

GALATIANS 1:15-21 COMMENTARY SAMPLE – Baker Exegetical Commentary (BECNT)

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DAY 1

¹⁵ **But when** [†] **God** [‡], **who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called me through his grace, was pleased** ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me—in order that I might preach the good news about him among the Gentiles—I did not immediately consult with human beings, ¹⁷ neither did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and then again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with [†] Cephass [‡]; and I spent fifteen days with him. ¹⁹ I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰ But concerning the things I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying. ²¹ Then I went into the regions of [†] Syria and Cilicia. [‡]

1:15 Verses 15–17 comprise one sentence, with a long subordinate clause describing Paul’s conversion—*ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν ... ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί (hote de eudokēsen ... apokalypsai ton huion autou en emoi, but when [God] was pleased ... to reveal his Son in me)*—and a compound main clause indicating what Paul did (or did not do) after his conversion—*εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ... ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν (eutheōs ou prosanethēmēn sarki kai haimati oude anēlthon eis Hierosolyma ... alla apē lthon eis Arabian kai palin hypēstrepsa eis Damaskon, immediately I did not consult with flesh and blood, neither did I go up to Jerusalem, ... but I went away into Arabia and again returned to Damascus)*. As we noted earlier, the structure of this sentence reflects Paul’s concern, for apologetic reasons, to establish his apostolic independence, and especially his independence from Jerusalem. Whether we include *ὁ θεός (ho theos, God)* in the text or not (see the additional note), the subject of the verb *εὐδόκησεν* is clearly God. This verb, which means basically “to take pleasure in,” “be pleased with,” often has an additional nuance: “take pleasure in and so decide to do.” See, for example, Ps. 68:16 (67:17 LXX), “the mountain on which God *has chosen* to dwell” (*τὸ ὄρος ὃ εὐδόκησεν ὁ θεὸς κατοικεῖν ἐν αὐτῷ, to oros ho eudokēsen ho theos katoikein en autō*) and 1 Thess. 2:8 (NRSV), “We *determined* to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own souls” (*εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς, eudokoumen metadounai hymin ou monon to euangelion tou theou alla kai tas heautōn psychas*). This is clearly its sense here (see also, in Paul, with God as subject, 1 Cor. 1:21; Col. 1:19).

Paul completes his main sentence with an infinitive at the beginning of verse 16 (*ἀποκαλύψαι*). But before he does this, he adds a compound participial description of God: *ὁ ἀφορίζας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ (ho apherisas me ek koilias mētros mou kai kalesas dia tēs charitos autou, the one who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called [me] through his grace)*.⁶ The verb *ἀφορίζω (aphorizō)* means “to separate” (Matt. 13:49; 25:32 [2x]; Luke 6:22; 2 Cor. 6:17; Gal. 2:12) and comes to be used in the sense of “set apart, appoint” (BDAG 158.2; cf. Acts 13:2; Rom. 1:1).⁷

Paul’s claim that he was “set apart” *ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου* can be variously interpreted. The *ἐκ* in this phrase can denote “separation” (Job 38:8; cf. also Ps. 71:6 [70:6 LXX]), giving rise to the KJV rendering, “separated me from my mother’s womb.” But *ἐκ* usually has a temporal meaning in this phrase (Lightfoot 1881: 82). The question is then whether the meaning is “set me apart *from the time of* my birth” or “set me apart

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

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LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

⁶ The article governs both participles as a valid example of “Sharp’s Rule” (Wallace 1996: 275).

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

⁷ It has been argued that Paul’s use of *ἀφορίζω*, “separate,” is a play on the word for “Pharisee,” the “separated one”: Paul truly became a “separated one” when God set him apart for the gospel (Dunn 1993a: 63). But the allusion is unlikely: Paul has not actually used the word “Pharisee,” whose etymology is, in any case, debated (Betz 1979: 70; Schlier 1989: 53).

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

KJV King James Version

before birth.” Most occurrences of the phrase in the LXX and NT have the former meaning, as in Acts 3:2, where Luke introduces “a man who was lame from birth” (see also Judg. 16:17; Ps. 22:10; Matt. 19:12; Acts 14:8). But the phrase probably has the latter meaning in Luke 1:15 (so most English translations), and in Isa. 49:1, where the Servant says, “from the womb the LORD called me; from the belly of my mother he mentioned my name” (AT; LXX is slightly different: “the Lord called my name from the womb of my mother” [κύριος ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομά μου, *kyrios ek koilias mētros mou ekalesen to onoma mou*]). The parallelism strongly suggests that “from the womb” here refers to the Lord’s call of the Servant before he was born. This text is important because Paul clearly depends on this text and on the prophetic call of Jeremiah in Jer. 1:5 as he describes his own apostolic call (see esp. the careful analysis of Ciampa 1998: 111–18; Harmon 2010: 76–85; Wilk 1998: 292–93, although he contests any reference to Jeremiah).⁸ Jeremiah 1:5 does not have the same complete phrase that we have here in Galatians, but it is very close in both wording and concept: “Before I formed you in the womb [ἐν κοιλίᾳ, *en koilia*] I knew you, before you were born [πρὸ τοῦ σε ἐξελεθῆν ἐκ μητρᾶς, *pro tou se exelthein ek mētras*] I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” Paul’s dependence on these texts makes it very likely that he is claiming to have been “set apart” “before he was born” (e.g., Lightfoot 1881: 82; Bruce 1982b: 92).

Neither of these two prophetic texts on which Paul probably depends uses the verb ἀφορίζω (in Isa. 49:1 ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός [*ek koilias mētros*, from my mother’s womb] is attached to καλέω [*kaleō*, call]), so they provide no help in determining how Paul relates his being “set apart” to his “calling.” He might view them as two ways of describing the same thing (Martyn 1997: 156–57, who notes that Paul reverses the sequence of the two ideas in Rom. 1:1 [κλητός ... ἀφορισμένος, *klētos ... aphōrismenos*, called ... set apart]). But it is also possible that he views them as two separate stages: being “set apart” before birth and “called” when God revealed his Son to him (Betz 1979: 70; P. O’Brien 2004b: 364–65). Perhaps the parallel Paul suggests between his own experience and that of the Galatians (1:6) favors the latter. It is, in each case, God’s grace that is the dominating force.

DAY 2

¹⁵ But when ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ἰσχυρὸς, who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me—in order that I might preach the good news about him among the Gentiles—I did not immediately consult with human beings, ¹⁷ neither did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and then again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with ὁ Κεφαῖς; and I spent fifteen days with him. ¹⁹ I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰ But concerning the things I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying. ²¹ Then I went into the regions of ὁ Συρία and Cilicia. ὁ

1:16 Paul now completes the verbal idea begun with εὐδόκησεν in verse 15: ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί (*apokalypsai ton huion autou en emoi*, to reveal his Son to me). The reference is to the appearance of the risen Christ to Paul as he was traveling to Damascus to persecute the Christians there (Acts 9:1–9). But Paul’s way of describing the experience is noteworthy. Only here (and indirectly in 1:12) does Paul use “revelation” language to depict his Damascus Road encounter with the risen Christ. Not only that: his claim that the Son was revealed “in” him is also surprising; we would have expected Paul to say that God revealed his Son “to” him. To be sure, some interpreters think that the ἐν could have this meaning here (BDF §220.1; Martyn 1997: 158). But this is doubtful. Paul elsewhere uses the dative (Eph. 3:5) or εἰς (Rom. 8:18) after ἀποκαλύπτω (*apokalyptō*,

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

AT author’s translation

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

⁸ S. Kim (2002: 101–6) argues that Paul also has the initial “call” of the Servant, in Isa. 42:1–9, in view in this text. He notes that some LXX MSS use the verb εὐδοκέω (*eudokeō*, be pleased) in v. 1; that the LXX reference to the Servant as ὁ ἐκλεκτός (*ho eklektos*, chosen) may have influenced Paul’s claim to have been “set apart” (ἀφορισάς); and that Isa. 42:6 refers to the Servant as a “light for the Gentiles.”

ὁ Textual variants in the Greek text

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)

reveal) to designate the recipients of revelation. His choice to use ἐν here is likely intended to denote that the revelation of God’s Son had a transformative power “in” his very being: “the revelation had enlightened his whole soul, and ... he had Christ speaking within him” (Chrysostom, *Comm. Gal.* on 1:16 [NPNF¹ 13:11]; see esp. Dunn 1993a: 64; B. Longenecker 1998: 149–50; also, e.g., Burton 1921: 49–51; Betz 1979: 71; Bruce 1982b: 93).⁹ God broke into Paul’s life as a Jew and indeed persecutor of the risen Christ and his people, through an “apocalyptic” transformative event (Boers 2006: 31–32). We should also take note of the object of the revelation: “God’s Son.” Sonship plays a critical and indeed central role in Galatians: Paul tries to convince the Galatians that they become and remain “the sons [or children] of Abraham,” and thus “sons of God” through faith in Christ alone (3:7, 26; 4:4–7; cf. 4:22, 30 and 2:20). Note particularly 4:4–5, where Paul connects the sending into the world of God’s Son with Christians’ attainment of “sonship.” Paul’s choice to identify the one who was revealed in him as the Son of God therefore implies that his experience has been, in a certain basic sense, similar to the Galatians: in both cases, God worked in grace through his Son to make them his sons.

Distinct from the Galatians’ experience, however, is the purpose for which God revealed his Son in Paul: ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (*hina euangelizōmai auton en tois ethnesin*, in order that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles).¹⁰ This clause does not mean that Paul views his Damascus Road experience as a call and *not* as a conversion: it is a logical error to think that because Paul speaks of his calling as a purpose of the experience that it is the *only* purpose of that experience (contra Dunn 1993a: 65). Indeed, the transformative revelation of God’s Son in itself suggests the idea of conversion. Of course, Paul typically associates his encounter with the risen Christ with his distinctive call to preach the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 22:15; 26:17–18). But here he does so because his focus, from this point forward in his autobiography, is on his mission and its relationship to the Jerusalem apostles. Perhaps Paul wants to make clear that his calling ultimately rests on God’s revelation, not with, for example, a human “commissioning,” either at Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1–3) or, as the agitators may have alleged, at Jerusalem (Mussner 1988: 87).

After a long and relatively complex subordinate clause (vv. 15–16a), Paul finally arrives at his main clause, which, as we noted earlier, is made up of two negative clauses, “I did not consult with flesh and blood” and “neither did I go up to Jerusalem,” and one positive clause, “I went away to Arabia.” After his conversion/commissioning, Paul felt no need to consult with other people about the meaning of his experience, and still less any need to find legitimation from the Jerusalem apostles. “Flesh and blood” is a typical idiom for “human beings,” and it is typically used, as here (versus “revelation”) to set up a contrast with something divine (Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 15:50; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14; cf. Mussner 1988: 89–90). The verb he uses—προσανατίθημι (*prosanatithēmi*, only here and at Gal. 2:6 in NT, lacking in LXX)—has the sense “consult with.”¹¹ There is considerable debate about which clause the adverb εὐθέως (*eutheōs*, immediately) modifies. Is Paul saying “I did not immediately consult with people or go up to Jerusalem” (NIV, ESV, NLT; R. Longenecker 1990: 33); or “I immediately went away to Arabia” (NRSV; Lightfoot 1881: 83; Burton 1921: 53–54; Bruce 1982b: 94)? Since Paul’s emphasis in this passage is on the former point, we should probably conclude that he is claiming he did not “immediately” consult with any human being.¹²

DAY 3

Comm. Gal. John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians*

NPNF Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, edited by P. Schaff, 1st series, 14 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–57)

¹ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by P. Schaff, 1st series, 14 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952–57)

⁹ Two other options for ἐν αὐτῷ are (1) that the phrase is instrumental, denoting the revealing of God’s Son through Paul in his ministry (Lightfoot 1881: 82–83); or (2) that the phrase refers to God’s revelation “in my former manner of life” (de Boer 2011: 92).

¹⁰ Hultgren (2006: 22–25, 29–32) suggests that, partly because of the OT prophetic background, ἔθνεσιν here means “nations.” But, as Schnabel (2004: 935) notes, parallel passages (esp. Rom. 1:13) suggest that “Gentiles” is the best reading (the ἐν means “among” [A. Robertson 1934: 587]). LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

¹¹ Dunn (1993a: 67), citing Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 17.116.4, argues that the verb has a more technical sense: “consult in order to be given a skilled and authoritative interpretation.” But the verb does not have this particular sense often enough to assume that Paul has this distinct idea in mind (Silva 2001: 58–61).

NIV New International Version

ESV English Standard Version

NLT New Living Translation

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

¹² Bruce (1982b: 94) suggests the latter is more likely because, if Paul had intended εὐθέως to qualify the verbs in the negative clauses, it would have followed the negative οὐ (as in Luke 14:5; 21:9). But the compound negative in Gal. 1:16–17, οὐ ... οὐδέ (*ou ... oude*, not ... neither), seems to warrant putting the adverb before the first negative.

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1:17 Together, the two assertions—positively, that God “revealed his Son in me” and negatively, that he did not immediately consult human beings—substantiate his claim that he received his gospel, not from a human source, but from a “revelation of Jesus Christ” (vv. 11–12). The second negative clause that opens this verse moves the argument into the specifics that were apparently in question in the Galatian crisis. As we noted above, the consistent focus on the Jerusalem apostles from this point forward in Paul’s narrative is best explained if the agitators were arguing that Paul was an unlearned or perhaps disobedient disciple of the Jerusalem apostles. Paul counters this accusation head-on by elaborating “flesh and blood” in terms of “the apostles who were before me” (τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, *tous pro emou apostolous*). These apostles, as Paul will make clear subsequently, are especially Cephas (or Peter), James (the brother of the Lord), and John (1:18–19; 2:7–9). To see them, he would have had to “go up” (ἀνῆλθον, *anēlthon*) to Jerusalem. (Jerusalem was situated on an elevated area; hence the traditional language of “going up” to Jerusalem; cf., e.g., 2 Sam. 19:34; 1 Kings 12:27; Ezra 1:3; Zech. 14:17; Acts 15:2; 21:12; 25:9.)¹³

“Instead” (ἀλλά, *alla*) of “going up” to Jerusalem, Paul “went away into Arabia.” In none of his other autobiographical comments does Paul mention such a trip to Arabia, and the reference here is so brief that we can only speculate about it. “Arabia” (Ἀραβία, *Arabia*) in Paul’s day would have referred to any part of a fairly large area to the northeast, east, and south of Israel, including portions of Transjordan, south Syria, the Negev, and the northwest Arabian Peninsula. But “Arabia” was more likely to be a political designation, referring to the Nabatean Kingdom, a Romanized nation whose capital was in Petra and whose influence extended as far as Damascus to the north and the Sinai Peninsula to the south (R. H. Smith, *ABD* 1:325).

What Paul was doing there has almost evenly divided interpreters for centuries. Some think that he got away from Israel in order to meditate on the significance of the revelation that he had received (e.g., Burton 1921: 55–57, who notes that this would make a good contrast with his decision not to consult with people; cf. also, e.g., Riesner 1998: 258–60). A particular twist on this suggestion that has gained currency recently is that Paul went, specifically, to Mount Sinai (which Paul explicitly locates in Arabia in 4:25), where he reflected on the relationship between the law given by God at that spot and the revelation of Jesus Christ that he had just experienced (Lightfoot 1881: 87–90; N. Wright 1996; Ciampa 1998: 121; Hays 2000: 216; Garlington 2003: 62).

This thesis is difficult to prove or disprove, but the fact that Paul was persecuted by the Nabatean King Aretas (2 Cor. 11:32) might suggest rather that Paul went to Arabia to preach the gospel that had been revealed to him (e.g., Betz 1979: 74; Bruce 1982b: 96; Murphy-O’Connor 1993: 733). Of course, Paul could have done both: Hengel and Schwemer (1997: 109–19) argue that Paul might have begun preaching in Nabatea because it was closest (both geographically and ethnically) to Israel but that Paul might also have journeyed to Mount Sinai for reflection. We simply cannot know for sure, but we think it slightly more likely that Paul mentions Arabia in his travelogue here because he began his preaching ministry there.¹⁴

“ Textual variants in the Greek text

¹³ Paul uses the more Hellenized form of the name for Jerusalem here, Ἱεροσόλυμα (*Hierosolyma*), as opposed to Ἱερουσαλήμ (*Jerusalēm*), which he more often uses (Rom. 15:19, 25, 26, 31; 1 Cor. 16:3; Gal. 4:25, 26; he uses Ἱεροσόλυμα elsewhere only in 1:18 and 2:1). Adams (2000: 222) suggests that Paul may intend to “de-sacralize” the city; but this is probably too speculative.

ABD The Anchor Bible Dictionary

¹⁴ S. Kim (2002: 103–4; cf. also 2011: 13–14) suggests that Paul might have had a “biblical” reason for going to Arabia. He thinks that Paul may well have read the geographical references in Isa. 42:11 (which immediately follows the passage about the commissioning of the Servant to which Paul may make allusion in v. 15), “Kedar” (קֶדָר, *qēdār*) and “Sela” (סֵלָא, *selā*), as references to “Arabia” (סֵלָא, *selā*; “crag” or “cliff” is similar to the name of the Nabatean capital, Petra [= “rock”]; and the Targum paraphrases both here as “the wilderness of Arabia”).

After his stay in Arabia, Paul says, “I returned again” (πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα) to Damascus. The language implies, of course, that Paul had already been in Damascus, a fact that is clear from other texts and that his readers may perhaps have known from Paul’s teaching (Mussner 1988: 92–93). The information Paul provides in this text reveals that the Damascus stay recorded by Luke in Acts 9:8–25 was interrupted by a perhaps extended stay in Arabia (on the relationship between Paul’s narrative here and Acts, see Schnabel 2004: 997–1006; Barnett 1999: 249–86).

DAY 4

¹⁵ But when Ϛ God Ϛ, who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me—in order that I might preach the good news about him among the Gentiles—I did not immediately consult with human beings, ¹⁷ neither did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and then again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ **Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Ϛ Cephas Ϛ; and I spent fifteen days with him.** ¹⁹ I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰ But concerning the things I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying. ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Ϛ Syria and Cilicia. Ϛ

b. First Jerusalem Visit and Further Travels (1:18–24)

The chronological indicators in 1:18 and 1:21 mark out the next stages in Paul’s travelogue. Two specific movements are noted, each introduced with ἔπειτα (*epeita*, then): a visit to Jerusalem (1:18) and a move to “the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (1:21). Paul spends no time describing his ministry during these years (the events he narrates in this paragraph may have covered as many as ten years). He concentrates, rather, on the negative point that he introduced in verse 17a: his minimal contact with Jerusalem and the apostles resident there.

Exegesis and Exposition

1:18 “Then, after three years” almost certainly should be connected not with Paul’s stay in Arabia or Damascus (v. 17b; as, e.g., Mussner 1988: 93; Lüdemann 1984: 60) but with his conversion (v. 15a; e.g., R. Longenecker 1990: 37; Martyn 1997: 181). For it is not Paul’s ministry per se that is the focus of this narrative but his contacts with the Jerusalem apostles. Thus, as we have seen, the main clause in the long sentence that runs from verse 15 through verse 17 features the negative claims “I did not consult with flesh and blood” and “I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me” (vv. 16b–17a). The chronological marker in verse 18, then, picks up the “immediately” that modifies both these clauses: “after my conversion, I did not immediately consult with humans, including the Jerusalem apostles; it was only ‘then, after three years’ that I went to Jerusalem.” In modern English, “after three years” would mean that three years intervened between his conversion and this visit to Jerusalem. In the ancient world, however, the comparable Greek phrase—μετὰ ἔτη τρία, *meta etē tria*—could mean a period anywhere from two to three years. For even in expressions using μετὰ, ancient writers would sometimes count “inclusively.” In effect, the phrase would then mean “in the third year.” This visit to Jerusalem, which is the same as the one recorded by Luke in Acts 9:26–30, thus probably took place in AD 36–37 (dating Paul’s conversion in 33–34). In fact, however, the precise chronological significance of this phrase has little bearing on the meaning of the passage: for our purposes what is important is that some time intervened between Paul’s conversion and his “consultation” with the Jerusalem apostles, thereby proving his point that his gospel was not derived from human beings (1:12).

Paul’s purpose in “going up” (ἀνῆλθον, *anēlthon*; see v. 17) was to “get acquainted with” Peter. The verb Paul uses here, ἱστορέω (*historeō*), is properly translated “get acquainted with,” “visit”; it does not signify that Paul went to Jerusalem to receive instruction about the basic meaning or implications of the gospel (which would contradict his whole point in this passage; see the first additional note on 1:18). Of course, it is inconceivable, as C. H. Dodd (1937: 16) has put it, that Paul and Cephas spent fifteen days discussing the weather. They would certainly have talked about their respective Christian experiences; and it would not be

Ϛ Textual variants in the Greek text
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counter to Paul’s argument to think that Paul would have eagerly sought information from Peter about Jesus’s life and teaching and the history of the early Christian movement. As we noted in commenting on verses 11–12, Paul has no intention of denying that he received much useful information about Jesus and the gospel from others. What he is keen to deny is the agitators’ charge that his understanding of the gospel *depends* on anyone else, especially the Jerusalem apostles.¹

Paul typically refers to the apostle Peter by his Aramaic name (כֶּפָּא, *kēpā*), as transliterated into Greek (κηφᾶς, *kēphas*; Gal. 2:9, 11, 14; 1 Cor. 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; only in Gal. 2:7, 8 does he use his Greek name, πέτρος [*petros*]). Scholars have suggested various reasons for this habit, but none is convincing.² The chronological exactitude (rare in the NT) that we have seen at the beginning of the verse—“after three years”—continues at the end of the verse: ἐπέμεινα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡμέρας δεκαπέντε (*epemeina pros auton hēmeras dekapente*, I remained with him for fifteen days).³ Recognizing that his every word will be scrutinized by opponents, Paul is being as precise as he can be.

DAY 5

¹⁵ But when Ἦ God Ἦ, who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me—in order that I might preach the good news about him among the Gentiles—I did not immediately consult with human beings, ¹⁷ neither did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and then again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Ἦ Cephas Ἦ; and I spent fifteen days with him. ¹⁹ **I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord.** ²⁰ But concerning the things I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying. ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Ἦ Syria and Cilicia. Ἦ

1:19 Continuing his careful rehearsal of events, Paul notes that he did not see any other apostle—εἰ μὴ Ἰάκωβον τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου (*ei mē Iakōbon ton adelphon tou kyriou*, except James, the brother of the Lord). Four men with the name Ἰάκωβος figure in the NT: (1) James the son of Zebedee, brother of John, one of the Twelve (very frequently in the Gospels; he suffered an early martyrdom [Acts 12:2]); (2) James, the son of Alphaeus, also one of the Twelve (see Mark 3:18; he may be the same as “James the younger” [Mark 15:40]); (3) James the father of Judas (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13); (4) James, a leader in the early church (see Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18), and (almost certainly) the writer of the Letter of James (1:1) and brother of Jude (Jude 1). The James that Paul mentions here cannot be the son of Zebedee (he died before the likely date of this Jerusalem visit) and almost certainly is not the son of Alphaeus or the father of Judas, who play no significant role in the NT or in early Christian literature. James, the leader of the Jerusalem church, on the other hand, has just the role that explains his prominence in Gal. 1–2 (see also 2:9, 12).

The real debate in this passage is not over the identity of James but whether Paul explicitly includes him among the apostles. Note these two different English translations:

I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. (NIV)

The only other apostle I met at that time was James, the Lord’s brother. (NLT)

¹ Howard (1979: 36) argues that the point is not whether Peter gave Paul information, but just the reverse: On this occasion Paul did not inform Peter about his law-free gospel. But this interpretation ignores the way vv. 11–12, with their focus on Paul’s receiving knowledge of the gospel, dominate this section.

² For example, Perkins (2003: 45) thinks that Paul’s use of Peter’s Aramaic name, while using a Roman name for himself, suggests a separation of ministry spheres, while Dunn (1993a: 74) thinks that the Aramaic form of Peter’s name may suggest his status with the Jewish churches. But neither explanation appears to make good sense in 1 Corinthians, where Paul also uses (exclusively) Peter’s Aramaic name.

³ Paul’s choice of the compound form ἐπιμένω instead of the simple μένω (*menō*, remain) probably has no semantic significance (see his other uses of the compound verb in Rom. 6:1; 11:22, 23; 1 Cor. 16:7, 8; Phil. 1:24; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16; it is difficult, for instance, to detect any difference in meaning between ἐπιμένω in Phil. 1:24 and μένω in v. 25). The preposition πρὸς (*pros*) with the accusative, similarly, here simply means “with”; any particular nuance (distinct, for instance, from μετά [*meta*, with] with the genitive or σύν [*syn*, with] with the dative) is difficult to detect (contra, e.g., Martyn [1997: 173], who suggests Paul here means he was Peter’s houseguest). The only other time Paul uses μένω or ἐπιμένω to denote a “stay” with someone, he also uses πρὸς with the accusative (1 Cor. 16:7; though note Phil. 1:25: μενῶ καὶ παραμένῶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν [*menō kai paramenō pasin hymin*, I will remain and I will continue with all of you]; here the dative probably depends more on παραμένω).

Ἦ Textual variants in the Greek text

NIV New International Version

The difference in these two translations is the way the phrase introduced by εἰ μὴ is understood. This combination of words normally indicates an “exception” to the previous statement, but it is not clear in this case whether the exception relates specifically to the apostles or more generally to “people in authority.” That is, we could paraphrase (as the dash in the NIV seems to imply): “I saw none of the other apostles; but I did see another important person, that is, James, the brother of the Lord”; or, as the NLT rendering suggests: “I saw none of the other apostles, with the exception of James, the brother of the Lord.” The latter is arguably the more natural reading of the syntax and should probably be accepted (see the first additional note on 1:19). Of the apostles, Paul “saw” (εἶδον, *eidon*) Peter and James on this trip to Jerusalem (see the second additional note on 1:19). His purpose is, again, to minimize the extent of his contact with the Jerusalem apostles. Paul spent some time with Peter, “getting acquainted” with him and—certainly—learning more about the life and teaching of Jesus. James he only “saw,” suggesting perhaps a briefer meeting.

DAY 6

¹⁵ But when ☐ God ☐, who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me—in order that I might preach the good news about him among the Gentiles—I did not immediately consult with human beings, ¹⁷ neither did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and then again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with ☐ Cephas ☐; and I spent fifteen days with him. ¹⁹ I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰ **But concerning the things I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying.** ²¹ Then I went into the regions of ☐ Syria and Cilicia. ☐

1:20 Paul adds a solemn oath to underscore the truthfulness of what he is saying: ἃ δὲ γράφω ὑμῖν, ἰδοὺ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ὅτι οὐ ψεύδομαι (*ha de graphō hymin, idou enōpion tou theou hoti ou pseudomai*, in the things that I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying). The ὅτι depends on a verb that must be supplied with the phrase ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. Based on similar asseverations in Paul, the verb we should most likely supply is μαρτυρέω (*martyreō*, testify; see Rom. 10:2; 2 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:15; Col. 4:13) or the compound form, διαμαρτυρέω (*diamartyreō*; 1 Tim. 5:21; 2 Tim. 4:1—Paul never uses the verb ὀμνύω [*omnyō*], take an oath). The use of ἰδοὺ (*idou*, traditionally “behold,” in modern English, “see,” or “note well”) is also significant. Unlike some biblical authors, Paul rarely uses the word (only five other times outside OT quotations: 1 Cor. 15:51; 2 Cor. 5:17; 6:9; 7:11; 12:14), so its presence here brings clear emphasis (perhaps carried over into modern English best with an exclamation mark at the end of the sentence; see RSV, NRSV, ESV, NET). As Sampley (1977) notes, the Romans viewed an oath as the “final word” in a trial. Paul is trying to make it as clear as he can that “the things he writes” (ἃ γράφω) here should have decisive significance in the “trial” between himself and his opponents. But what in particular are “the things he writes”? The plural suggests that more than verse 19 is in view (contra Schlier 1989: 62); most think that Paul has all of verses 13–19 in mind (e.g., Burton 1921: 61; Betz 1979: 79; R. Longenecker 1990: 39–40). It is also possible, however, that Paul intends this oath to apply to all of verses 13–24 and even into Gal. 2 (Martyn 1997: 174).

DAY 7

¹⁵ But when ἰ God ῥ, who set me apart from the womb of my mother and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me—in order that I might preach the good news about him among the Gentiles—I did not immediately consult with human beings, ¹⁷ neither did I go up to Jerusalem, to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia and then again returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with ἰ Cephas ῥ; and I spent fifteen days with him. ¹⁹ I saw no other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. ²⁰ But concerning the things I am writing about, I testify before God that I am not lying. ²¹ **Then I went into the regions of ἰ Syria and Cilicia. ῥ**

1:21 A second ἔπειτα (*epeita*, then; see v. 18) marks the next stage of Paul’s selective autobiography. His purpose remains clear: to show how little contact he had with the Jerusalem apostles so that no one can accuse him of having learned his gospel from them (v. 12). According to Luke, Paul’s first postconversion Jerusalem visit ended when his attempts to evangelize Hellenistic Jews stirred up persecution against him. To save his life, the Jerusalem believers “took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus” (Acts 9:30). It was after some time—probably around eight years—that Barnabas brought Paul from Tarsus to Antioch to join him in ministry in that key city (Acts 11:25–26). Tarsus was one of the major cities in the Roman province of Cilicia. So Paul’s claim here in Galatians that ἦλθον εἰς τὰ κλίματα τῆς Συρίας καὶ τῆς Κιλικίας (*ēlthon eis ta klimata tēs Syrias kai Kilikias*, I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia) must describe his move to Tarsus. However, since Paul follows up this notice of movement with a description of activity during that period, the combination ἦλθον εἰς probably has the sense “Then I came into” (cf. KJV). Paul’s use of the two provincial names, Syria and Cilicia, shows that Paul has in mind the entire period of time from his move to Tarsus until his next journey to Jerusalem for the council described in Gal. 2:1–10. Assuming, as we argue, that this council took place during the visit to Jerusalem described in Acts 11:27–30, this period of time includes ministry in Tarsus for around eight years and ministry in Antioch for at least a year: see Acts 11:26: “So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church [in Antioch] and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.”

Paul denotes the region of this activity quite generally: “the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” “Regions” (κλίματα) probably refers to geographical areas within the provinces of Syria and Cilicia (Paul’s two other uses of κλίμα also seem to have a geographic, rather than political, focus: Rom. 15:23; 2 Cor. 11:10; cf. LN 15.1.79; R. Longenecker 1990: 40). The separate mention of Syria and Cilicia does not conform to the official Roman usage at that time (Syria-Cilicia was a single Roman province until AD 72 [Riesner 1998: 266]), but it undoubtedly reflects common local practice. The letter from the Apostolic Council is addressed to believers in τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν καὶ Συρίαν καὶ Κιλικίαν (*tēn Antiocheian kai Syrian kai Kilikian*, Antioch and Syria and Cilicia; Acts 15:23); and Paul, with Silas, is described as “strengthening the churches” in τὴν Συρίαν καὶ [τὴν] Κιλικίαν (*tēn Syrian kai [tēn] Kilikian*, Syria and Cilicia) after the Council (Acts 15:41). Moreover, Syria and Cilicia are often separated in Acts: for Syria see 18:18; 20:3; 21:3; for Cilicia see 21:39; 22:3; 23:34. We might have expected Paul to have mentioned the provincial regions in reverse order, since Acts shows that he ministered in Cilicia (Tarsus) first, and then moved to Syria (Antioch). Probably Paul mentions the more important area first (Lightfoot 1881: 85). We should also note a region of significant Pauline ministry that is *not* mentioned here: Cyprus and the “Galatian” region of the first missionary journey (Acts 13–14). While arguments from silence are always precarious, it does seem unusual, if the journey had taken place before the Council described in Gal. 2, that Paul makes no reference to those regions here (Martyn 1997: 183–86).⁴¹

ῥ Textual variants in the Greek text

KJV King James Version

LN *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Society, 1999)

⁴ Dunn (1993a: 80), indeed, thinks these regions may be included in vv. 21–24, but there is nothing in Paul’s narrative to suggest it. An even stronger “argument from silence” is Lüdemann’s (1984: 59–61) contention, in support of his wildly revisionist chronology, that Paul includes in these verses his ministry in Macedonia and Achaia. This is quite unlikely (R. Longenecker 1990: 40).

¹ **Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 102–112.**