good, as long as it is taken for the right reasons and with full intention on fulfilling it. Oaths that are based on the “fine print” are really just another form of deception and injustice.

Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia – As noted above, the continued use of “then” tells us that Paul was giving an orderly record of the events. After his brief visit in Jerusalem, he went immediately to the northeast quadrant of the Mediterranean (cf. Acts 9:30). It is likely that he went to Antioch, which was the largest city in Syria and seat of the imperial power in the whole region. This would also fit with the notice in Acts 13 that it was the community in Antioch that first sent Paul and Barnabas on their mission to the Gentiles.

I was still unknown by sight (literally, “by face”) to the congregations of Judea which were in Messiah – Paul continues with his main theme of this section, namely, that he was essentially unknown by the congregations centered in Judea, that is, connected in one way or another with the Jerusalem community. Some have wondered if this contradicts the record of Acts that Paul was persecuting the Judean congregations (cf. Acts 8:1, 3; 9:1), but it is most likely that while there may have been a few who felt the sting of Paul’s wrath, the majority of his antagonism was spent on Hellenistic targets (Acts 9:29), most likely in the diaspora. Thus, while some may have known him by his face, the majority did not. And certainly the language would indicate that he had not made it his habit to be there often.

The added “in Messiah” is typically Pauline. This is, of course, one of his favorite phrases, and one that might well define his theology. Here, the term “Messiah” has already gained a kind of technical status, so much so that “those who are in Messiah” becomes a label for the people of The Way.

Here, the identity markers for the group are set within the confines of belief and life in Messiah Yeshua. Whereas the influencers most likely were continuing to appeal to the Torah as the boundary marker for true covenant members, Paul appeals to the core issue of Yeshua and His Messiahship. While various Judaisms would define themselves *halachically* according to their particular understanding and application of Torah, Paul had come to find his own identity, and the identity of those to whom he ministered, as “in Messiah.”

This “in Messiah” identity also lays the stage for his later leveling of ethnic, gender, and social status, for in Messiah there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free. The message of the influencers which centered on the need for ethnic status is thus set against Paul’s gospel that finds covenant membership in no other place than “in Messiah.” To be “in Messiah” is the true identity for those who have placed their faith in Him.

but only, they kept hearing, “He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy.” – The fact that Paul was able to quote what had been said about him means it must have been widespread. As much as Shaul and his power were feared, in like measure the amazement at his change of heart was being shared. This is *lashon hara* in reverse, that is, *lashon hatov*, “good speech.” Shaul had become known as a “persecutor” of The Way (note the Greek, “the persecutor,” ὁ διώκων ἡμᾶς)—this was his reputation, and one only time could overcome. But his activity in “preaching the faith” was the first clear mark that he was now willing fully to identify with those he formerly persecuted.

preaching the faith – We’ve encountered the word “preach” (εὐαγγελίζομαι) before, cf. vv. 8, 11, 16. (For comments on “preaching,” see v. 16.) Here the object of Paul’s preaching is “the faith” (τὴν πίστιν, *ten pistin*). The word “faith” is found 243 times in the Apostolic Scriptures, of which 142 are found in Paul’s letters. The word shows up 22 times in Galatians, second only to 1 Timothy in terms of percentage per words, indicating that Paul intends to emphasize “faith” in his argument to the Galatians.

The word “faith” (found here for the first time in Galatians) is with the article, “the faith,” indicating its objective use, as over against its subjective meaning, “to have faith, trust.” In its objective sense, it describes a core body of truth that those who were disciples of Yeshua had received and affirmed.⁷⁴ We should not think of the later “creeds” or “doctrinal statements,” something that finds no parallel in the Judaisms of Paul’s day. Rather, by “the faith” we should most likely understand that core truth which resides in confessing Yeshua as the true Messiah.

For Paul, the central element of his “preaching” was Messiah, so much so that he can interchange “faith” and “Messiah,” saying that he preaches “Messiah Yeshua as Lord”:

For we do not preach ourselves but Messiah Yeshua as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Yeshua’s sake. (2Cor 4:5)

This interchange between “preaching the faith” and “preaching Messiah” shows concisely that the “faith” here spoken of is that central and foundation message that Yeshua is the long awaited and promised Messiah.

We should also keep this in mind for when we come to chapter three. There Paul writes:

But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Torah, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Torah has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua. (Gal 3:23-26)

It becomes clear when we keep in mind that Yeshua is the core issue of “the faith,” that Paul can just as easily say “the faith came” as “the Messiah came.” “The Faith” has become so bound up in Paul’s mind with the person and work of Yeshua the Messiah, it has become a circumlocution for the Messiah Himself.

And they were glorifying God because of me. – Here we find the perspective, both of Paul and the early believers—the turn of events in Paul’s life rendered a fitting cause, not for self-glorification (“see who we won to the Lord!”) but for giving glory to God. “Giving glory to God” means to give Him the reverence He deserves. The underlying truth of this statement is that God is the One Who controls all things. Had the early believers also reckoned with the fact that Paul, as their persecutor, was somehow being used in God’s overall scheme of things? One might imagine so, though this would have no doubt stretched their faith. But when Paul, through the sovereign intervention of the Almighty, came to faith in Yeshua, the praise was given to Him, not to man.

⁷⁴ Cf. Rom 1:5, cf. 1Tim 1:19; 4:1, 6; 6:10.

Chapter Two

Commentary

1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

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Paul could move very quickly over his initial visit to Jerusalem because it was brief and of little consequence. Likewise, he could pack fourteen years into a sentence or two, since this period also had virtually nothing to do with the authorities in Jerusalem, and had resulted in only minimal contact with the diaspora congregations. But his second visit to Jerusalem is of vital importance for his message to the Galatians, so he slows down to give a more ordered and detailed account. He is still proving that his gospel was “not of human origin or from a human being” (1:11-12).

We are not sure if the three years (1:18) is included in the interval of fourteen years or whether it is in addition to it. Many commentators take it to be additional, meaning there was a time span of 16 or 17 years. But one cannot be dogmatic—the language is not specific. Thus, the time span from his Damascus experience to the Jerusalem consultation could have been as little as 12 years, or as long as 17 years. This is one factor that makes Pauline chronology so imprecise.

The debates about how this chronology should be reconciled to Acts are legion. Dunn outlines the issues:

According to Acts, Paul’s second visit took place at an unspecified date in order to deliver famine relief from the church of Antioch to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29-20). But also according to Acts the issue discussed in the visit of Gal 2:1-10 was not discussed until a third visit, again from Antioch as the base (Acts 15: 2-29).¹

The solutions which have been proposed may be summed up under two heads:

1) Galatians 2 = Acts 11²

This is based upon the presupposition that the Acts record is historically accurate. Acts 11:30 does mention Barnabas as our text does, and since the Galatians 2 account indicates the meeting was “private” (v. 2), it does not fit with the later Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 which was clearly public. The conclusion, if this view is accepted, is that Paul is writing Galatians before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, and that the Council may have been called in response to the troubles in Galatia, and perhaps elsewhere.

The problem some see with this view is that if the issue of circumcision was so decisively dealt with by the “pillars” of the Jerusalem community as Galatians 2:1-11 indicates, then why would it have come up again, and required the need for the Council in Acts 15? This has led some to adopt another explanation.

1 Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 87-8.

2 For those who hold this view, see F. F. Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians* (Paternoster, 1982), 43-56; R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Word, 1990), lxxvii-lxxxii.

2) Galatians 2 = Acts 15³

This view considers the events of Acts 15, along with the details (Barnabas, issue of circumcision) to be too close not to be the same event. As such, the notice of the meeting being “private” is discounted, and it is considered that Luke must have conflated events in his history and put the visit for bringing relief funds to the Jerusalem community in the wrong place. Interestingly, the majority of modern commentators opt for this view. Furthermore, this view puts the writing of Galatians after the Acts 15 Council, something some commentators find more agreeable with the overall chronology of Paul’s writings.

The problems with this view are obvious: a) it calls into question the accuracy of Acts, b) it discounts Paul’s notice that this meeting was “private,” not public, c) and it gives no explanation for why Paul would not have mentioned the decree of the Council, something that would greatly strengthened his argument in regard to circumcision for Gentiles.

It seems most warranted, then, to accept the first view and to understand the Jerusalem visit spoken of here in our Galatians text as one and the same with that which is recorded in Acts 11.

One always “goes up” to Jerusalem (from which we derive the modern *Aliyah* [עֲלִיָּה], “to immigrate”). This is because the city of Jerusalem sits at a higher elevation than the surrounding regions. Thus Paul uses the conventional terminology to describe his going up to Jerusalem.

with Barnabas – Barnabas is listed by Luke as one of the first landowners in Jerusalem to contribute to the common fund of The Way (Acts 4:36-7). He was a native of Cyprus (Acts 4:36) and may have belonged to the “Hellenists” of Acts 6. If so, his native tongue was probably Greek. His personality may have matched his name, for Luke pays special attention to its meaning: “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36). He acted as a peacemaker between the Hellenists and the Jerusalem leadership (Acts 9:27; 9:22-4). He apparently settled in Antioch where he became part of the community’s leadership. He was responsible for bringing Shaul/Paul to Antioch (Acts 9:25-6) and is named first among the leaders in Acts 13. He accompanied Paul on the first journey from Antioch to evangelize the Gentile cities. Paul likewise attests to his association with Barnabas (Gal 2:1, 9, 13) indicating that together they headed the mission to the Gentiles. If there was a breach between Paul and Barnabas over the issue of whether it was required for Gentile believers to become proselytes (Acts 15:36-40, cp. Gal 2:13-14), it most likely did not last very long (cf. 1Cor 9:6; Col 4:10).

taking Titus along also – the word “taking” in the Greek is συμπαράλαμ-βάνω, *sumparalambanō*, which is used only two other times, Acts 12:25; 15:37-38, and both in relation to taking John Mark along in the work of the gospel. The dispute over John Mark caused division between Paul and Barnabas, and it is interesting that in our current text, this word “taking” is singular, indicating that Paul had invited Titus, perhaps without the input of Barnabas. Paul was no doubt on the look-out for promising younger men to train as part of his team (cf. Acts 16:13 of Timothy).

Did Paul take Titus as a helper or as a test case in the whole circumcision issue? One cannot know for certain, but it may be that he had both possibilities in mind.

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3 For representation of this view, see Betz, *Galatians* (Fortress, 1979), pp. 81f.