

The Gospel of Paul

The word “Gospel” that Paul uses refers to the content of his preaching. It surely doesn’t mean the “Four Gospels” because those weren’t written yet. His Gospel is not “from human origin”, i.e. it wasn’t written by a human and it wasn’t taught to Paul by a human. He actually didn’t meet any apostle of the Twelve or any of their followers before starting his teaching.

He clarifies that by saying: “I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it”. This is confirmed in the Book of Acts that speaks about his conversion. “Meanwhile, Saul (i.e. Paul) was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples” (Acts 9: 1). Before the Lord’s appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, He was “extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers”. This Judaic zeal made him go to Damascus and “bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem”.

On the road to Damascus to fulfill his mission, God called him by his grace to “reveal his Son in him so that he might preach him among the Gentiles”. Logically, he was supposed to go to Jerusalem to contact the apostles. However, the important thing for him was his awareness that God “set him apart from his mother’s womb” as he did with ancient prophets, i.e. he made him dedicated for Him, and when Paul knew that, he went into Arabia. The expression “Arabia” that he uses means our part of the Arabic world that is near Damascus; perhaps it means Horan or Petra in Jordan today.

It seems that he didn’t stay for a long time in any location because he was expecting to confront civil authorities that wanted to suppress Christians.

In Arabia (Horan), the ruler was the King of “Al-Anbat” Aretha IV. When Paul feared suppression from Aretha, he went back to Damascus. He says: “after three years, I went back to Damascus”. Was he counting the years starting from the Lord’s appearance to him? Or from his return to Damascus? We cannot answer precisely.

After all these movements, he felt that he must go up to Jerusalem where Peter was living. It is clear that Peter then didn’t leave Palestine yet to preach; he stayed with him for fifteen days.

Why did Paul want to meet Peter and James the Lord’s brother? He wanted to meet Peter because he was the leader of the Twelve and James because he was from the Lord’s family. James is mentioned in Mark 6: 3 and he was important in the Church of Jerusalem and the tradition says that he was the first bishop of Jerusalem. This could mean that James stayed in this position until he was stoned by the Chief Priest (of the Jews).

It is remarkable in this passage that Paul bases his duties and responsibilities on his direct contact with Lord Jesus; i.e. he didn’t get his apostlehood from his

teaching authority because the apostolic community didn't assign him but he was chosen by Lord Jesus.

He bases his entire teaching on this selection, and asks for commitment to this teaching.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon