

"I Conferred Not ..." #2

It was shown in a previous article that Paul's change in his attitude toward Jesus was not due to man's influence; he was not persuaded by Stephen's defense nor by arguments others might have made of the divine character of the gospel of Jesus. He stood resolutely against any such efforts. It was the blinding light and the accusing question from Jesus that made him come to realize he had opposed God in his persecutions of Christians. His next effort was to establish that he "conferred not with flesh and blood" to learn of the elements of the gospel. In the concluding verses of Galatians one he continued his arguments his message was a direct revelation from Christ; he had not been an "understudy" of any men. He said, "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before me ..." (Gal. 1:17).

Then Paul wrote, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas" (Gal. 1:18). It is somewhat difficult to pinpoint the exact chronology of the next few years after Paul's conversion. We know he preached in Damascus; that he went to Arabia, that he returned to Damascus from Arabia; that he continued preaching in Damascus again and that he left Damascus because threats were made against his life. What is not so certain is to where he spent three years during that time. Were they spent in Arabia or do these three years consist the whole period of time after his conversion until the time he made his visit to Jerusalem?

Actually, neither Luke's account of Paul's conversion (Acts 9) nor Paul's two accounts of it (Acts 22, 26) indicate anything other than Paul's being at Damascus and that "after many days were fulfilled," he fled Damascus to return to Jerusalem (Acts 9:23). It is only this account in Galatians that tells us that he had gone -- for awhile -- to Arabia. This much we know: after his conversion Paul immediately preached in the synagogues in Damascus for the passage in Acts 9:19-2 permits no other interpretation. And the account likewise demands that he preached in Damascus immediately before he secretly escaped the hands of the governor by his disciples letting him down in a basket over the walls of Damascus (Acts 9:24; 2 Cor. 11:32). "Sandwiched between" was a stay in Arabia. It seems, most likely, that the "after three years" is reference to the whole period of time that lapsed from his conversion to his arrival in Jerusalem.

But, if there is uncertainty as to how long he stayed in Arabia, there is no uncertainty of the fact that: (1) he immediately, after his baptism, preached Christ in the synagogues and (2) he had been preaching for at least three years before he knew any of the apostles. He wrote, "Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and tarried with him fifteen days"

(Gal. 1:18). And aside from "James the Lord's brother," he had seen none of the earlier apostles (Gal. 1:19). Then, Paul sent into the regions of Syria and Cilicia -- preaching, you may be certain (Gal. 1:21). Yet, for all this time, he was "still unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ" (Gal. 1:22). These only heard say "he that once persecuted us now preacheth the faith of which he once made havoc" (Gal. 1:23). Regarding these things Paul said, "Now touching the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not" (Gal. 1:20). Paul has shown that he did not receive his message from men; it was divine. He has shown he did not learn what he taught from any man.

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