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***What Paul Knew and
When He Knew It
Part Two***

By

Mark McGee

Some people believe that the Apostle Paul “hijacked” Christianity and turned it into something God never intended. How Paul, a mere human being, could have done that to God’s plan is not explained very well, but they still believe it. Some say Paul was a dupe. Others say he was a fraud. If you believe that, please read [Paul – Apostle or Fraud](#). It should answer many of your questions about Paul and his position in the early Church.

If you wonder what the early Church thought of Paul’s writings, please read [Convince Me There’s A God – The New Testament Part 7](#).

As for whether Paul hijacked or invented Christianity, let’s look at **what** Paul knew and **when** he knew it.

One of the reasons given most often by people who think Paul ‘hijacked’ Christianity is that Paul’s view of salvation differed from James’ view of salvation.

Paul

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

EPHESIANS 2:8-10

James

“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do

well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” JAMES 2:14-24

The difference between what Paul and James wrote is obvious and has caused many debates within the Church for centuries. Paul wrote that we are saved by grace through faith and that it is a gift, “not of works.” It’s not of ourselves. Why? “... lest anyone should boast.” Once Paul established the correct order of saving grace, he added that we are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Good works follows God’s gift of salvation.

Paul also wrote in his letter to the Christians in Rome “that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” (Romans 3:28)

James, on the other hand, asked whether ‘faith’ can save a man? He wrote that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” He also wrote that “a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.”

So, what do we do with this difference? Paul wrote that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law and that salvation is a gift from God, not of works. James wrote that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Big difference?

I believe it has to do with what Paul and James knew and when they knew it. Let’s begin with James.

James

James was the son of Joseph and Mary and half-brother of Jesus. I say ‘half-brother’ because Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born. Joseph was not the earthly father of Jesus –

“Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’ LUKE 1:34-35

We also know that James was not a ‘disciple’ of Jesus during His earthly teaching/preaching ministry –

“Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to

the world.’ For even His brothers did not believe in Him.”

JOHN 7:3-5

Some Bible students believe that Mark’s words in Mark 3:21 – “But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind” – referred to Jesus’ brothers and sisters. Just a few verses later, Mark wrote that Jesus’ brothers and His mother stood outside of where He was speaking, “calling Him.” (Mark 3:31) That would include James, the author of the Epistle of James.

James became a committed disciple of Jesus Christ after Jesus appeared to him following His resurrection –

“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some

have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” 1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8

Jesus most likely appeared to James, his half-brother, soon after the resurrection. Paul placed the Lord's appearance to James before Jesus' appearance to him (Paul). Acts 9 speaks of the Lord's appearance to Paul. Then, we see half-brother James' first mentioned by name in Acts 12.

James was referenced earlier in Acts when Luke named some of the people who went into the upper room after Jesus ascended to Heaven: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” (Acts 1:14)

The Gospel accounts list Jesus' brothers as James, Joses, Judas and Simon (Mark 6:3). In response to what people said about Jesus in that context, the Lord responded –

“But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.’ MARK 6:4

Jesus was saying that He, the prophet, **was without honor** in His own hometown (Nazareth), among His own relatives, and in His own house. That would have included His brothers and sisters. It seems obvious from what we read in the Gospels that Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him until after He rose from the dead.

The murder of the Apostle James, son of Zebedee and brother of John, was mentioned in Acts 12:2. Herod had James killed by the sword. When Herod saw that the murder pleased the Jews, he had the Apostle Peter arrested and placed in prison with multiple guards making sure he didn't escape. An angel of the Lord miraculously freed Peter from

prison and Peter made his way to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many believers were gathered in prayer for Peter. When Peter got into the house, he told them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. He told them to go and “tell these things to James and to the brethren.” Since James the brother of John had already died at the hands of Herod, the James mentioned by Peter would have been the half-brother of Jesus. The next time we see James mentioned in Acts is at the Jerusalem Council where he was in a top position of leadership (Acts 15).

As we saw in our last study, James probably wrote his epistle prior to the Jerusalem Council. Based on that, we see that James, along with the other leaders (“apostles and elders”), concluded that what Paul was preaching to the Gentiles was legitimate and approved by God – even though it had some differences from what James and the other leaders in Jerusalem were preaching to the Jews –

“And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, ‘Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, And I will set it up; So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, Even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, Says the Lord who does all these things.’ ‘Known to God from eternity are all His works. Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, ‘You must be circumcised and keep the law’—to whom we gave no such

commandment— it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.” ACTS 15:13-21, 24-29

The Apostle Paul summed up the Jerusalem Council’s decision this way –

“But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who

seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” GALATIANS 2:7-10

Notice that Paul mentioned James’ name first .. before Peter’s (Cephas) and John .. and called them ‘pillars.’ Paul wrote that James and the others “perceived the grace” that had been given him and gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship “that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”

We know from Acts 21 that James stayed true to preaching the Gospel to the circumcised (Jews) many years after the Jerusalem Council. We know from *Antiquities*, written by 1st century historian Josephus, that James, “the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ,” was stoned to death in Jerusalem after appearing before the “sanhedrim of judges.” The 2nd century Christian Hegesippus wrote that scribes and

Pharisees took James (called the Just) to the summit of the Temple in Jerusalem and threw him down to the ground below. Hegesippus wrote that James did not die from the fall from the top of the Temple, so the Jewish religious leaders stoned him to death.

“And so he suffered martyrdom; and they buried him on the spot, and the pillar erected to his memory still remains, close by the temple. This man was a true witness to both Jews and Greeks that Jesus is the Christ.” HEGESIPPUS, BOOK V, ROBERTS-DONALDSON TRANSLATION (2ND CENTURY AD)

Paul

Here's a reminder from our last study:

Paul mentioned a timeline in his letter to the Galatians that included three years and 14 years –

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.’ And they glorified God in me ... Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of

reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only

that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” GALATIANS 1:18-24; 2:1-10

Based on Jesus’ death and resurrection about 30 AD and Paul’s conversion between 32-33 AD, the 17 years Paul mentioned in Galatians would place the Jerusalem Council about 49-50 AD – a few years after James wrote his letter to the ‘twelve tribes which are scattered abroad.’”

Did Paul Know More Than James?

It would appear from what we read about the Jerusalem Council that Paul knew something the apostles and elders didn't know. Even though God had given Peter some insight into the Gospel and Gentiles, many of the Jewish believers continued to believe that Gentiles should become Jews through circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses (Torah observance) –

“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’ This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” Acts 15:1-2

“Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses. The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them ...”

Acts 15:5-7

“The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.”

Acts 15:12

“Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.”

Galatians 2:1-2

Something else to add to our understanding of what Paul knew and when he knew it comes from a reading of 2 Corinthians –

“It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.” 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-6

Paul added that he was given a thorn in the flesh “a messenger of Satan” to buffet him lest he should “be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations.” Paul’s heavenly vision was more than just a quick visit to Paradise. His vision included an *abundance* of revelations. He heard “inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” Scholars believe Paul wrote 2 Corinthians about 55 AD. Subtracting 14 years (“who fourteen years ago”) means Paul had his heavenly vision about 41 AD, many years before the Jerusalem Council.

Based on what we read in Galatians 1:18-24, Paul would have been preaching the Gospel in Syria and Cilicia during the years following his 15-day visit to see Peter in Jerusalem and his time with the apostles and elders at the Jerusalem Council in 49 AD. As Paul wrote about that period of time, “And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which *were* in Christ. But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once *tried to* destroy.’ And they glorified God in me.”

This information makes it easier to understand by Barnabas searched out Paul after seeing what God was doing in Antioch

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“Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then news of these things came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent out Barnabas to go as far as Antioch. When he came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord. For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled

with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” ACTS 11:22-26

Historians believe Barnabas found Paul (Saul) and brought him to Antioch about 45 AD, four years after Paul's heavenly vision and four years before the Jerusalem Council. That means Paul's preaching and teaching with Barnabas in Antioch and during their first missionary journey was based on what Paul had learned from His time with Christ in the desert of Arabia and his heavenly vision with the *abundance of revelations*. Jesus gave Paul extraordinary access to both Himself and heavenly revelations that would have given the young apostle the right to preach and teach something the other apostles would not have known – yet.

So, we have several things to consider as to what Paul knew and when he knew it, especially as compared to what James knew and when he knew it.

- Paul spent three years learning from Christ in Arabia .. many years before the Jerusalem Council
- Paul experienced his vision in Paradise and received an abundance of revelations about Christ and the Gospel he would preach at least four years before the Jerusalem Council
- Paul and Barnabas taught at Antioch, Syria and conducted their first missionary journey prior to the Jerusalem Council
- Some believers from Jerusalem traveled to Antioch, Syria, and told the Gentile believers in the church there that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised
- Paul and Barnabas got into sharp dispute and debate with the Jewish believers
- Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem “in response to a revelation” and met privately with those who were esteemed as leaders of the church there (apostles and elders)
- The apostles and elders considered the issue for a long time (“after much discussion”)

- Peter shared his story about preaching to Cornelius and his family and friends (Gentiles)
- Paul presented to the Council the Gospel he preached among the Gentiles saying he wanted to make sure he was not and had not been running his “race in vain”
- Paul and Barnabas shared about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them

If the apostles and elders in Jerusalem knew the correct answer, why the lengthy discussion to discover the correct answer? If they knew what Paul knew, they would simply have said it at the beginning and ended what was apparently a lengthy meeting. It wasn't until after Peter reminded the apostles and elders how God had opened the door to Gentile believers through his preaching and until Paul and Barnabas had shared about the Gospel they preached to the Gentiles and the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles that the apostles and elders came to an agreement about how to deal with Gentiles (Acts 15:13-29; Galatians 2:6-10).

The agreement was in line with what Paul had been preaching to Gentiles for a long time. Paul didn't come away with any new knowledge about the Gospel and how it should be preached, but James did –

“As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.” GALATIANS 2:6-9

James was a godly man and leader. When he listened to the testimony of Peter, then of Paul and Barnabas, he realized that what they were sharing was true about the Gentiles. In fact, James said this after listening to them –

“James spoke up. ‘Brothers,’ he said, ‘listen to me. Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: ‘After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things’— things known from long ago. ‘It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.’” ACTS 15:13-19

James heard the testimony of Peter, Paul and Barnabas, compared it with what he had read in the Hebrew Bible and made a judgment about how they should relate to Gentile believers. Notice that James made the ‘judgment.’ The apostles and elders agreed with James, but he made the initial judgment.

Yes, Paul did know more than James. He knew it earlier than James, which may help explain why the Epistle of James doesn’t mention Gentiles and the Gospel that Paul preached to them since it was probably written prior to the Jerusalem Council.

Salvation?

We mentioned at the beginning of this article that one of the reasons given most often by people who think Paul ‘hijacked’ Christianity is that Paul’s view of salvation differed from James’ view of salvation. Is that true?

The Gospel of Christ is that Jesus died on a Roman cross, was buried in a tomb, rose from the dead, and was seen alive by a large number of witnesses.

Paul and James believed and preached that same Gospel. Their audiences were different (Paul to the uncircumcised Gentiles .. James to the circumcised Jews), but they preached the same Jesus Christ: dead, buried, risen, and seen alive by hundreds of people.

What was different was Jesus called Paul first to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19). Paul did what Jesus called him to do. That is a credit to Jesus, not Paul. Paul

simply obeyed what Jesus told him to do. Jesus controlled everything about the building of His Church.

As we saw in the last chapter of our study the Apostle Paul knew some important things before James and other Jewish elders and apostles in Jerusalem. Those things concerned how Gentiles would be saved. Some of the Jewish church leadership went to Antioch, Syria, and told the Gentile believers there that they needed to be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses. Paul and Barnabas had “no small dissension and dispute with them” (Acts 15:2) in Antioch, so they traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to consider the matter.

Luke described the meeting this way – “And when there had been much dispute ...” (Acts 15:7). Peter stood up to speak and that opened the door for Paul and Barnabas to speak. After listening to Paul and Barnabas declare “how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles,” James determined that the Jewish church leadership in Jerusalem “should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:12, 19)

From that point on, as Paul wrote, it changed the way the Jewish apostles and elders responded to the salvation of Gentiles:

... when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

GALATIANS 2:7-9

It should be obvious from reading Acts 15 and Galatians 2 that Paul knew some things about how God would save Gentiles that the other apostles did not know. The reason for the dispute in Antioch and the debate in Jerusalem was because Jewish followers of Christ in Jerusalem believed Gentiles had to be circumcised and obedient to the Torah

(Mosaic Law) in order to be saved. Paul knew that was not the case and would not give in to the Jews who wanted to change the Gospel to the Gentiles. As Paul wrote the Galatians about facing opposition in Jerusalem — “we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Galatians 2:5).

Pauline Knowledge Timeline

The purpose of this series is to determine what Paul knew and when he knew it. It's clear from Acts 15 and Galatians 2 that Paul knew more and knew it earlier than the other apostles and elders in Jerusalem, but how and when did that happen? Let's look at a quick timeline that will take us from Paul's salvation on the road to Damascus to the council meeting in Jerusalem (dates approximate based on information from Acts and Paul's epistles, and historical documents from other sources), along with other important dates in his ministry.

Paul's Conversion	34 AD
Paul in Arabia	35-38 AD
Paul Visits Peter in Jerusalem	38 AD
Paul Preaches in Syria and Cilicia	38-46 AD
Paul's Visions of Third Heaven	41 AD

Paul Teaches in Antioch, Syria	46-47 AD
Paul's First Missionary Journey	47-49 AD
Paul at Jerusalem Council	49 AD
Paul's Second Missionary Journey	49-52 AD
Paul in Antioch, Syria	52-53 AD
Paul's Third Missionary Journey	53-57 AD
Paul Imprisoned in Judea	57-59 AD
Paul's Voyage to Rome	59-60 AD
Paul Houe Arrest in Rome	60-62 AD
Paul's Last Missionary Journey	62-65 AD
Paul In Prison in Rome	65-66 AD
Paul Martyred in Rome	66 AD

Paul Knowledge Timeline

You will notice that Paul received many visions and revelations several years before he began teaching at the church in Antioch, which was prior to Paul going on his first missionary journey with Barnabas.

According to 2 Corinthians 12, Paul was “caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” He also wrote that he saw an “abundance of the revelations.” That means Paul saw Paradise, heard inexpressible words which was not lawful for a man to utter, and experienced an abundance of revelations years before he began his teaching and preaching ministry in Antioch and other parts of the Roman Empire.

Paul knew more than the other apostles about the ministry Jesus had specifically called him to have with Gentiles (Acts 9), but it's interesting that Peter came to Paul's aid at the Jerusalem Council. That was because God had given Peter visions and revelations concerning the Gentiles (Acts 10).

I think it's important that we see Jesus spoke to Paul first about the Gentile ministry before revealing a portion of that ministry to Peter. God reveals His plan in an orderly fashion. It's helpful as a Bible student to note His order.

Though Peter's ministry was to the Jews (Galatians 2:7), God used Peter to open the door to God-fearing Gentiles at an earlier date (Acts 10). Peter used that experience at the Jerusalem meeting to support what Jesus was doing through Paul (Acts 15:7-11).

Here are some of the New Testament references we used to develop the timeline. We invite you to use these Scriptures and others you may find to develop your own timeline for Paul's conversion and ministry.

While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' ACTS 26:12-18

And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. ACTS 9:9

Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him. ACTS 9:23

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 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 1:15-17

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) GALATIANS 1:18-20

Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, 'He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God in me. GALATIANS 1:21-24

It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-4

Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. ACTS 11:25-26

Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. ACTS 14:3

So they stayed there a long time with the disciples. ACTS 14:28

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. GALATIANS 2:1-2

And after they had stayed there for a time, they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles. ACTS 15:33

Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, 'Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing. ACTS 15:36

Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.' And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. ACTS 18:9-11

After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. ACTS 18:23

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. ACTS 19:8

And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. ACTS 19:10

So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time. ACTS 19:22

Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months. ACTS 20:2-3

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. ACTS 20:16

Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

ACTS 20:31

Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. ACTS 24:17-18

But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

ACTS 24:27

After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. ACTS 28:11

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him. ACTS 28:30-31

We hope you have enjoyed this special series about what the Apostle Paul knew and when he knew it. We started this series more than three years ago to address challenges from people who believe Paul “invented” Christianity, “hijacked” Christianity, or was a “dupe” for a false Jesus. I believe the evidence we’ve presented during the previous nine chapters of this series, along with other resources we’ve shared, have demonstrated that Paul was a legitimate apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul and the Mystery

One of the reasons people give for their belief that Paul invented or hijacked Christianity is because of this claim:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles— if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to

make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. Ephesians 3:1-12

Did God really reveal something to Paul that was a mystery to the other apostles until Paul told them about it? Or was Paul lying or delusional?

I think we've laid out the evidence in previous articles that Paul did know important things before the other apostles. We read about that in Acts 15 and Galatians 2. 2 Corinthians 12 demonstrates Paul's special revelations years before he embarked on his first missionary journey to preach the Gospel of Grace to Gentiles.

Does that mean the other apostles didn't know anything? Not at all. The first use of the Greek word *mustērion* is found in Mark 4:

But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, 'To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that 'Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.' MARK 4:10-12

Jesus revealed the “mystery of the kingdom of God” to the twelve apostles. He explained the real meaning behind the parables He spoke to the crowds that followed Him. However, the apostles still didn't understand what Jesus called Paul to do. Why? Because Jesus had another mystery (secret) to reveal and He revealed that to Paul.

God revealed many mysteries to people throughout the Bible. He chose both the timing and the recipient(s) for revealing the mysteries. Jesus selected twelve men to be His apostles. They understood what He told them to be about bringing in the prophesied Kingdom of God that would elevate Israel to a place of world dominance with Messiah Jesus in charge.

For example .. Jesus spent 40 days after His resurrection speaking to the apostles “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). How did the apostles respond to the Lord’s teaching? On the day Jesus ascended back to Heaven, the apostles asked Him this question. Notice the question and the Lord’s response:

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’ And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to

Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. ACTS 1:6-8

With all the apostles had learned from Jesus before and after the resurrection, their question focused on Jesus restoring the Kingdom to Israel. That meant Jesus on the throne of David and the end of Roman occupation. Jesus had taught them that when He came in all His glory, along with the holy angels who would be with Him, He would sit on the throne of His glory and judge all the nations (Matthew 25:31-33). That's what Jesus had taught them and that's what they expected would happen. The question the apostles asked Jesus on the day of His ascension came from their understanding of the order of how things would happen in bringing in the Kingdom of God. Jesus responded that it wasn't for them to know when that would happen, but it was their responsibility to be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth. What the apostles needed to do was wait to receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

As we follow the preaching of the apostles on the day the Spirit of God came upon them (Pentecost) and the following days, weeks and months, we see that their emphasis was on preaching salvation to Jews through the name of Jesus. Even replacing Judas Iscariot as an apostle was based on the person having accompanied the other apostles all the time that Jesus had ministered on earth — “beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us.” The apostles cast their lots and the lot fell on Matthias, so he was numbered with the eleven apostles (Acts 1:21-26).

Jesus had another mystery to reveal, but He chose to do that through an enemy:

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul,

Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ Then the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Acts 9:1-9

Jesus then spoke in a vision to a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. Jesus told Ananias to go to the street called Straight and inquire at the house of Judas for Saul of Tarsus. Ananias expressed concern about doing that because Saul (Paul) was well known as a persecutor of the saints in Jerusalem. Here’s how Jesus responded to Ananias:

But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake. ACTS 9:15-16

Jesus chose Paul separately from His other apostles because He was going to reveal the mystery Paul preached and wrote.

The Mystery Explained

Paul explained the mystery as Jesus doing something the Hebrew prophets and other apostles did not anticipate:

- The death of Jesus on the Cross made two people groups, Jew and Gentile, one new people — “so as to created in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Ephesians 2:15-16).
- Spiritual blindness in part happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in (Romans 11:25).

Jesus did not reveal those two important truths to the apostles. They didn't know that Jesus would make a new man from the two enemies (Jew and Gentile), and that He would set aside Israel until a time when the “fullness of the Gentiles” had come in.

You can read more about the mystery Jesus gave Paul to reveal from Acts 9 – 28 and Paul's epistles. It's important that we understand the two mysteries Jesus revealed to His apostles: the mystery of the Kingdom of God to the Twelve, and the mystery of the Body of Christ to Paul.

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. Colossians 1:24-29

Resources

Some people believe that the Apostle Paul “hijacked” Christianity and turned it into something God never intended. How Paul, a mere human being, could have done that to God’s plan is not explained very well, but they still believe it. Some say Paul was duped. Others say he was a fraud. If you believe that, please read [Paul – Apostle or Fraud](#). It should answer many of your questions about Paul and his position in the early Church.

If you wonder what the early Church thought of Paul’s writings, please read [Convince Me There’s A God – The New Testament Part 7](#).

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