

**Scriptures and Doctrine :: Paul's Conversion story. Addressing "inconsistency"**

**Paul's Conversion story. Addressing "inconsistency" - posted by roadsign (), on: 2008/5/3 13:56**

The following post was sent to me by a young man who is testing the scripture for authenticity. I wonder if someone can offer an explanation that would satisfy this seeker/sceptic:

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Galatians 1:16-1:20:

"To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: \* Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me\*; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not."

Acts 9:26-28:

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles\*, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

The response to this that I've seen has been that as there is no time limit described, then Paul could very well have been off doing other things and hence no problem.

I find two faults in that argument, though. One is that after three years it is almost certain that those in Jerusalem would have been aware of what he was up to in Damascus--after all, that's a pretty enticing story right there--and should not have been afraid of him.

The other is that arguing he went elsewhere is entirely speculation, and it is not actually contained in that manuscript. Since the speculation can not be proven, we can only go on what we see here. The answer is a good example of begging the question --obviously the text is correct, therefore we will speculate an answer that proves the text correct.

I find it more likely that there is an actual chronological mismatch in what we see here, the answer staring us in the face. I can see that this wouldn't be acceptable to someone with a belief in an inerrant bible.

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How should I respond to this:

Diane

**Re: Paul's Conversion story. Addressing "inconsistency" - posted by crsschk (), on: 2008/5/3 16:04**

Some commentary;

**Gal 1:17 -**

**Neither went I up to Jerusalem** - That is, I did not go there at once. I did not go to consult with the apostles there, or to be instructed by them in regard to the nature of the Christian religion. The design of this statement is to show that, in no sense, did he derive his commission from man.

**To them which were apostles before me** - This implies that Paul then regarded himself to be an apostle. They were, he admits, apostles before he was; but he felt also that he had original authority with them, and he did not go to them to receive instruction, or to derive his commission from them. Several of the apostles remained in Jerusalem for a considerable time after the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and it was regarded as the principal place of authority; see Acts 15.

**But I went into Arabia** - Arabia was south of Damascus, and at no great distance. The line indeed between Arabia Deserta and Syria is not very definitely marked, but it is generally agreed that Arabia extends to a considerable distance into the Great Syrian Desert. To what part of Arabia and for what purpose that Paul went is wholly unknown. Nothing is known of the circumstances of this journey; nor is the time which he spent there known. It is known indeed Gal\_1:18 that he d

id not go to Jerusalem until three years after his conversion, but how large a part of this time was spent in Damascus, we have no means of ascertaining. It is probable that Paul was engaged during these three years in preaching the gospel in Damascus and the adjacent regions, and in Arabia; compare Act\_9:20, Act\_9:22, Act\_9:27. The account of this journey into Arabia is wholly omitted by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, and this fact, as has been remarked by Paley (Horae Paulinae, chapter v. No. 2), demonstrates that the Acts and this Epistle were not written by the same author, or that the one is independent of the other; because, "if the Acts of the Apostles had been a forged history made up from the Epistle, it is impossible that this journey should have been passed over in silence; if the Epistle had been composed out of what the author had read of Paul's history in the Acts, it is unaccountable that it should have been inserted."

As to the reason why Luke omitted to mention the journey into Arabia nothing is known. Various conjectures have been entertained, but they are mere conjectures. It is sufficient to say, that Luke has by no means recorded all that Paul or the other apostles did, nor has he pretended to do it. He has given the leading events in the public labors of Paul; and it is not at all improbable that he has omitted not a few short excursions made by him for the purpose of preaching the gospel. The journey into Arabia, probably, did not furnish any incidents in regard to the success of the gospel there which required particular record by the sacred historian, nor has Paul himself referred to it for any such reason, or intimated that it furnished any incidents, or any facts, that required particularly the notice of the historian. He has mentioned it for a different purpose altogether, to show that he did not receive his commission from the apostles, and that he did not go at once to consult them. He went directly the other way. Since Luke, in the Book of Acts, had no occasion to illustrate this; since he had no occasion to refer to this argument, it did not fall in with the design to mention the fact. Nor is it known why Paul went into Arabia. Bloomfield supposes that it was in order to recover his health after the calamity which he suffered on the way to Damascus. But everything in regard to this is mere conjecture. I should rather think it was more in accordance with the general character of Paul that he made this short excursion for the purpose of preaching the gospel.

**And returned again unto Damascus** - He did not go to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles after his visit to Arabia, but returned again to the place where he was converted and preached there, showing that he had not derived his commission from the other apostles.

*Albert Barnes*

**Gal 1:17 - Neither went I up to Jerusalem,....** That is, immediately, as soon as he was converted, not till three years after, as follows; though by the account which Luke gives of him, Act\_9:23 and by that which the apostle gives of himself, Act\_22:17 it looks as if he went to Jerusalem some little time after his conversion, and before the date here given: and therefore some have thought that he did go up to Jerusalem pretty quickly, when, praying in the temple, he fell into a trance, and was ordered to make haste from thence, and go far hence unto the Gentiles and accordingly he made no stay, did not go to any of the apostles, and neither saw nor conversed with any of them, which is what he here says,

**to them which were apostles before me.** The twelve, who were called, ordained, and sent forth as apostles before he was; for last of all Christ appeared to him, and was seen by him as one born out of due time: his meaning is, not that he was a successor of the apostles, but that they were instated in the office of apostleship before him; and this he mentions to show that he did not receive the Gospel from men, nor not from the apostles themselves; since, upon his conversion, he did not go up to Jerusalem to see any of them, and talk with them; nor did he stand in need of any instructions from them, being immediately furnished sufficiently by Christ himself; nor did his work lie at Jerusalem, nor so much among the Jews as among the Gentiles, and therefore to them he went:

**but I went into Arabia.** This journey of the apostle is wholly omitted by Luke, nor should we have known anything of it, had it not been for this account: how long he stayed there, what he did, and what success he met with among the Arabs are no where related; no doubt but he preached the Gospel to them, and as his ministry everywhere was owned and blessed by God, it may be very reasonably thought it was here at his first setting out in it. The Arabic version reads it, "I went to Balcam", which was a city in Syria; but without any foundation for it; for it was not Syria, but Arabia to which he went. There are three countries which bear the name of Arabia, and which are called to distinguish them from one another, Arabia Petraea, Arabia Deserta, and Arabia Felix; of which see Gill on Act\_2:11. It is very likely it was the former of these which the apostle went to, as being nearest to Syria, since from Damascus, the metropolis of Syria, he went thither; and Damascus itself was at this time under the government of an Arabian king, see 2Co\_11:32. So Pliny frequently speaks of Arabia as near to Syria, Palestine, and Judea: in one place he says (l), Arabia divides Judea from Egypt; and elsewhere (m) observes, that Syria is distinguished by many names; for it is called Palestina, where it touches the Arabians, and Judea, and Coele, and Phenice; and Peraea, or the country beyond Jordan, he says, is next to Arabia and Egypt; and o

n the east of the lake of Asphaltites he places Arabia, that belongs to the Nomades; so likewise Josephus (n) places Arabia at the east of Peraea, or the country beyond Jordan; and says (o) in another place, that Arabia borders on Judea, the metropolis of which was Petra, where Aretas the king had his royal palace: Jerom (p) likewise observes, that the river Jordan divides Judea and Arabia; so that this country into which the apostle went was not a great way off of Syria and Judea, whither he returned again after some time; which seems to be about the space of three years, by what follows in the next verse, and when he had done the work and will of God in those parts; where doubtless he was the instrument of converting souls, and planting churches, and here it is certain were churches in ages following: in the "third" century were churches in Arabia, mentioned along with the churches in Syria, by Eusebius (q); in which age lived two famous Arabian bishops, Beryllus and Maximus; and the same historian (r) reports, that in the times of Dioclesian there were some wonderful martyrs in Arabia, who suffered the most cruel tortures and death, for the sake of Christ: and in the "fourth" century there were Arabian bishops in the Nicene council, and in other synods, as at Jerusalem and Sardica; and in the same century there were bishops of Arabia Petraea, at the synod in Antioch, whose names were Nicomachus and Cyron: and also in the "fifth" century there were churches and bishops in the same country (s), not to trace them any further:

**and returned again unto Damascus;** and then it was, that being increased in spiritual strength and knowledge, he proved that Jesus of Nazareth was the true Messiah, to the confusion of the Jews there; which drew upon him their resentment and indignation, so that they took counsel and lay in wait to kill him; but the disciples let him down through a window, by the wall of the city in a basket, and so he escaped them.

(l) Nat. Hist. l. 12. c. 21. (m) lb. l. 5. c. 12, 14, 16. (n) De Bello Jud. l. 3. c. 3. sect. 3. (o) Antiqu. l. 14. c. 1. sect. 4. & l. 4. c. 4. sect. 7. (p) De locis Hebraicis, fol. 92. G. (q) Eccl. Hist. l. 7. c. 5. (r) lb. l. 8. c. 12. (s) Hist. Eccl. Magdeburgh. cent. 4. c. 9. p. 350, 390, 405, 425. cent. 5. c. 2. p. 2. c. 10. p. 552.

*John Gill*

To back up a hair in Acts;

**Act 9:23 - And after that many days were fulfilled,....** This phrase is used by the Septuagint on Exo\_2:11 for a considerable length of time, for many years. The Jewish writers observe (t), that the phrase, "many days", signify at least three days; for by "days", in the plural number, two must be designed, and many signifies a third, or that one at least is added to them; but here it signifies three years, as it also does, 1Ki\_18:1 where it is said, "and it came to pass after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year"; and such a space of time is designed by the many days here; for when the apostle had stayed a little while at Damascus, and preached Christ in the synagogues, he went into Arabia, where he continued about three years, and then returned to Damascus, where what is related happened to him; Gal\_1:17.

**the Jews took counsel to kill him;** being filled with indignation at him, that he had changed his religion, and from a persecutor was become a preacher of the Gospel; this they had meditated some time, and now upon his return to Damascus attempted to put their counsel into execution.

(t) Maimon. & Bartenora in Misn. Zavim, c. 1. sect. 1.

Jumping ahead to;

**But they were all afraid of him;** knowing him to have been such an enemy to Christ, and so violent a persecutor of his church in times past:

**and believed not that he was a disciple;** or a true follower of Christ, but only pretended to be one, having some wicked design upon them in attempting to get among them: the reason of their not knowing anything of his conversion might be, because not only of the distance between Damascus and Jerusalem, and the continuance of the persecution in the latter place, which might occasion few comers to and fro of the Christians; but because the apostle, soon after his conversion, went to Arabia, where he had been all this while. Hence it appears, that the primitive churches were very careful in the admission of persons into fellowship with them; as they could not bear them in their communion who were evil, so they would not admit any among them but such as they looked upon to be the true disciples of Christ: and this is a method worthy of imitation; and such persons who, before a profession of religion, have been either very scandalous in their lives and conversations, or notorious enemies to Christ and his Gospel, ought to be thoroughly examined into, and full satisfaction obtained concerning them, ere they be received into the bosom of the church.

John Gill

There are a lot of time-lines that can be quickly passed without notice as the text can seem to be all running together. Don't find it all hard to believe that the apostles either did not know of his excursions or if they had heard, were highly skeptical and obviously afraid due to his former notoriety.

And as in other places in the scriptures where accounts seemingly differ think it does prove out their authenticity more so than by collusion. An omission doesn't necessitate anything amiss, just as it was put by Barnes, *It is sufficient to say, that Luke has by no means recorded all that Paul or the other apostles did, nor has he pretended to do it.* Certainly one thing is noticeable in many of Paul's writings, he seemed never tired of re-telling his conversion experience, no matter how many years since it occurred.

**Re: Paul's Conversion story. Addressing "inconsistency" - posted by Christinyou (), on: 2008/5/3 17:17**

Chronology of Paul the Apostle  
By Brandon C. Wason

It is not uncommon for a comprehensive study of Paul the Apostle to include some reconstruction of his chronology. The benefit of making a chronology of Paul's life is that readers of the Pauline corpus are better equipped to put the letters in the appropriate context. Nevertheless, there are several difficulties in this pursuit. First of all, Paul only wrote a limited number of letters, and the letters which we do possess are, for the most part, disinterested in chronology. Second, the role of the Acts for the Apostles must also be taken into consideration.

When constructing a chronology, there are those who put Acts on par with the letters, claiming that Acts is written by a first-rate historian, Luke, who was well equipped to compose a history of Paul's life. In his major work on Paul, William Mitchell Ramsay affirms this:

Our hypothesis is that Acts was written by a great historian, a writer who set himself to record the facts as they occurred, a strong partisan, indeed, but raised above partiality by his perfect confidence that he had only to describe the facts as they occurred, in order to make the truth of Christianity and the honor of Paul apparent.

Others claim that Acts is of no value to a chronological study of Paul's life and that it is only after one sheds the details of Acts that an accurate chronology (taken from the letters only) can be attained. John Knox is usually credited with spearheading this concept in his *Chapters of a Life of Paul*. Following in Knox's footsteps, LÄ¼demann states:

Our claim is that the answers to such issues as the existence of an itinerary and the actual chronological place of the tradition in Acts may only be approached after a careful evaluation of the letters.

Yet a third understanding is that the letters should be preferred, but the substantial amount that is usable and reliable from Acts should also be culled. This view makes the assumption that Acts is generally in agreement with the letters, and without Acts much of the Pauline chronology would be lost. Luke, however, was not a historian such as Tacitus or Suetonius; he wrote a monograph that served a purpose in the primitive church—a document with a theological emphasis—that did not necessitate the inclusion of every detail of Paul's activity. Along these lines, KÄ¼mmel writes:

Yet Campbell has proved convincingly that the sequence of Paul's missionary activities that can be inferred from his letters is so remarkably compatible with the information from Acts that we have good grounds for deriving the relative chronology of Paul's activity from a critical combination of the information from Paul's letters with the account in Acts.

For the chronological reconstruction to be as accurate as possible it is important to solidify the dates in some concrete form. There are certain events in the life of Paul which can be fixed with a substantial degree of certainty because of corresponding external information.

In 2 Cor 11.32, Paul makes reference to the governor in Damascus that served under King Aretas IV. Because Aretas's death occurred in 40 ce, it is impossible to date Paul's escape from Damascus any later than 40 ce. Yet more specifically Aretas IV had control over Damascus from 36 to 38 ce, which more places Paul's escape inside a tighter range of dates.

A second piece of evidence that helps solidify the dates of Paul's chronology is the discovery and publication of the Gallio inscription. This inscription is a transcription of a letter, written by Claudius, to the city of Delphi sometime in the first half of 52 ce; the inscription indicates that L. Junius Gallio entered his proconsulship in the summer of 51 ce. With this in mind, Deissmann makes the following conclusion regarding Paul's stay in Corinth:

Since he had already been working for approximately eighteen months in Corinth, Paul must have come to Corinth in the first months of the year 50, and left Corinth in the late summer of the year 51.

A third fixed date is the death of Herod Agrippa. According to Josephus Ant. 19.343-352, Herod Agrippa's death occurred in 44 bce. Luke depicts the death of Herod in Acts 12.21-23 and the return of Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem in 12.25. If Luke is concerned with chronology, Paul's return to Jerusalem would have occurred in 44 ce.

With the methodology and absolute dates in order, we can now construct a chronology of Paul in tabulated form.

#### A Tabulated Chronology of Paul the Apostle

Date  
Information from the Letters  
Implicit/External Information  
Information from Acts

c. 5-10 ce  
Born as an Israelite, (Phil 3.5; Gal 2.15; cf. Phlm 9)  
Paul's Birth  
Born as a citizen of Tarsus and Rome (Acts 22.3; cf. Acts 7.58)

Studies under Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22.3)

30 ce

The Crucifixion of Jesus

Becomes a member of the party of Pharisees (Phil 3.5)

cf. Acts 23.6; 26.5

Advances beyond his contemporaries in Judaism (Gal 1.14)

Paul Persecutes the church (1 Cor 15.9; Gal 1.13; Phil 3.6)

cf. Acts 7.58; 8.1; 9.1-2

35 ce  
Paul receives his revelation as 'to one untimely born' (Gal 1.15; 1 Cor 15.8)

The occurrence on the road to Damascus (9.3-8)

Paul arrives in Damascus

cf. Acts 9.9-19

Goes to Arabia (Gal 1.17)

Returns to Damascus; escapes from the city (Gal 1.17; 2 Cor 11.32-33)

cf. Acts 9.20-25

37ce

Travels to Jerusalem for fifteen days where he visits with Peter and James (Gal 1.18-19); Goes north to the regions of Syria and Cilicia (Gal 1.21-22)

cf. Acts 9.26-29; He departs Jerusalem for his safety and goes to Caesarea then Tarsus (Acts 9.30).

40 ce

Aretas IV Dies

Paul's first missionary journey covering the regions of Syria, Pamphylia, Pisidia, and southern Galatia (Acts 13.1—15.35).

49/50 ce

Goes to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus (Gal 2.1)

Paul and Barnabas attend the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15.2-29)

Incident with Peter in Antioch (Gal 2.11-14)

Returns to Antioch (Acts 15.30-35)

50-52 ce

Writing of Galatians, 1 Thessalonians and, possibly, 2 Thessalonians

Paul's second missionary journey where he travels through Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Ephesus, Caesarea, then back to Antioch (Acts. 15.40—18.22)

52-56 ce

Correspondence with the Corinthians (writes four letters) and the writing of Romans

Paul's third missionary journey, where he travels back through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia (Acts 18.23—21.17)

56/57 ce

Arrives in Jerusalem

Writes Philippians, Philemon. Traditional dating of Ephesians and Colossians.

Captivity in Palestine and eventually in Rome (Acts 22.24—28.31)

The above should form a general reconstruction of the events in Paul's life. Much more detail can be given in areas especially where Acts elaborates on events not recorded in the epistles. Anyone seeking information beyond Paul's Roman imprisonment should consult Lightfoot's intriguing treatise, "St Paul's History after the Close of the Acts."

As you can see the two verses quoted are not at odds with each other, they are separate happenings in the Life of Paul. First His conversion by the Christ in Him. Second, three years with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself relation the Gospel of Himself to Paul, Third Paul's trip to Jerusalem to see Peter and James, then His final trip to Jerusalem of the Quoted verse:

Acts 9:26-28:

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles\*, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

In Christ: Phillip

**Re: Paul's Conversion story. Addressing "inconsistency" - posted by InTheLight (), on: 2008/5/3 18:45**

Quote:  
-----The other is that arguing he went elsewhere is entirely speculation, and it is not actually contained in that manuscript. Since the speculation can not be proven, we can only go on what we see here. The answer is a good example of begging the question --obviously the text is correct, therefore we will speculate an answer that proves the text correct.  
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This is actually unfair because your friends own point about a possible inconsistency here is itself based only on speculation.

The writer of Acts gives no time limitation and your friend won't find anywhere in the New Testament a verse that denies that Paul spent three years in Arabia before going to Jerusalem. What the Bible does *not* say in this case is important because it proves that your friends argument is not based on a fair portrayal of the Bible.

In Christ,

Ron

**Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2008/5/3 22:28**

Quote:  
-----What the Bible does not say in this case is important because it proves that your friends argument is not based on a fair portrayal of the Bible.  
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This seems to be a common trend: To deploy the very methods that you accuse the "oponent" of using.

I will see how I can integrate these various articles into a reasonable reply.

Many thanks ye'all!

Diane