

**Paul was not very much in touch with Jerusalem**

In Galatians 1:18–24 Paul continues to tell the story of what he was doing in the years after his conversion. He is wanting to show the Galatians that he was not simply a worker from the Jerusalem church. Rather he was as much an apostle as any of the apostles in Jerusalem. The difference between Paul and the other apostles was that Paul had a special ministry that took the church a step further forward in its history. **His main point is that he was not very much in touch with the Christians in Jerusalem.** Two years after his conversion ('three years' if you count in the Hebrew style) Paul paid a visit to Jerusalem. He says, '*Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and I remained with him fifteen days*<sup>1</sup>. *But I saw none of the other apostles although I did see James, the Lord's brother*<sup>2</sup>'. The three years are the period around AD 34– 36. English-speakers would say it is a period of two years, but Hebrew-speakers include the first year in their counting and so they call the period three years. In about AD 36 Paul got to know Peter. No doubt they spent a lot of time during those two weeks talking about the life of Jesus. This was Paul's reason for going to see Peter. Paul's overall understanding of the gospel came from his meeting the risen Lord Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, but undoubtedly he would also have wanted to know something of the facts of Jesus' ministry, and Peter was the best person to give him this information. Yet Paul saw only two Jerusalem leaders and he saw them only briefly.

1:18

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**False claims being addressed by Paul**

Paul insists that he is telling the truth. '*In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie*<sup>1</sup>'. Why is he so emphatic? **There were people who were claiming that Paul was really a Jerusalem-based Christian worker who had become disobedient to his seniors in Jerusalem.** They then wanted to put Paul down as if he had no real authority as a teacher of the gospel. Instead they wanted to build up the authority of the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. They were deliberately acting as if a very Jewish Jerusalem-trained type of Christian was the only acceptable kind of Christian. They were acting as if Paul were an enemy to the gospel, someone who was resisting the Jerusalem-trained type of Christian. But Paul's basic knowledge of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God never came from Jerusalem; it came from Jesus Himself. After a very brief visit to Jerusalem in around AD 36 he had no further contact with Jerusalem for many years. He says, '*Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia*<sup>2</sup>'.

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Syria was to the north of Israel; its chief city was Damascus. Further north still around the coast of the Mediterranean Sea was Cilicia; its chief city was Tarsus, the town where Paul's parents lived, and where Paul was born. So at this stage of his life (after AD 36) Paul was nowhere near Jerusalem, and was not very much in touch with Jerusalem. He goes on to say, '*And I was still unknown in person to the churches in Judea that are in Christ*<sup>1</sup>. *They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy"*<sup>2</sup>. *And they glorified God because of me*<sup>3</sup>'. In the years after his conversion Paul was engaged in the work of preaching. People in Jerusalem heard stories about it, but Paul never went to Jerusalem itself and so they never saw him personally. At this stage, before the time when hundreds of gentiles came to salvation, no one questioned what Paul was preaching. They praised God because of the news that came to them of what Paul was doing. His converts were not Jerusalem- Christians.

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1:24

**Lessons & Principles for us**

**1. New movements in the story of the Church**

**2. Older Christians likely to want control**

So what can we learn from all of this? Does it have any spiritual message to us?

(i) One principle here is this: **there are often new movements in the story of the church.** In earliest times for a few years all Christians were Jewish (from the Day of Pentecost until around AD 45. Then something new began to happen when the gentiles began to experience salvation.

ii) **When new movements take place in the story of the church, the older Christians are likely to want to control what is happening.** Or they are likely to be offended at what is happening. When gentiles became believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Jerusalem church sent someone to find out what was happening. They then sent Barnabas to give the new movement some help. That was all good and useful, but there were Jerusalem-based people who wanted the(new Christians to be fully like the Jerusalem-Christians in Jewish culture. At this stage of events the Christians in Jerusalem were becoming increasingly conservative.

For centuries they had been gripped with the idea that anyone not circumcised and obeying the law could not be part of God's people. Abraham was told that anyone not circumcised should be cut off from the 'seed of Abraham' <sup>¶1</sup>. Moses almost died because he had not circumcised his son <sup>¶2</sup>. Surely, these Jewish Christians thought, it was not possible for a man to be part of the people of God without being circumcised? God's people had always been a nation; circumcision was the sign of being ingrafted into God's holy nation. Surely, thought these Christian Jews, Israel is the holy nation, circumcision is necessary, Jerusalem is a holy city, Hebrew is a holy language. How can gentiles be saved without adopting the 'holy land', the holy sign of membership (circumcision), the holy city Jerusalem, the holy language?

¶1 Genesis 17:14

¶2 Exodus 4:24-6

**3. New movements have to stay loyal to what God is doing**

(iii) **A new movement of the Holy Spirit has to stay loyal to what God is doing.** When we are seeking God's will we must not be too traditional. Around AD 34–36 the churches of Judea were the only churches that existed. It would have been quite natural for anyone who felt called to preach to put himself under the Jerusalem church-leaders. But Paul did not do that. That was not the way God was leading him. Actually God was planning that Paul's life would be spent among gentiles, outside of Israel. Paul did not need training in Jerusalem. He was needing to get experience in places like Syria and Cilicia where there were plenty of Jews but also plenty of gentiles.

**4. Others are perplexed & ask questions**

(iv) **People who find God's will for themselves can reckon that they will find others being very perplexed about them.** It is obvious that there was a lot of perplexity, and even gossip, about the apostle Paul. They must have been asking dozens of questions about him. Is this man genuine? Why is he preaching to gentiles when everyone else is preaching to Jews? Why does he not visit Jerusalem more often? Why does he not have a wife to travel with him like the other apostles (note 1 Corinthians 9:5)? Where does he get his money from? Especially there were questions about Jewish culture. Why does this man Paul not persuade his converts to be more like us Jews? He preaches grace so much, maybe he encourages sin. His converts do not bother about sabbath-keeping. They never attend festivals in Jerusalem. Is he encouraging sin? Maybe he holds the theory that sin promotes grace (note Romans 3:8)? This man Paul, he seems to be a loner. Is he accountable to anyone?

**5. Answer questions with the basic facts but talk about Jesus**

(v) **So how then are we to live?** How did Paul cope with this constant flood of questions and gossiping and misunderstanding? It all arose because Paul was doing something new and taking the church a step forward in its outreach. The answer is as follows. He does not talk about himself much except when he has to do so in connection with the work he is doing. He tells people the basic facts about himself, when he has to, but he does not satisfy their curiosity as much as they would like. He is far more interested in talking about Jesus than in talking about himself.

**6. Loyalty to the Gospel but total openness to the leading of God's Spirit**

(vi) **He insists that he is an apostle on a level with other apostles but independent of them.** He preaches the same gospel – and the other apostles agreed that his gospel was the same as theirs. He preaches the same facts, and some of those facts he got from Peter. Yet Paul is not a traditionalist. He never got stuck in Jewish culture, although by background he was a 'Hebrew of Hebrews'. He is a model of loyalty to God's gospel, but of total openness to the leading of God's Spirit.



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