



(For access to all available commentaries and sermons of Charlie's click [HERE](#))

# Galatians

**...nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Galatians 1:17**

Paul continues to reveal his qualifications as an apostle who is to be trusted in the message he brought to Galatia. In the previous verse, he said that he did not "confer with flesh and blood." This was to show that what he received was superior to anything taught by fallen, fallible man. Instead, he received his instructions from a divine Source.

He continues with this thought now saying, "...nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me." As they were flesh and blood men, it would seem superfluous to say this. But it is not. Their training had come from the Lord. They were personally selected and commissioned by Him. Therefore, had he gone to them in Jerusalem, it would not be contradictory to his previous words.

And yet, it would also mean that he felt it necessary to have his commission testified to by them; he did not. Instead, his words "*who were* apostles before me" clearly imply that he was to be considered an apostle, having been selected by the same divine Source as they had, and having received his full apostolic commission from Him. He did not require men to confirm what the Lord had established. Instead of going to them, he "went to Arabia."

This clause, consisting of just a few words, is one of the most highly debated set of words to be found in Paul's life and travels. At this point, the conversion and early ministry of Paul needs to be cited from Acts 9 -

And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>18</sup> Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.

<sup>19</sup> So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

<sup>20</sup> Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.

<sup>21</sup> Then all who heard were amazed, and said, "Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?"

<sup>22</sup> But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ.

There seems to be no room in Luke's record for Paul's words here in Galatians. However, Luke was concerned with Paul's ministry in a particular way. Recording this trip to Arabia was not a necessary part of his account. The trip to Arabia would fit logically in the middle of verse 19 of Acts 9. As Paul did not "confer with flesh and blood," it is probable that he immediately felt his calling to go to Arabia and then return after that.

And so this brings in the next fundamental question, "Where in Arabia?" Arabia of Paul's day was considerably different than that of Saudi Arabia today. As it is only referred to one other time in the New Testament, Galatians 4:25, all we have is that one verse to give us a clue as to where Paul went.

In that verse, Paul says that Mount Sinai is in Arabia. For this reason, we can logically (although not dogmatically) suppose that Paul went to the very spot where Moses received the law, and where Elijah was drawn to after his great ordeal with the false prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 19), in order to receive the instruction for his ministry after having received the commission of his apostleship. There is no reason to dismiss this, and a valid reason to accept it.

Regardless of this though, after his time in Arabia, it says he "returned again to Damascus." This then would be in line with the words in Acts 9:19 that he "spent some days with the disciples at Damascus." The time of his divine instruction is hidden in part, and yet it is revealed here in his few words to the wayward churches in Galatia.

For those who were willing to understand and accept his words, they would see that the same God who had given the law to Moses had also given the instructions to Paul for his apostolic ministry to the Gentiles. Thus, the gospel of Grace stands on the same level of authority as the Law of Moses, but it also stands in replacement of it.

Life application: Bible study is hard work, but it is greatly rewarding. Study your Bible.

**Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.** Galatians 1:18

Paul is being exceptionally methodical in his words here for a reason. He has already established that the gospel he preached was neither received from man, nor was he taught it. He further gave the timeline of what occurred after his conversion, including his trip to Arabia. Now he says that "after three years I went up to Jerusalem." This "three years" is probably from his original conversion and not from the later events which included his return from Damascus.

The purpose of the visit was "to see Peter." This seems innocuous enough, but there is exacting purpose in why he says this. First, the word rendered "to see" is an uncommon one, being found only here in the New Testament. It is *historeó*. One can see the germ of our modern word "history" in it. It is what one does in order to ascertain information by a personal examination and inquiry. For example, it is the word one would use when visiting a great city to find out all about it. Scholars puzzle over why Peter is singled out, but understanding what Paul writes about Peter in chapter 2 clears up the reason.

Peter is noted as one of the "pillars" of the church in Galatians 2:9. It may seem peculiar that his words are directed only at Peter, but this directed line of wording is given as a build-up to the events of Galatians 2:11-13. In other words, Paul is continuing to establish his apostleship and the truth of the gospel message he preaches, showing that it is on the same level of authority as that of any other apostles, including the noted Peter.

In this visit to Peter, he notes that he was there with him for "fifteen days." Again, this is important to understand because it established the fact that this extremely short time was insufficient in length for Paul to have somehow obtained his apostleship by Peter or anyone else. There would not have been time to evaluate him, test his sincerity, place the needed trust in him, and commission him. Paul himself, while speaking to Timothy, shows that granting a commission after such a short time is imprudent -

"Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure." 1 Timothy 5:22

Finally, during this fifteen-day period, Paul stayed with Peter, but he did not spend all of his time with him. This is evidenced by the account found in Acts 9 -

"So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. <sup>29</sup> And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him. <sup>30</sup> When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus." Acts 9:28-30

Paul has methodically given the record of his conversion to demonstrate that what he preaches is both sound and on an equal footing with that of even the most noted of apostles. When a challenge is made to the true gospel, he was willing to go to almost unimaginable efforts to protect its purity. This will be seen as the epistle unfolds.

Life application: We are being given a continuous stream of verses which clearly establish Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, and one whose message is to be adhered to as doctrine for the church age. Of course this is why Paul's letters are attacked continuously by legalistic Judaizers such as the Hebrew Roots Movement and other "messianic" groups. He is also diminished by countless other churches as well. By weakening the authority of Paul's letters, one is left with nothing but a convoluted religion that will inevitably fall back on works-based salvation. Hold fast to the gospel of Jesus Christ which says that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone.

**But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.**

Galatians 1:19

The wording of this verse is rather difficult to be dogmatic about. At the same time, there are logical conclusions we can make as we evaluate its words. The first problem is the standing of James. Paul says that he "saw none of the other apostles except James." This can be taken in one of two ways.

1) "I saw none of the other apostles with one exception, James." (James is the only other apostle that Paul saw).

2) "I saw none of the other apostles, but I saw James." (Of the apostles, Paul only saw only Peter. He also saw James.)

The second makes less sense because there would be no reason to mention seeing James if he were of no direct importance to the narrative in an apostolic

capacity. Paul is refuting the "false apostles" in this letter, and therefore any mentioning of true apostles is what is considered bearing on his words to the Galatians.

Therefore, it can be inferred that "James" is an apostle. However, it does not logically follow that he was one of the Twelve. If he were, then it would be probable that he would be noted as such. Rather, it is possible that he is an apostle in the wider sense of the word, just as Barnabas is noted in Acts 14:14.

The reason why this is so complicated is because of the final words of the verse which designate him as "James, the Lord's brother." If one believes in the perpetual virginity of Mary, a wholly unscriptural tenet, then this cannot be a literal brother of the Lord, unless he is a son of Joseph from a previous marriage. But there is nothing in Scripture to indicate this and it needs to be read into the Bible.

Other views are 1) that the word "brother" means a cousin; 2) that this is James, the son of Alphaeus who is one of the Twelve noted in Matthew 10:3; or 3) that it is James, the son of Zebedee (who had not yet been killed with the sword).

If this is not one of the Twelve, then this would exclude the two apostles, James, the son of Alphaeus, and James, the son of Zebedee. If it is one of the Twelve, then the term "the Lord's brother" seems to be an unusual term of designation. It would imply that one was considered a "brother" of the Lord, while the other wasn't.

What seems the most logical, and without inserting anything into the Bible in order to come to a conclusion which the Bible cannot fully support, is that the answer is that this is a literal brother of Jesus - born of Joseph and Mary after the virgin birth of Christ. This is why in Acts 12:17, James is noted separately from the "brothers" by Peter. He is named James, but is not one of the Twelve. That he is an actual brother of the Lord would follow naturally from the words of Matthew 1 -

"Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, <sup>25</sup> and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS." Matthew 1:24, 25

The Bible says that Joseph "did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son." The meaning is evident on the surface. Joseph "knew," or had relations with, Mary after Jesus' miraculous birth. Any other view is entirely forced, and is only given to elevate Mary in an unhealthy way. This has led down a very sad path for those who have taken their eyes off of Jesus and fixed them on her.

It is this James, the Lords brother, who later was to be the leader of the council in Jerusalem in Acts 15 and also the author of the book of James which is the 59th book of the Bible.

Life application: There are passages which are very confusing in the Bible. Further, there are things that people intentionally want to believe because of a presupposition they hold to. However, with a thorough study of what is related to a confusing subject, a logical conclusion can normally be made which is supportable by the rest of the Bible. Be diligent and be sure to carefully evaluate the Bible without getting caught up in unscriptural tenets simply because someone says something is so. Check, verify, and be ready to accept what is written when all of the evidence is in.

**(Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)** Galatians 1:20

The verb Paul uses is in the present tense. In essence, "...the things I am writing to you." This then covers all of those things which he has relayed of which those in Galatia would have no way of easily verifying. It covers from verse 13 through the end of the chapter and then on through more events recorded in Chapter 2. However, it more especially starts with the thought beginning at verse 15. This

begins the focus on his calling as an apostle and the fact that the gospel he preached was derived not from men, but from God.

The reason for this oath is that he is building a case against the false apostles. In doing so, he must verify for them the truth of his own calling and the divine Source from which it came. This oath is quite similar to that of Romans 9:1 -

"I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit."

And so in as solemn a manner as he can possibly present himself, he says, "...indeed, before God, I do not lie." The words he has been writing, and those he will continue with, are either truthful or they are a lie. If a lie, then nothing else he has said can be held as reliable either. In other words, his words here are either an anchor which holds fast for the entire epistle, and as a refutation of the false apostles, or they are the cunning deception of a man who was willing to even pronounce a curse upon himself in order to deceive (see verse 1:8 & 9).

Paul has put himself out in a spiritually exposed manner for the Galatians to evaluate him and the truthfulness of his message. Though it would be difficult to determine the truth of some of his claims, many could be validated by the testimony of those who had walked with him in the past. Only a fool would make such claims if they weren't true. This is especially so because they are in writing and could be referred to at any time. Because of this, it adds weight to the fact that they are, in fact, true.

Life application: On several occasions, the Bible tells us to let our yes be yes and our no be no. In other words, let our words be of such weight that when we speak those around us will know they are the truth. At times, however, a matter may be of such importance that we must invoke God in our words. Invoking anything less than God is idolatry. Let us never flippantly invoke God's name, and let us never invoke any thing in creation when making a vow or an oath.



## **Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.** Galatians 1:21

Paul's last words of explanation were found in the narrative of verses 18 & 19 -

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother."

After that came the parenthetical oath claiming that his words were truthful. Now he continues on with the narrative saying that, "Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia." This is recorded in Acts 9:30 -

"When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus."

However, this seems to be at odds with his words now. Acts says he went to Tarsus (which is in Cilicia), but he says here that he went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. There is really no difficulty in this. The word Paul uses for "regions" is *klima*. It is also found in Romans 15:23 and 2 Corinthians 11:10. Vincent's Word Studies explains the meaning of this infrequently used word -

"Κλίμα, originally an inclination or slope of ground: the supposed slope of the earth from the equator to the pole. The ancient geographers ran imaginary parallel lines from the equator toward the pole, and the spaces or zones or regions between these lines, viewed in their slope or inclination toward the pole, were κλίματα. The word came to signify the temperature of these zones, hence our climate. In Chaucer's treatise on the Astrolabe, chapter 39 is headed "Description of the Meridional Lyne, of Longitudes and Latitudes of Cities and Towns from on to another of Clymatz." He says: "The longitude of a clymat is a lyne imagined fro est to west, y-lyke distant by-twene them alle. The latitude of a clymat is a lyne imagined fro north to south the space of the erthe, fro the bygning of the firste clymat unto the verrey ende of the same clymat, even

directe agayns the pole artik." In poetical language, "climes" is used for regions of the earth, as Milton:

"Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms."

The "regions" of Syria and Cilicia is a correct description of the place to which Paul went. He is giving a general area which covers the specific places that he afterwards went to. Again, Vincent's Word Studies gives the explanation -

"Syria, in the narrower sense, of the district of which Antioch was the capital: not the whole Roman province of Syria, including Galilee and Judaea. ... This district was the scene of Paul's first apostolic work among the Gentiles. Cilicia was the southeasterly province of Asia Minor, directly adjoining Syria, from which it was separated by Mt. Pierius and the range of Amanus. It was bordered by the Mediterranean on the south. It was Paul's native province, and its capital was Tarsus, Paul's birthplace."

Life application: Taking time to refer to maps, or descriptions of ancient borders, while reading the Bible can be a helpful tool in understanding the biblical narrative.

**And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ.**  
Galatians 1:22

Paul continues with the surety that the gospel he preached was not of any human origin. After his brief trip to Jerusalem, he had gone to the "regions of Syria and Cilicia." During, and even after this, he was "unknown by face to the churches of Judea." The verb is in the imperfect tense, showing that he continued unknown in those churches.

Singling out the "churches of Judea" shows that the message, even by this early time, had gone out to the areas beyond Jerusalem. This was probably within just

ten years of the ascension of Christ. Paul's face was unknown to those outside of the area of Jerusalem, and probably within Jerusalem itself with the exception of those he met during his visit there.

His final words concerning the churches in Judea are that they "*were* in Christ." The Greek word for "church" here is *ekklésia* . It means "an assembly." The term can be used when speaking of non-Christian elements as well. It can refer to the Israelites as a nation, or individual synagogues. For this reason, Paul designates who he is speaking about specifically, saying that they are "in Christ." Though there may have been other assemblies in and around Jerusalem, Paul's only concern is those who were true followers of Christ.

The reason for his specificity is, again, to show that his doctrine had not come from any of these sources. His doctrine was also unknown to these people, with the exception of those in Jerusalem whom he had conferred with. All of this is building up his case for those in Galatia to consider. They had received a false gospel and they therefore needed this detail to be assured that what they had heard from him was truly of the Lord and was both proper and untainted.

Life application: Following along the account of the book of Acts, and then comparing it to the epistles, shows a precise timeline of events. Even if all of the events are not recorded in one place or another, they can be seamlessly combined into a clear and non-contradictory testimony to the reliability of Paul's ministry. Be assured that his words are exactly what they claim to be. They are divinely inspired and proper for doctrine.

**But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to destroy.*" Galatians 1:23**

The words "they were hearing" are tied directly to the words "I was unknown" in verse 22. Though they never met Paul personally, they were continuously receiving reports about him. It was probably an amazing thing to have someone show up at the door of the church and start talking about the guy "who formerly

persecuted us now preaches the faith he once *tried to destroy*." The obvious reason is that they expected a different kind of knock on the door from that very same person!

Paul was known as one to persecute the church. And so with each new report of him out preaching the faith, it must have marveled the people immensely. The words, "the faith" does not refer to the faith that we have in Jesus as individuals. Rather, it speaks of the doctrine about Jesus which is to be believed. In other words, "the faith" is that Jesus is in fact the Messiah. The word is used in the objective sense, something that continues on in the Christian world today. The faith of our fathers is the faith passed down to us.

Paul's conversion must have had an immense strengthening effect on those scattered churches. Surely they would be willing to speak out more openly knowing that God could change even the hardest heart.

Life application: If you have had a great conversion in your life, don't hide it from others. Be willing to share how God has changed you into a new person. Your testimony may be the very thing which will lead others to speak out boldly for the sake of the gospel.

**And they glorified God in me.** Galatians 1:24

"They" is referring to "the churches of Judea that are in Christ" referred to in verse 22. They heard the word about Paul's conversion and there was a distinct reaction to it. Instead of denial or suspicion, "they glorified God in me." This is where such praise belongs. Unfortunately, as pastors or teachers grow in prominence, they become the object of the praise of people rather than our great God who placed them in that position.

The almost idol worship of great orators or noted figures has gone on since the beginning. It finds its true peak in people like the pope of the RCC or in other such

large denominations. Followers make a point of attending a gathering held by one of these people, not to worship God, but to say they were in the presence of such a person.

This continues on today with pastors of mega-churches, TV evangelists, and those who are specialists in a particular field, such as Bible prophecy. Instead of praising God for what they hear, people laud praises on the one giving the message. But Paul would redirect us in such an attitude, as any sound follower of Christ should.

Life application: Let us praise God for the gifts that others possess, for the changes in the lives of those He has called, for the great mysteries that are discovered in His word, or for any other like matter. Let us keep ourselves from making idols of anything less than God, and let us ensure that He alone gets the true praise and adoration for His marvelous greatness.