

Exegetical Notes for Galatians 1:13-17

KEY

ATR = Robertson, A.T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933.

BAG = Bauer Arndt and Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon to the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.

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Parsing Verbs and Declining Nouns

Verbs:

ποιμάνετε (ποιμαινῶ = to tend, shepherd || Verb: Aorist Active Imperative, Second Person Plural).

ἀποκαλύπτεσθαι (ἀποκαλύπτω = to reveal, disclose || Verb: Present Passive Infinitive).

Nouns (gender before case):

παθημάτων, (παθημά = suffering || Noun: Neuter Genitive Plural).

Participles (gender before case):

μελλούσης (μελλῶ = to be about to || Participle: Feminine Genitive Singular Present Active).

Adjectives (gender before case):

(ἐπιεικής = gentle, kind || Adjective: Masculine Dative Plural).

Independent Personal Pronouns:

ἡμῖν (ἐγώ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Dative Plural).

ὑμῖν (σύ = you || Second Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Dative Plural).

αὐτῷ (αὐτός = He, Him || Third Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Masculine Dative Singular).

Demonstrative Pronouns (gender before case):

(τοῦτο = this || Near Demonstrative Pronoun: Neuter Nominative Singular).

Reflexive Pronouns (only masculine and feminine - the genitive is the lexical form as there is no nominative case):

(ἐμαυτοῦ = myself || First Person Reflexive Pronoun: Masculine Genitive).

(σεαυτοῦ = yourself || Second Person Reflexive Pronoun: Masculine Genitive).

(ἐαυτοῦ = himself, herself, oneself || Third Person Reflexive Pronoun: Masculine Genitive).

Sentence Structure

[Sentence]

13 Ἰκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφήν ποτε
you have heard about for – my way of life former

Prepositional Phrase

ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ,
in – Judaism

Subordinate Clause

ὅτι
that

Prepositional Phrase

καθ' ὑπερβολὴν
to an extraordinary degree

Segment Clause

ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ
I was persecuting the church of God

[Subordinate Clause (continued)]

καὶ
and

Segment Clause

ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν,
trying to destroy it

[Subordinate Clause (continued)]

14 καὶ
and

Segment Clause

προέκοπτον
was progressing

Prepositional Phrase

ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ
in – Judaism

Prepositional Phrase

ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας
beyond many contemporaries

Prepositional Phrase

ἐν τῷ γένει μου,
in – nation my

Participial Clause

περισσότερως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων.
far more zealous adherent was of the handed down by my traditions

Sentence

Subordinate Clause

15 ὅτε
when

[Sentence]

δὲ
but

[Subordinate Clause (continued)]

εὐδόκησεν
was pleased

Relative Clause

ὅ
the

Predicate

ἀφορίσας με
one who set me

Prepositional Phrase

ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου
from womb mother's my

[Relative Clause (continued)]

καὶ
and

Predicate

καλέσας
called

Prepositional Phrase

διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ
by - grace his

Infinitival Clause

16 ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ
to reveal - Son his

Prepositional Phrase

ἐν ἐμοὶ
in me

Subordinate Clause

ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν
in order that I would proclaim the gospel him

Prepositional Phrase

ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν,
among the Gentiles

[Sentence (continued)]

εὐθέως
immediately

Segment Clause

οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι,
not consult with flesh and blood

Segment Clause

17 οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον
nor did I go up

Prepositional Phrase

εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα
to Jerusalem

Prepositional Phrase

πρὸς
to

Relative Clause

τοὺς
those

Prepositional Phrase

πρὸ ἐμοῦ
before me

[Prepositional Phrase (continued)]

ἀποστόλους,
apostles

[Sentence (continued)]

ἀλλὰ
but

Segment Clause

ἀπῆλθον
I went away

Prepositional Phrase

εἰς Ἀραβίαν,
to Arabia

[Sentence (continued)]

καὶ
and

Segment Clause

πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα
again I returned

Prepositional Phrase

εἰς Δαμασκόν.¹
to Damascus

¹ Albert L. Lukaszewski, Mark Dubis, and J. Ted Blakley, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press, 2011), Ga 1:12–17.

Chiasmus in vv. 11-17

- A my gospel is not from a human source (vv. 11-12a), rather
 - B It came by revelation (v. 12b)
 - B when God revealed His Son to me (vv. 13-16a)
 - A I did not consult with any human being (vv. 16b-17).
-

13 For

you have heard
of my former manner of life
in Judaism,
how

I used to persecute the church of God
beyond measure
and
tried to destroy it;

14

And

I was advancing in Judaism
beyond many of my contemporaries
among my people,
being more extremely zealous
for my ancestral traditions.

15

But

when He — who had set me apart
from my mother's womb
and called me
through His grace,
was pleased

16

to reveal His Son
in me,

in order that
I might preach the gospel
among the Gentiles,
I immediately did not consult with flesh and blood,

17

nor did I go up to Jerusalem
to those who were Apostles before me;
but I went up to Arabia
and again returned to Damascus.

TRANSLATION, OUTLINE AND CENTRAL PROPOSITION

GREEK TEXT:

13 Ἦκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν, 14 καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων. 15 Ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεὸς] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ 16 ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι 17 οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

1:13–17 (NA27)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; 14 And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my people, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. 15 But when He who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach the gospel among the Gentiles, I immediately did not consult with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before me; but I went up to Arabia and again returned to Damascus.

PASSAGE SUBJECT/THEME (what's t/passag talking about): Paul's conversion and calling

PASSAGE COMPLEMENT/THRUST (what's the passage saying about what it's talking about): were independent of the Jerusalem apostles as evidenced by his drastic transformation through a revelation of Christ and subsequent trip to Arabia.

PASSAGE MAIN IDEA (central proposition of the text): Paul's Conversion and Calling Were Through Jesus not Jerusalem

CENTRAL PROPOSITION OF THE SERMON: Paul's Conversion and Call Were Through Jesus not Jerusalem

SERMONIC IDEA/TITLE: "Jesus Not Jerusalem"

SERMON OUTLINE:

I. Paul's First Defense: Jesus Not Jerusalem (vv. 13-17)

A. "Who I Was" (Paul's Pre-Conversion Life as a Jew) – vv. 13-14

1. Public knowledge: Paul was a notorious
2. Paul's former manner of life "in Ioudaismos" ("in Judaism")
3. Expressed negatively (13) and positively (14)

B. "What I Am" (Paul's Conversion to Christ) – vv. 15-16a

1. God's Choice
2. God's Call
3. God's Commission

C. "Where I Went" (Paul's Post-Conversion Trip to Arabia) – vv. 16b-17

II. Observations (adapted from Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae: Galatians-Ephesians*, vol. 17 [London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833], 24–26)

- A. Our salvation is the same in its origin: the electing love of God
- B. Our salvation is the same in its means: the effectual grace of God
- C. Our salvation is the same in its manner: the revelation of Christ who is the Gospel
- D. Our salvation is the same in its goal: to make Christ known

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL/GRAMMATICAL CONTEXT

Paul's thesis statement for 1:13 – 2:21 is found in 1:11-12:

11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul's defense of this thesis:

Verse 13 – Paul's life as an unregenerate Jew

Verse 14 – His accomplishments as a Pharisee

Verses 15-16 – His conversion to Christ and his calling to preach the gospel to the Gentiles

Paul's defends his thesis (13-17) by first est. that his conversion was dramatic and miraculous. It was independent of the Jerusalem Apostles; it came by direct revelation from Christ. After he was converted, he didn't rush to Jerusalem to consult with the Apostles there.

Vv. 18-24 – Second Defense (“then”).

2:1-10 (“then”) - marks Paul's 3d defense.

Theme of this section:

2:6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.

2:11 “but” - here begins Paul's 4th defense.

This section ends either at v. 14 or it continues to the end of the chapter.

It has been suggested that the criticisms of Paul's gospel, to which he makes reference in vv 11–12, have controlled the structure of most of the letter. In v 11 his gospel is accused of being *κατὰ ἀνθρώπου*, while in v 12 it is said to be derived *παρὰ ἀνθρώπου*. Both these criticisms, it is suggested, are now to receive detailed rebuttal, but in reverse order: in 1:13–2:21 Paul shows that his gospel was not derived *παρὰ ἀνθρώπου*, and in 3:1–6:10 he argues that it is not *κατὰ ἀνθρώπου*. The bulk of the letter could then be viewed as an elaborate chiasmus (see BDF 477 [2] summarizing J. Jeremias, ‘Chiasmus in den Paulusbriefen’, ZNW 49 [1958], 145–156, especially 152f.). [F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 89.]

Having set forth the issues and alternatives that would dominate his Letter to the Galatians, Paul now began in earnest to develop the first major section of the epistle, a historical overview of his conversion, call, and ministry prior to his evangelistic work in Galatia. This long autobiographical account runs from 1:11 through 2:21 and is itself divided into three discrete subsections: Paul's early Christian experience and his first encounter with church leaders in Jerusalem (1:11–24), the summit meeting between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders over the scope and sphere of his missionary work (2:1–10), and the confrontation with Peter at Antioch leading to the central pronouncement of justification by faith (2:11–21).

These verses contain the longest and richest autobiographical material we have from the pen of Paul. They supplement in significant ways what Luke said about Paul's background, conversion, and early missionary activity. This entire section and the prominence it holds in the structure of Galatians, occupying as it does nearly one-fourth of the book, underscore the fact that Christianity is a historical faith. It is based upon certain specific, irreversible, and irreducible historical events. Jesus was born during the imperial reign of Caesar Augustus. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he rose again on the third day, and was taken up into heaven forty days later. Christianity is not a philosophy of life, or yet a set of moral precepts, or a secret code for mystical union with the divine. At its core Christianity is the record of what God has once and for all done in the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ. Among these mighty acts of God, we must include the calling of the apostle Paul, for it too belongs among the foundational events of salvation history.

What this means and why it was such a hot issue in Galatia we will seek to uncover in our study of the verses that follow. Suffice it to say here that nowhere in this long historical section does Paul tell us how he felt about the events that happened to him. We can certainly speculate about this matter, imagining, for example, that he must have been greatly surprised at the appearance of the risen Christ near Damascus, or greatly angered by the false brothers who were trying to subvert the principle of Christian freedom, or deeply hurt and betrayed by Peter, who in a tense situation compromised what Paul knew were his real convictions. But the point of the narrative is not to focus on Paul's personal experience or subjective feelings, however interesting such a disclosure would be to us. Rather it is to set forth the objectively given revelation of God in and through Paul, the expressed purpose of which was to serve the furtherance of the gospel (Gal 1:16).

Galatians 1–2, then, establishes a historical context for the expressly theological content of Gal 3–4, which issues in turn in the ethical outcome of Gal 5–6. From the beginning, however, the theological issue is paramount, as we have seen already in the introductory verses. In the historical narrative also Paul was concerned not merely to recount the story of his life but to relate how "the truth of the gospel" (2:14) had manifested itself in his life story.

Paul was not quoting in these verses from his personal spiritual diary; unlike Augustine, he was not given to reminiscence and left behind no "Confessions of St. Paul." Rather he surveyed his life and selectively recounted certain incidents in order to make a theological point. The theological thrust of his presentation is seen in the fact that the historical narrative flows almost

imperceptibly into his theological exposition. Thus it is unclear whether 2:15–21 constitutes the conclusion of his declaration to Peter (as the NIV has it with quotation marks around the entire passage) or the commencement of his special address to the Galatians on the theme of justification.

In any event, the entire historical narrative is evidently intended as a prolegomenon to the central thesis that “a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16). The polemical tone we have encountered in the early verses of chap. 1 continues to dominate Paul’s rehearsal of his life and ministry here. Clearly he was responding to a certain representation of his career that his opponents had disseminated among the Galatian churches. If, as seems likely, these agitators had close ties to Jerusalem Christianity, they may well have represented themselves as the true ambassadors of the mother church there while depicting Paul as a renegade evangelist, one whose authority was wholly derived and subordinate to the Jerusalem apostles. Paul, they perhaps claimed, had totally distorted the message of these great church leaders while they, on the other hand, offered a pure replication of it.

Thus Paul was concerned to clarify his relationship to the church at Jerusalem, and especially to Peter and James. Each of these leaders is mentioned three times in the first two chapters. First, just a few years after his conversion Paul paid a “get acquainted” visit to Peter and James in Jerusalem (1:18–19). Then, well over a decade later, he encountered them again at Jerusalem in a strategic conference related to his missionary work among the Gentiles. And, finally, he confronted Peter at Antioch in a crisis over table fellowship prompted by certain individuals affiliated with James. We will have to examine more closely what these verses tell us about Paul’s relationship to the church at Jerusalem and its leaders. It is clear, however, that Paul wanted to assert his apostolic independence over against Peter, James, and all other human intermediaries. [Timothy George, Galatians, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 105–107.]

Verses 13-17 – Paul defends himself as against the Jerusalem apostles whom, the Judaizers were likely claiming, held a different Gospel from that of Paul. That is, Paul used to agree with those in Jerusalem, but had modified his position as to the law and Gentiles. Cf. Moo, 97.

Jewish-Christian/Judaizer opposition to Paul from the 2-4 centuries (cited by Longenecker, 26):

“Paul was a man of Tarsus—indeed, a [Greek], the son of a [Greek] mother and a [Greek] father. Having gone up to Jerusalem and having remained there a long time, he desired to marry a daughter of the (high) priest and on that account submitted himself as a proselyte for circumcision. When, however, he didn't obtain the girl, he became furious and began to write against circumcision, the sabbath, and the law.” [from “The Ascension of James” - late 2d c.]

The last 2d c. “Kerygmata Petrou” (“Preaching of Peter”) refers to Paul as “the enemy man” who proclaimed “a lawless and absurd doctrine.”

1:13 EXEGESIS

GREEK TEXT:

Ἦκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν,

Ἦκούσατε γὰρ (ἀκουω || Verb: Aorist Active Indicative, 2P).

τὴν (Definite Article: Feminine Accusative Singular).

ἐμὴν (ἐμός || Possessive pronoun: Feminine Accusative Singular).

ἀναστροφὴν (ἀναστροφή = manner of life, conduct, behavior || Noun: Feminine Accusative Singular).

ποτε (ποτε = formerly || Adverb).

ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, (Ἰουδαϊσμός = Judaism || Noun: Masculine Dative Singular). “The word in N.T. only here and next verse, already in 2 Macc. 2:21; 8:1; 14:38; 4 Macc. 4:26. In these passages it means the Jewish religion as opposed to the Hellenism that the Syrian Kings were imposing upon the Jews.”

[ATR]

ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν (ὑπερβολή = excess / w. ὅτι καθ' = beyond measure, to an extraordinary degree || Noun: Feminine Accusative Singular).

ἐδίωκον (δίωκω = to persecute, to pursue || Verb: Imperfect Active Indicative, 1S). Descriptive Imperfect. Common word (used for example in Acts 9:4 – Damascus connection).

τὴν ἐκκλησίαν (ἐκκλησία || Noun: Feminine Accusative Singular). Accusative of direct object.

τοῦ θεοῦ (Noun: Masculine Genitive Singular).

καὶ ἐπόρθουν (πόρθεω = to destroy, annihilate, pillage || Verb: Imperfect Active Indicative, 1S). Tential Imperfect (action having been attempted but not accomplished; action incomplete or interrupted).

αὐτήν, (αὐτός = He, Him || Third Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Feminine Accusative Singular).

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, (Ἦκούσατε γὰρ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ,)

You have been told is literally “you heard.” The source of information is not mentioned; it is even possible that it was Paul himself who told them. Another possibility which has been suggested is to take “you heard” as reflecting a typical and traditional Eastern way of apologizing before mentioning one’s own experiences. This seems to be the sense implied in at

least one translation (JB “You must have heard”). [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 18]

Cf. Acts 26:4-5,26.

ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ, (Ἰουδαϊσμός = Judaism || Noun: Masculine Dative Singular). “The word in N.T. only here and next verse, already in 2 Macc. 2:21; 8:1; 14:38; 4 Macc. 4:26. In these passages it means the Jewish religion as opposed to the Hellenism that the Syrian Kings were imposing upon the Jews.” [ATR]

The phrase ‘in Judaism’ also implies a sense of being ‘inside’ a well-defined area; so also 2 Macc. 8:1, and a funerary inscription from Italy which praises a woman ‘who lived a gracious life inside Judaism’—Judaism understood as ‘a sort of fenced-off area in which Jewish lives are led’ (Y. Amir, ‘The Term Ioudaismos: A Study in Jewish-Hellenistic Self-Identification’, *Immanuel* 14 [1982] 35–6, 39–40) . . . [Dunn, 57]

Moo claims that Dunn elsewhere argues that the term refers specifically to the nationalistic group in Israel that arose during the time of the Maccabees. Moo rejects this narrow understanding in favor of a broad reference “to the Jewish faith as a whole, within which Paul distinguished himself for his devotion and zeal.” [100]

Judaism stands for the entire political/social/religious system. Paul was a Jew, but no longer part of that system which he puts in apposition to the church of God.

Paul here gives negative proof that his Gospel had no foundation in his past. Nothing in his preconversion life could explain the truth he was now proclaiming. The only explanation is in God’s sovereign calling.

It may seem remarkable that Paul, who was once the strictest of Pharisees, should become the most ardent champion of the doctrines of salvation by grace and justification by faith. How large a portion of the New Testament is given up to his writings! And the most prominent subject in all that falls from his pen is righteousness by faith. Did not the Lord show great wisdom in selecting as the chief advocate of this truth a man who knew the other side, who had wrought diligently under the law, who had practiced every ceremony, who was a Hebrew of the Hebrews and had profited above many under the Jews’ religion, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of the fathers? He would know right well the bondage of the old system, and having felt its iron enter into his soul, he would the more highly prize the liberty with which Christ makes people free. [Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians: Spurgeon Commentary*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Ga 1:14]

No matter how you look at it, the conversion of Paul was a spiritual miracle. It was humanly impossible for Rabbi Saul to become the Apostle Paul apart from the miracle of God’s grace. And the same God who saved Paul also called him to be an apostle, and gave him the message of the Gospel. For the Judaizers to deny Paul’s apostleship and Gospel was the same as denying his conversion! Certainly Paul was preaching the same message that he himself had believed—the truth that had changed him. But no mere human message could effect such a change. Paul’s argument is conclusive: his past conduct as a persecutor of the church plus the dramatic change that he experienced prove that his message and ministry are from God. [Wiersbe, 687]

Former = Paul left it behind him. Cf. Phil. 3 – counted as loss.

how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; (ὅτι καθ' ὑπερβολὴν ἐδίωκον τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐπόρθουν αὐτήν,)

The verbs ἐδίωκον and ἐπόρθουν are both in the imperfect and refer to past repeated actions, not one time aberrations from a person's normal conduct. The two verbs must be interpreted together with the latter making more explicit what is implicit in the former. These are political terms, with the latter regularly used to refer to the sacking or destroying or devastating of a city, and the former in this sort of context referring to persecution, not mere pursuit (cf. Josephus War 4.534 and 1 Macc. 2:47; 1 Macc. 3:5 where in a close parallel it refers to the pursuit and persecution of apostate Jews). [Witherington, 100]

War 4.534 Thence did Simon make his progress over all Idumea, and did not only ravage the cities and villages, but laid waste the whole country; for, besides those that were completely armed, he had forty thousand men that followed him, insomuch that he had not provisions enough to suffice such a multitude.

1 Mac 2:47–48 - 47 They hunted down the arrogant, and the work prospered in their hands. They rescued the law out of the hands of the Gentiles and kings, and they never let the sinner gain the upper hand.

1 Mac 3:5 He searched out and pursued those who broke the law; he burned those who troubled his people.

* May want to look up these passages in their greater context.

The imperfect tense of the Greek verb translated persecuted suggests that Paul's persecution of the church continued for some time. The force of the imperfect tense may be expressed in some languages as "I kept on persecuting." The imperfect tense of the verb meaning "to destroy" indicates an attempt, as well as an action which continued for a period of time; it may be rendered as "I kept on doing my best to destroy." It is important in employing a verb for destroy to use one which would be applicable to an institution or a group of people and not merely to some building. One may sometimes use a phrase meaning "to cause to come to an end," "to cause to cease," or "to scatter and make disappear." [Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 19]

T. George writes:

Having set forth his thesis of the nonhuman origin of the gospel in the two preceding verses, Paul began a demonstration of its truth in terms of five historical proofs derived from his own life and ministry: (1) Nothing in Paul's religious background could account for his acceptance of the gospel (1:13–17). (2) Paul was not commissioned by the Jerusalem church (1:18–20). (3) Those Paul formerly persecuted glorified God because of the change wrought in him (1:21–24). (4) Paul's apostolic work was recognized by church leaders at Jerusalem (2:1–10). (5) Paul defended the gospel against Peter's vacillation at Antioch (2:11–14). Following this extensive historical excursus, Paul summarized the central theme of his letter (2:15–21) and then

reminded the Galatians of how God had worked among them at his first preaching of the gospel in their midst (3:1–5). Thus the entire historical section of the letter moves from Paul the persecutor to Paul the preacher; it is the record of “the way of the gospel from Damascus to Galatia.”

Paul’s main point in vv. 13–14 was to show that there was nothing in his religious background and pre-conversion life that could have in any way prepared him for a positive response to the gospel. Quite the contrary. His early career and lifestyle were shaped by a confident attachment to the strictest traditions of Judaism, which in turn had led him to take up arms against the believers in Jesus. Paul assumed that the Galatians already knew something about his past life as a persecutor; he was reminding them of something they already had heard about. Doubtless they had heard this from Paul’s own lips, for, unlike many public figures, he was never one to conceal the shameful deeds that marred his past life.

Paul spoke frequently and graphically of his campaign of persecution against the Christians. He told of how he had pursued them, like a bloodhound, from city to city, arresting both men and women, throwing them into prison, voting for their execution, and further harassing them even to the point of death (Acts 22:4; 26:9). Paul gave this witness not to brag on the misdeeds of his pre-Christian life, as some converts are wont to magnify their sinful past more than their rescue from it, but in order to hold high the sovereign initiative of God in reversing the murderous track of his career. Paul always spoke of this part of his life with great sorrow and shame, considering himself the “least of the apostles” (1 Cor 15:9) because he had “persecuted the church of God” (Gal 1:13). [Timothy George, Galatians, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 113–114]

τὴν ἐκκλησίαν – singular (cf. earlier “churches in Galatia”). 1:2 = local church; here we see a ref. to the universal church – the body of Christ – the company of all the redeemed throughout the world. Note the qualifying genitive: “the church of God.” Stands in opposition to “Judaism”.

What Paul came to realize through his encounter with the risen Christ was that the despised Christians he had been pursuing with such ardor were none other than the special people of the Holy One of Israel, “the community of God.” This expression was used in the Old Testament to describe the children of Israel who stood in a special covenantal relationship to God. Paul’s persecution of the Christians was designed to safeguard the purity of that very community. Now he suddenly saw that the crux of his life’s work had been directed against the very “company of God” he had intended to protect: God’s called-out ones. [George, 114]

καὶ ἐπόρθουν (πόρθεω = to destroy, annihilate, pillage || Verb: Imperfect Active Indicative, 1S). It’s to wreak havoc upon. Tential Imperfect (action having been attempted but not accomplished; action incomplete or interrupted).

Chrysostom states that the word signifies “an attempt to extinguish, to pull down, to destroy, to annihilate the church.” [NPNF 13:10]

Same word, also used for the destruction of a city, is used in v. 23 and in Luke’s parallel account of Paul’s devastation of the Jerusalem Christians in Acts 8:3.

Cf. Paul's persecuting zeal in Phil. 3:6.

Pharisaical notion that obedience to God's law would usher in the golden age / messianic age of Israel.

1:14 EXEGESIS

GREEK TEXT:

καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου, περισσοτέρως ζηλωτῆς ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων.

καὶ προέκοπτον (προκοπτο = to cut forward, advance || Verb: Imperfect Active Indicative, 1S). Descriptive Imperfect. Wallace identifies the imperfect here as “continuous” (I was continually advancing in Judaism.” (Wallace, 548). Word used only here, Rom. 13:12; 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:9, 13. “The word profit is from prokopto (προκοπτο), which means “to blaze a way” through a forest, “to cut a pioneer path.” Paul means that he outstripped his Jewish contemporaries in distinctively Jewish culture, zeal, and activity.” [Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament]

ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ (Ἰουδαϊσμος = Judaism || Noun: Masculine Dative Singular).

ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς (πολὺς || Adjective: Masculine Accusative Plural).

συνηλικιώτας (συνηλικιώτης = one of the same age, a contemporary || Noun: Masculine Accusative Plural). Accusative of Comparison.

ἐν τῷ γένει (γένος = nation, people || Noun: Neuter Dative Singular). Dative-Instrumental of Association.

μου, (ἐγώ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Genitive Singular).

περισσοτέρως (περισσοτέρως = To a much greater degree, far more, far greater || Adverb).

ζηλωτῆς (ζηλωτής = zealot, zealous adherent || Noun: Masculine Nominative Singular).

ὑπάρχων (ὑπάρχω = to be, exist, be present, at one's disposal || Participle: Masculine Nominative Singular Present Active).

τῶν πατρικῶν (πατρικος = paternal, ancestral || Adjective: Feminine Genitive Plural).

μου (ἐγώ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Genitive Singular).

παραδόσεων. (παραδόσις = tradition || Noun: Feminine Genitive Plural). Genitive of Advantage.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my people, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my people,
(καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς συνηλικιώτας ἐν τῷ γένει μου,)

καὶ προέκοπτον (προκοπτο = to cut forward, advance || Verb: Imperfect Active Indicative, 1S). Descriptive Imperfect. Wallace identifies the imperfect here as “continuous” (I was continually advancing in Judaism.” (Wallace, 548). Word used only here, Rom. 13:12; 2 Tim. 2:16; 3:9, 13. “The word profit is from prokopto (προκοπτο), which means “to blaze a way” through a forest, “to cut a pioneer path.” Paul means that he outstripped his Jewish contemporaries in distinctively Jewish culture, zeal, and activity.” [Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament]

ὑπὲρ πολλοὺς – the use of ὑπὲρ gives the phrase a strong sense of superiority.

The Usain Bolt in the race of the up and comers. Answer to the fastest man in the world: “Currently the answer is Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, he's also the fastest man in history with a world record time of 9.58 seconds. The fastest woman in history is Florence Griffith-Joyner with a world record time of 10.49.” clocked at nearly 28 mph. (cf. Cheetah @ 75 mph).

The verb προκόπτω (‘advance’, ‘increase’) is used of Jesus’ ‘advancing’ in wisdom, stature and grace in Luke 2:52. Josephus (Life, 8) describes how as a boy he ‘made great progress in education’ (εἰς μεγάλην παιδείας προὔκοπτον ἐπίδοσιν); this is the common Hellenistic use of the word (cf. G. Stählin, TDNT VI, 705f., 709ff., s.v. προκόπτω). [Bruce, 91]

Two aspects of the early Christian message must have been especially galling to Paul. Not merely the claim that Jesus was the Messiah, but the triple assertion that this Messiah had been publicly condemned and crucified, then raised from the dead, and now exalted to heaven with the status of deity, which demanded the kind of worship only properly given to God—all of this amounted to the perpetuation of the same “blasphemy” that had led to Jesus’ death in the first place (John 10:33). What Paul later called the “stumbling block” of the cross was offensive in the highest degree: to be crucified was to come under the curse of God, an unthinkable condition for God’s anointed one from the perspective of strict Pharisaic Judaism. [George, 115]

being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. (περισσοτέρως ζηλωτής ὑπάρχων τῶν πατρικῶν μου παραδόσεων.)

ζηλωτής (ζηλωτής = zealot, zealous adherent || Noun: Masculine Nominative Singular). Noun related to the one used in Phil. 3:6. These words are prominent in the Maccabean literature (referring to Jewish leaders willing to use force to defend temple, home, and law). In t/OT corpus, see the examples of Phinehas (Num 25), Joshua (Josh 7), and Elijah (1 Kgs 18:19).

It is best to give ζηλωτής the general sense of ‘zealous’ here. The word appears in a specialized sense of the party of the Zealots who emerge by that name in AD 66, perpetuating the ideals of Judas the Galilaean and his ‘fourth philosophy’ (Jos., War 2.441, 651; 4.160f.). This may be the force of the sobriquet of Simon the Zealot (Lk. 6:15; Acts 1:13; cf. ‘Cananaean’, from Aram. qan’anā’, in Mk. 3:18; Mt. 10:4), but we do not know enough to be certain about this. Elsewhere in the NT the word has the more general force, as when James and his fellow-elders speak of the thousands of ‘zealots for the law’ in the Jerusalem church (Acts 21:20; cf. Acts 22:3; 1 Cor. 14:12; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 3:13). Paul’s ‘zeal’ was shown pre-eminently in his attempt to exterminate the church: to use language which he employs in another connexion in Rom. 10:2, it was a religious zeal (ζῆλος θεοῦ) but an unrestricted zeal (οὐ κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν). There is an ambivalence about ζῆλος—it may be good or bad, not only in respect of its object but also in respect of the spirit in which it is cherished (see on 5:20, where it is listed as a ‘work of the flesh’). The Corinthians’ zeal for the Jerusalem relief fund is praised in 2 Cor. 9:2, but in 2 Cor. 12:20 ζῆλος (the same word) stands in a list of vices against which they are warned. [Bruce, 91]

Great OT example of zeal = Phinehas, who killed an Israelite and his pagan love interest (Numbers 26:6-15). Cf. 25:11,13; Psalm 106:30.

Note Jesus' zeal – 2:17.

Here it was a zeal not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2).

St Paul seems to have belonged to the extreme party of the Pharisees (Acts 22:3, 23:7, 26:5, Phil. 3:5, 6), whose pride it was to call themselves 'zealots of the law, zealots of God.' To this party also had belonged Simon, one of the Twelve, thence surnamed the zealot, ζηλωτής or καναναῖος, i.e. זנאן. A portion of these extreme partizans, forming into a separate sect under Judas of Galilee, took the name of 'zealots' par excellence, and distinguished themselves by their furious opposition to the Romans: Joseph. Antiq. 18.1.1, 6. See Ewald Gesch. des Volkes Isr. 5. p. 25 sq, p. 322, 6. p. 340. [Lightfoot, 81–82]

ZEALOTS—a sect of Jews which originated with Judas the Gaulonite (Acts 5:37). They refused to pay tribute to the Romans, on the ground that this was a violation of the principle that God was the only king of Israel. They rebelled against the Romans, but were soon scattered, and became a lawless band of mere brigands. They were afterwards called Sicarii, from their use of the sica, i.e., the Roman dagger. [M. G. Easton, Easton's Bible Dictionary (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893)]

Paul was no second-rate thug or mafioso bent on vandalism and violence for its own sake. There is no evidence that he carried out his work with a guilty conscience burdened by self-doubt or hindered by second thoughts. He was a happy and successful Jew who could put on his résumé, as he later reconstructed it for the Philippians, his persecution of the church alongside his other virtues and achievements—his circumcision, his rootage in the tribe of Benjamin, his membership in the Pharisaic party, his blameless devotion to the law. All of these, including the persecutions, he counted as “profit” before he met Christ (Phil 3:4–6). Thus all the greater his shame and remorse when he realized that in seeking to please God he had actually been striving against God; in aiming for the best he had sunk to the worst. Those things he had called “profit” he now realized were “loss,” refuse, trash, skubala, human excrement fit only to be hurled onto the dung heap of his life. [George, 116]

Who were the Pharisees?

PHARISEES—separatists (Heb. persahin, from parash, “to separate”). They were probably the successors of the Assideans (i.e., the “pious”), a party that originated in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes in revolt against his heathenizing policy. The first mention of them is in a description by Josephus of the three sects or schools into which the Jews were divided (B.C. 145). The other two sects were the Essenes and the Sadducees. In the time of our Lord they were the popular party (John 7:48). They were extremely accurate and minute in all matters appertaining to the law of Moses (Matt. 9:14; 23:15; Luke 11:39; 18:12). Paul, when brought before the council of Jerusalem, professed himself a Pharisee (Acts 23:6–8; 26:4, 5).

There was much that was sound in their creed, yet their system of religion was a form and nothing more. Theirs was a very lax morality (Matt. 5:20; 15:4, 8; 23:3, 14, 23, 25; John 8:7). On the first notice of them in the New Testament (Matt. 3:7), they are ranked by our Lord with

the Sadducees as a “generation of vipers.” They were noted for their self-righteousness and their pride (Matt. 9:11; Luke 7:39; 18:11, 12). They were frequently rebuked by our Lord (Matt. 12:39; 16:1–4).

From the very beginning of his ministry the Pharisees showed themselves bitter and persistent enemies of our Lord. They could not bear his doctrines, and they sought by every means to destroy his influence among the people. [M. G. Easton, Easton’s Bible Dictionary (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893)]

Josephus:

And now the Pharisees joined themselves to her, to assist her in the government. These are a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately.

. . . the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact explication of their laws,

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers . . . [Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987)]

τῶν πατρικῶν (πατρικος = paternal, ancestral || Adjective: Feminine Genitive Plural).
παραδόσεων. (παραδόσις = tradition || Noun: Feminine Genitive Plural). Genitive of Advantage.

παραδόσις

This term (pardosis) is used in several senses: (1) in 1 Cor. 11:2, 23 for gospel truths, (2) in Matt. 15:6; 23:1ff.; Mark 7:8; Gal. 1:14 of Jewish traditions, (3) in Col. 2:6–8 of gnostic speculations . . . However, in this context it refers to Apostolic truth either spoken or written (cf. 3:6). [Utley, 138]

1:15 EXEGESIS

GREEK TEXT:

Ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεὸς] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ

Ὅτε δὲ (Adverbial Conjunction).

εὐδόκησεν (εὐδόκω = to be pleased, to consent || Verb: Aorist Active Indicative, 3S). Emphatic.

Constative Aorist. This word often has the additional nuance: “Take pleasure in and decide to do.”

[Moo, 102]. Cf. Psalm 68:16.

[ὁ θεὸς] (See textual note below).

ὁ ἀφορίσας (ἀφορίζω = to separate, set apart, appoint || Masculine Nominative Singular Aorist Active Participle). Substantival Participial. “Ἀφορίζω [Aphorizō] is old word (from ἀπο [apo] and ὅρος [horos]) to mark off from a boundary or line.” [A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures] “Chose me is literally 'set me apart,' with the idea of separating one from others for a particular purpose or task. [UBS Handbook Series, 21–22]

με (ἐγώ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Accusative Singular).

ἐκ κοιλίας (κοιλία = womb, stomach || Noun: Feminine Genitive Singular). Genitive-Ablative of Separation.

μητρὸς (Noun: Feminine Genitive Singular). Genitive of Source.

μου (ἐγώ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Genitive Singular).

καὶ καλέσας (καλεῶ || Masculine Nominative Singular Aorist Active Participle).

διὰ τῆς χάριτος (Noun: Feminine Genitive Singular). Genitive-Ablative of Means.

αὐτοῦ (αὐτὸς || Third Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Masculine Genitive Singular).

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

But when He who had set me apart from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

Having described his previous life as a devoted Jew, Paul proceeds to talk about his call to be an apostle, and the events that immediately followed, with one aim in mind, namely, to show that his apostleship is not dependent on any man, not even on the original twelve apostles, but on God alone. . . . Pursuing his aim to show that his apostleship is dependent on God alone, Paul enumerates several acts of God which were involved in his becoming an apostle. God, he says, chose me, called me, and revealed his Son to me (verse 16a). [UBS Handbook, 21]

Contrast between vv. 13-14 / 15-16 is remarkable.

13 . . . I used to persecute the church of God tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporariesbeing more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

15 But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased 16 to reveal His Son in me

Verse 15 is not a complete sentence in the Greek text, but begins a long sentence that terminates in verse 17.

But when He who had set me apart from my mother's womb (Ὅτε δὲ . . . [ὁ θεός] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου)

But shows the contrast of this section with what precedes; it is as if Paul were saying: "Despite all this, when God...." [UBS Handbook, 21]

Cf. Ephesians 2:4.

No conviction or agony such as Luther prior to his conversion. Paul's sensitivity was after his conversion (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:13). Cf. Acts 26:1ff.

I too may say that before I was enlightened by the Gospel, I was as zealous for the papistical laws and traditions of the fathers as ever a man was. I tried hard to live up to every law as best I could. I punished myself with fasting, watching, praying, and other exercises more than all those who today hate and persecute me. I was so much in earnest that I imposed upon my body more than it could stand. I honored the pope as a matter of conscience. Whatever I did, I did with a single heart to the glory of God. But our opponents, well-fed idlers that they are, will not believe what I and many others have endured. . . . We also have come to the knowledge of the truth by the same kindness of God. I crucified Christ daily in my cloistered life, and blasphemed God by my wrong faith. Outwardly I kept myself chaste, poor, and obedient. I was much given to fasting, watching, praying, saying of masses, and the like. Yet under the cloak of my outward respectability I continually mistrusted, doubted, feared, hated, and blasphemed God. My righteousness was a filthy puddle. Satan loves such saints. They are his darlings, for they quickly destroy their body and soul by depriving them of the blessings of God's generous gifts. I tell you I stood in awe of the pope's authority. To dissent from him I considered a crime worthy of eternal death. I thought of John Huss as a cursed heretic. I counted it a sin even to think of him. I would gladly have furnished the wood to burn him. I would have felt I had done God a real service. [Luther, Galatians]

1:15 εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεός] {C} On the basis of preponderance of external testimony a majority of the Committee preferred the reading with ὁ θεός, yet, in view of the importance of the witnesses that lack the words, it was thought advisable to enclose them within square brackets. [The reading with ὁ θεός has every appearance of being a scribal gloss making explicit the implied subject of εὐδόκησεν, nor is there any good reason why the words should have been deleted if they had been original (the supposition that they were accidentally omitted is improbable in view of the diversified testimony supporting the shorter text). B.M.M. and A.W.]
[Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament]

"God was pleased" = KJV, NKJV, NASB, NRSV, NIV, TNIV, NEB, REB, NJB, NAB, HCSB, NETmg
"He was pleased" = RSV, ESV, NLT, NET

* For witnesses see Comfort, New Testament Text and Translation Commentary.

Many reliable ancient manuscripts, instead of having the term “God,” use the MASCULINE PRONOUN “he,” (cf. manuscripts P46 and B). Theos [God] does occur in manuscripts 8, A, and D. “He” was likely original and scribes later added Theos to clarify the ambiguous pronoun. [Utley, 13]

ὁ ἀφορίσας (ἀφορίζω = to separate, set apart, appoint || Masculine Nominative Singular Aorist Active Participle). Substantival Participial. “Ἀφορίζω [Aphorizō] is old word (from ἀπο [apo] and ὅρος [horos]) to mark off from a boundary or line.” [A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures] “Chose me is literally 'set me apart,' with the idea of separating one from others for a particular purpose or task. [UBS Handbook Series, 21–22]

Rom. 1:1 ἀφορισμένος εἰς εὐσγγέλιον φεοῦ. See also Acts 13:2 ἀφορίσατε δὴ μοι ...

The word separated is from aphorizo (ἀφορίζο) which means “to mark off from a boundary or line.” The simple verb horizo (ὀρίζο) means “to place a limitation upon, to fix limits around.” The cognate noun horos (ὄρος) means “a boundary, a frontier, a limit.” The verb proorizo (προορίζο) (Eph. 1:5), “to set limits upon beforehand” is there translated predestinate. The word aphorizo (ἀφορίζο) used in our Galatian verse (1:15), is used in Romans 1:1. The impression one gets from the rendering of the A.V. is that it refers to the physical separation of the child from the mother’s womb, which idea was not in the apostle’s mind. The idea is, “who set me apart, devoted me to a special purpose from before my birth, and before I had any impulses or principles of my own.” Passages from the Old Testament sustain this usage (Judges 16:17; Isaiah 44:21, 24, 49:1, 5). This idea is also seen in those instances where a child’s destiny is clearly fixed by God before birth as was Samson’s (Judges 16:17), and John the Baptist’s (Luke 1:15). The preposition ek (ἐκ) translated from, in the phrase “from my mother’s womb,” is used at times to mark a temporal starting point (John 6:66, 9:1; Acts 9:33, 24:10). Paul, therefore, states that he was set apart or devoted by God to the apostleship before he was born. Here again he shows his apostolic independence of men. [Kenneth S. Wuest, Wuest’s Word Studies]

From the womb, cf. Rom. 9:11-12. Pretemporal, followed by calling and justification and sanctification.

Harkens to the prophetic call of Jeremiah (1:5) of which Paul would be very familiar. Another instance in which the NT Apostle compares to the OT prophet.

and called me through His grace, (καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ)

Called to apostleship or salvation (both?). Conversion and commission go together with Paul.

Calling and election . . . “Election is God’s gracious choice of certain individuals unto eternal life in consequence of which they are called, justified, sanctified and glorified.” [*Abstract of Principles*, the confessional standard of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary] Cf. other confessions, such as The First and Second London Baptist Confessions.

was pleased (. . . εὐδόκησεν . . .)

This word connects to the next clause in v. 16.

1:16 EXEGESIS

GREEK TEXT:

ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι

ἀποκαλύψαι (ἀποκαλύπτω || Verb: Aorist Infinitive Active). Substantival Infinitive?

τὸν υἱὸν (Noun: Masculine Accusative Singular). Accusative of Direct Object.

αὐτοῦ (αὐτὸς || Third Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Masculine Genitive Singular).

ἐν ἐμοί, (ἐγὼ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Dative Singular). Emphatic.

ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι (εὐαγγελίζω || Verb: Present Subjunctive Middle, 1S). Subjunctive of Purpose.

αὐτὸν (αὐτὸς || Third Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Masculine Accusative Singular).

ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, (Noun: Neuter Dative Plural). Dative-Locative of Place.

εὐθέως (Adverb).

οὐ προσανεθέμην (προσανατιθῆμι = to consult || Verb: Aorist Indicative Middle, 1S). Ingressive Aorist. Only used here and 2:6.

σαρκὶ (Noun: Feminine Dative Singular). Dative-Instrumental of Means.

καὶ αἵματι (Noun: Neuter Dative Singular). Dative-Instrumental of Means.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

to reveal His Son in me, in order that I might preach the gospel among the Gentiles, I immediately did not consult with flesh and blood,

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

to reveal His Son in me, (ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί,)

ἐν ἐμοί, (ἐγὼ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Dative Singular). Emphatic. Cf. Luke 10:22.

The phrase “in me” has been much debated. Some believe it means that God revealed Jesus to Paul while others think it means that God revealed Jesus through Paul. Both are true. The Revised English Bible translation combines both possibilities (“to reveal His Son in and through me”). [Utley, 13]

The prepositional phrase ἐν ἐμοί could be a substitute for the simple dative (cf. φανερόν ἐστιν ἐν αὐτοῖς, Rom. 1:19; ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἐστιν κεκαλυμμένον, 2 Cor. 4:3), but here it probably points to the inwardness of the experience. For Paul the outward vision and the inward illumination coincided: Jesus, whom he persecuted, was revealed as the Son of God, and the revelation was the act of God himself. [Bruce, 93]

To reveal his Son to me is literally “to reveal his Son in (or by) me.” Does this mean “to reveal his Son to others, by means of me” or “to reveal his Son to me”? While the first of these is

possible (a similar construction occurs in 1:24), yet on the basis of the total context and Paul's line of argument, the second alternative is more acceptable. The burden of this passage is how Paul received the gospel, not how he proclaimed it. TEV makes this latter meaning clear (so also NAB and RSV). Most other translations keep the construction "in me," and NEB combines the two ideas ("reveal his Son to me and through me"). [UBS Handbook Series, 22]

To reveal His Son in me. Does Paul mean here that God called him in order that He might reveal the Lord Jesus to Paul, or that He might reveal the Lord Jesus through Paul to the world? The answer is found in the meaning and usage of the word translated reveal, *apokalupto* (ἀποκαλύπτω). We will use the terms subjective revelation and objective revelation in our discussion. A subjective revelation would be one in which God revealed the Lord Jesus to Paul, and an objective revelation, one in which God would reveal Him through Paul to others.

The word *apokalupto* (ἀποκαλύπτω) refers to the disclosure of something by the removal of that which hitherto concealed it, and refers especially to a subjective revelation to an individual. A public disclosure of the Lord Jesus through Paul would necessitate the fact that He had been previously hidden from public knowledge, which is not the case, since He had already been preached in the world. But He had been previously hidden from Paul, which points to a subjective revelation of the Lord Jesus to Paul within Paul. Furthermore, if it were an objective revelation through Paul, the Greek would require the preposition *dia* (διὰ) which means through. Again, the entire context has to do, not with how Paul preached the gospel, but how he received it.

Paul makes a distinction between the call and the revelation. The latter cannot then be identified with the previous vision of the Lord Jesus which Paul had on the road to Damascus. That vision was apprehended by the eye. The revelation of which he is speaking here was an inward one, apprehended by the spiritual senses, possibly given Paul during the three days which he spent in communion with his new found Saviour and Lord in Damascus. Thus, Paul, whom God from before his birth had set apart to be a preacher of the gospel to the Gentiles, and whom God had called into salvation and His service, could not have been dependent upon men for his commission or subject to their control. The word translated heathen is from *ethnos* (ἔθνος) which referred to foreign nations not worshipping the true God, pagans, Gentiles. [Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*]

Cf. Paul's Damascus Road experience with Isaiah's vision of Christ (Isaiah 6). Cf. also 2 Cor. 4:4.

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 *en* could have this meaning here (BDF §220.1; Martyn 1997: 158). But this is doubtful. Paul elsewhere uses the dative (Eph. 3:5) or *eis* (Rom. 8:18) after *apokalupto* (*apokalupto*, reveal) to designate the recipients of revelation. His choice to use *en* 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* [NPNE1 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). 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.' [Moo, 104]

Cf. 1:12 and the objective Genitive.

This also stands along with 2:20 / union with Christ (we are in Christ and Christ is in us).

“The primary verbal idea within the subordinate clause ('God was pleased to reveal his Son in me') is clearly an allusion to the Damascus vision and expands on the last clause of 1:12 ('I received [the gospel] through a revelation of Jesus Christ').” [Beale, 786]

The entire phrase speaks of God's sovereignty – His delight in being God – words like “pleased” and “reveal” (ἀποκαλύψαι). Cf. 1 Cor. 1:21, 10:5; Col. 1:19. For εὐδοκία see Eph. 1:5,9; Phil. 2:13.

Isaiah 49:1–6 1 Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me. 2 He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. 3 He said to Me, “You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory.” 4 But I said, “I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God.” 5 And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), 6 He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Jeremiah 1:5 “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

Note Jer. 15: “nations” and the connection to what Paul says next (“gentiles”).

in order that I might preach the gospel among the Gentiles, (ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν,)

ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι (εὐαγγελίζω || Verb: Present Subjunctive Middle, 1S). Subjunctive of Purpose. The goal or end for which Paul was set apart, called, and made the instrument of the revelation of God's Son.

Each one of us who is called and to whom Christ has been revealed, has an “in order that” (purpose).

The fact that Paul was called to pioneer evangelism among the Gentiles should not obscure his great zeal and desire for his fellow Jews to know Christ as well. On one occasion he went so far as to echo the plea of Moses, wishing himself cursed and “cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel” (Rom 9:3). His missionary strategy

reflected the burden of his heart: wherever he could, he always preached the gospel “to the Jew first.” [George, 122]

Cf. 2:7; Rom 11:13; 1 Tim 2:7.

I immediately did not consult with flesh and blood, (εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι)

flesh and blood = figure of speech meaning “humans”. [i.e. the mortal body]. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:50; Eph. 6:12; Heb. 2:14.

1:17 EXEGESIS

GREEK TEXT:

οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους, ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

οὐδὲ (οὐδὲ = nor || Negative Adverb).

ἀνῆλθον (ἀνερχομαι = to go up || Verb: Aorist Active Indicative, 1S). Constativ Aorist.

εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα (Noun: Feminine Accusative Singular). Adverbial Accusative of Place.

πρὸς τοὺς (ὁ || Definite Article: Masculine Accusative Plural). Article expressing the idea of a pronoun.

πρὸ (πρὸ = before || Preposition).

ἐμοῦ (ἐγὼ = I || First Person Independent Personal Pronoun: Genitive Singular). Emphatic.

ἀποστόλους, (ἀποστόλος || Noun: Masculine Accusative Plural).

ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον (ἀνερχομαι = to go up || Verb: Aorist Active Indicative, 1S). Constativ Aorist.

εἰς Ἀραβίαν (Noun: Feminine Accusative Singular). Adverbial Accusative of Place.

καὶ πάλιν (πάλιν = again || Adverb).

ὑπέστρεψα (ὑποστρεφω = to return, turn back || Verb: Aorist Indicative Active, 1S). Constativ Aorist.

εἰς Δαμασκόν. (Noun: Feminine Accusative Singular). Adverbial Accusative of Place.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:

nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before me; but I went up to Arabia and again returned to Damascus.

CONTEXTUAL, GRAMMATICAL, THEOLOGICAL, APPLICATIONAL ANALYSIS:

nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before me; (οὐδὲ ἀνῆλθον εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους,)

ἀνερχομαι = freq. used of Jerusalem. From any direction Jerusalem was “up” (as in London?).

ἀνῆλθον] ‘I came up.’ This verb and ἀναβαίνειν are used especially of visiting Jerusalem, situated in the high lands of Palestine, as κατέρχεσθαι, καταβαίνειν, are of leaving it. See Luke 10:30, Acts 11:27, 12:19, 15:1, 2, 21:15, 25:1, 6, 7, and especially Acts 18:22, 24:1. In the two last passages ἀναβαίνειν and καταβαίνειν are used absolutely without any mention of Jerusalem, this being implied in the expressions ‘going up,’ ‘going down.’ Here the various reading ἀπῆλθον has great claims to a place in the text. [Lightfoot, 83]

A's before Paul would be Peter, the eleven, and also (probably) James the Lord's brother (cf. v 19).

but I went up to Arabia and again returned to Damascus. (ἀλλὰ ἀπῆλθον εἰς Ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.)

Comparing 2 Cor. 11:32–33 it is likely that when Paul went away to Arabia he went to certain populated parts of the Nabatean kingdom and preached there to the Gentiles (why Aretas sent his official after Paul while he was in Damascus, which was at that time part of the Nabatean kingdom).

It is entirely impossible to decide what Paul means by this term, since the word was so loosely used and so variously applied. Many think the Sinaitic peninsula is meant (Stanley, Farrar, Matheson, Lightfoot). Others, the district of Auranitis near Damascus (Lipsius, Conybeare and Howson, Lewin, McGiffert). Others again the district of Arabia Petraea. [Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*]

This seems to refer to Paul's private study time in Arabia (cf. verse 17). We are not sure how long he studied or how long he remained in Arabia. It was probably the Nabatean kingdom, which was very close to the city of Damascus, just to the southeast (cf. 2 Cor. 11:32). From verse 18 it seems that he could have stayed for as long as three years (but not necessarily). Paul's basic purpose for mentioning this (it is omitted in the book of Acts) was to show that he did not receive his gospel from the Apostles in Jerusalem, nor was he officially sanctioned by the Church in Jerusalem, but from God and by God (cf. vv. 1, 11–12). [Utley, 13]

George sums up this verse:

A difficult interpretive problem is posed by the adverb “immediately” (euthōs) in this passage. In the Greek text this word stands at the beginning of the two negative statements Paul made about his postconversion activity and thus could be translated “immediately, without seeking human advisors, or even going to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me.” This is an awkward construction in both Greek and English, and most modern translations have connected “immediately” with Paul's visit to Arabia. Thus, as the NEB has it, “I went at once to Arabia.”⁷⁰

If this view is pressed very far, it seems to conflict with the narrative of Paul's activities given in Acts 9:19–22. There the same word, euthōs, is used to describe what Paul did immediately following his baptism. “Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). How could Paul have “at once” both preached in Damascus and gone off to Arabia?

This difficulty disappears altogether if we follow the literal sequence of the Greek text and interpret “immediately” as qualifying Paul's negative statements concerning his postconversion whereabouts. Clearly the point he was making was not that he went immediately to Arabia without doing anything at all in Damascus but rather that immediately after his conversion, he did not go to Jerusalem or consult with the apostles there. He was countering the charge of his Galatian opponents that whatever gospel he possessed, he received secondhand from those who were apostles before him. Paul wanted to show that not only was he called and commissioned by Christ himself apart from any human mediation but also that he was engaged in the ministry of preaching prior to his first meeting with the Jerusalem authorities.

Some modern critics have cast aspersion on the historical accuracy of Luke's account because he nowhere mentioned Paul's journey to Arabia. However, it is important to recognize that both Luke and Paul wrote their distinctive accounts with a clearly defined purpose in mind. Neither Acts nor Galatians was intended to be a day-by-day journal of Paul's activities; each is a selective account of what Paul said and did, designed to show, in the case of Acts, his strategic

role in the worldwide mission of the church and, in the case of Galatians, the divine derivation and independence of his apostolic mission. It is possible to affirm the total truthfulness and accuracy of the Bible in everything it describes without assuming that it purports to be totally exhaustive in every detail.

Why did Paul go to Arabia? In the history of interpretation two possible answers have been given to this question. Some have claimed that he withdrew to Arabia for an extended time of prayer, meditation, and reflection on the tremendous experience he had just gone through. The word “Arabia” occurs again in Gal 4:25 as the location of Mount Sinai. On the basis of this allusion, some have speculated that Paul withdrew far away into the Arabian Peninsula to Mount Sinai itself, where the law originally had been revealed to Moses. However, in the days of Paul the word “Arabia” referred to the Nabatean Kingdom, a vast expanse of territory stretching southward from Damascus toward the Arabian Peninsula. At the time of Paul’s conversion this kingdom was governed by Aretas IV (9 B.C. to A.D. 40), a monarch connected by marriage to the Herodian dynasty. Paul did not say where within this territory he went or how long he stayed. A visit to Mount Sinai, while not impossible, may be considered unlikely given its far distance from Damascus, Paul’s home base during his earliest days as a Christian. A second reason has been advanced for Paul’s visit to Arabia: he went there to continue the preaching ministry he had already begun in Damascus. Recent excavations have shown that the kingdom of Nabatea (Provincia Arabia) encompassed a thriving civilization centered around the cities of Petra and Bostra. No doubt Paul would have had ample opportunity to preach the gospel among many Gentiles in these places. We have no record of Christian communities in this territory which sprang from Paul’s activity there, but there is a shred of evidence in one of Paul’s own letters that his word did not go unnoticed by the governing authorities. In 2 Cor 11:32–33 Paul referred to the fact of his being lowered in a basket from the city wall of Damascus following a plot against him engineered by King Aretas (cf. Acts 9:23–25). Of course, it is impossible to date this event precisely, but it seems likely that it occurred after Paul’s return from Arabia to Damascus and before his first journey to Jerusalem.

Which of the two theories should we choose? Did Paul go to Arabia on a preaching mission or for a spiritual retreat? There is no reason why we should be forced to choose between the two alternatives. We know that Paul’s preaching activity began immediately after his baptism in Damascus, although he was still a new Christian at that time. However, as J. Bligh has put it, “If the illumination he had received on the road to Damascus was enough to equip him to preach in the synagogues of Damascus, it was also enough to enable him to preach to the Arabs.”⁷² We can safely assume that Paul would be just as anxious to herald the good news of Jesus Christ to whomever he met on his journey to Arabia. However, the plausibility of this scenario should not obscure the fact that even so brilliant and well-trained a thinker as Paul would also require a period of intensive preparation for the life work to which he had been called. [George, 122–125]

Dunn:

Instead of immediately looking for some authoritative ruling regarding ‘the revelation of Christ’ to him, Paul went away into Arabia. Both where he went and the reason why are unclear and the subject of some dispute. The word (‘Arabia’) itself could refer to anywhere west of Mesopotamia, east and south of Syria and Palestine, including the isthmus of Suez (cf. 4:25—the Sinai peninsula). But the proximity to Damascus (implied by the next clause) points most naturally to the kingdom of Nabatea, immediately to the south of Damascus; and this fits best

with our other evidence, including the reference in 2 Cor. 11:32 to King Aretas who would be the Nabatean king Aretas IV (see fuller details in BAGD, Arabia; Betz, Galatians 73–4; the precise limits of Nabatean rule during this period are unclear—see Schürer i.578–82). More difficult to resolve is the question why Paul went there. It should not be assumed that ‘Arabia’ meant for Paul desert or semi-desert land. To be sure, some parallel with the tradition of Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness is inviting. It would accord with the much more widely attested practice in the history of religions of a period of withdrawal into an uninhabited region, following a revelatory or visionary experience, in preparation for some prophet-like or shamanistic role. And the psychological need for such a ‘retreat’ and reconstruction of his theology can well be imagined (see especially Burton 55–7 and Duncan 29–30). It would also fit Paul’s emphasis throughout this passage on the independence of his calling from all human resource—‘I did not consult with flesh and blood but went away into Arabia’ (Lightfoot 90). But at this time Arabia/Nabatea was a prosperous region with a number of large cities, probably including at least some of the Decapolis, so that it is also quite possible that Paul went to Arabia ‘in order to preach Christ among the Gentiles’ (so e.g. Bornkamm, Paul 27; Betz 73–4; Barrett, Freedom 8). This too would have served Paul’s purpose in his statement of defence: the implication being that the gospel preached by him was thus firmly established from the first (cf. Acts 9:20). However, Paul has left the point unclear and further clarity is not possible. It is idle, for example, to speculate whether his silence on the success (or otherwise) of this earliest mission indicates a relative failure on his part, causing some re-evaluation of his mission and gospel. The only point Paul chooses to make is that his time in Arabia further underlines his independence from the Jerusalem leadership; in Arabia there was no one whom he could consult (‘The meaning is: he was in Arabia and consequently not in Jerusalem’—Linton 84). And with that we must be content.

Following an unspecified period in Arabia Paul returned again to Damascus. Paul has given no indication of the intervals of time at this point, since that information was irrelevant to his main concern (his relationship with Jerusalem). The talk of ‘return’ to Damascus clearly implies that the initial period following his conversion was spent in that city; though if the ‘immediately’ of verse 16 does govern the previous clause, he cannot have spent long there before going off to Arabia. But presumably he was there long enough to be baptized and received into the church in Damascus (cf. Rom. 6:3–4; 1 Cor. 12:13; otherwise Taylor). All this is sufficient confirmation of the basic outline of Paul’s conversion itself as given by Luke (Acts 9:3–19). Nor do we know how long he spent in Arabia before his return to Damascus; it could have been quite a short period; the aorist tense probably excludes any implication of repeated visits to Arabia, using Damascus as a base. To put the same point from the other angle, we do not know how much of the three years between his calling and his first visit to Jerusalem (1:18) was spent in Damascus itself; it could have been the bulk of the three-year period. If we add in the evidence, once again, of 2 Cor. 11:32–3, it would appear that Paul’s activities were sufficient to cause unrest in Damascus, presumably among the large Jewish community primarily (cf. Acts 18:12–17; Suetonius, Claudius xxv.4; Josephus, War ii.559–61), to such an extent that his liberty (or life) was in danger and he had to make a humiliating escape. This again makes quite a plausible ‘fit’ with Acts 9:23–5 and strengthens the case for the latter’s historical value. But of this Paul says nothing, since, once again, it was not relevant to the primary purpose of defending his gospel. For further details on Damascus see Schürer ii.127–30. [Dunn, 69–71]

Bruce:

ἀπὸ τῆς ἀραβίας εἰς Ἀραβίαν—a reference, probably, to the Nabataean kingdom, founded in the 2nd century BC with its capital at Petra; at this time it stretched from the neighbourhood of Damascus south into the Hijaz. The Nabataean king at the time of Paul's conversion was Aretas IV (9 BC-AD 40), at present embroiled with his western neighbour Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea (4 BC-AD 39), because of the insult offered to his family some years earlier when Antipas divorced Aretas's daughter so as to be free to marry Herodias (Jos. Ant. 18.109–115).

It is possible that in 'Arabia' Paul communed with God in the wilderness where Moses and Elijah had communed with him centuries before; but in the present context the primary purpose of his Arabian visit appears to have been the immediate fulfilment of his commission to preach the Son of God 'among the Gentiles'. There were Gentiles in abundance in the Nabataean realm, both settled population and Bedouin. Nothing is said of the planting of any church, but a beginning in preached the gospel is indicated. Paul's argument at this point is: 'As soon as I was converted, I began my apostolic service, and had been thus engaged for three years before I ever saw the leaders of the Jerusalem church.' That his visit to 'Arabia' was not undertaken solely for the purpose of a contemplative retreat in the desert is confirmed by the incident which he recalls in 2 Cor. 11:32f.: 'In Damascus the ethnarch of King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascenes to arrest me, and I was let down through a window in a basket and escaped his hands.' He had evidently done something to attract the hostile attention of the Nabataean authorities if the Nabataean king's representative in Damascus attempted to kidnap him as he left the city. His attempt, and Paul's escape, presumably took place after Paul 'returned to Damascus', as he says here.

The mention of his return to Damascus (καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν) confirms the record of Acts (9:3; 22:6; 26:12f.) that it was at or near Damascus that he was confronted by the risen Christ.

Damascus, one of the oldest continuously-inhabited cities in the world (cf. Gn. 14:5; 15:2), was an Amorite centre in patriarchal times, but later became the capital of the Aramaean kingdom. It was captured and annexed by the Assyrians in 732 BC and was thereafter controlled by the successive empires which dominated that part of the Near East. In 66 BC it fell into the hands of the Romans, in whose power it thereafter remained (apart from a brief occupation by the Parthians in 40–39 BC) as one of the cities of the Decapolis, under the general supervision of the imperial legate of Syria. Under the Seleucids Damascus had become hellenized and rebuilt on the grid pattern, with the various installations characteristic of a Hellenistic city. Arguments that it was controlled by the Nabataean kings from AD 37 to 61 (based on the absence of Roman coins from its coin record between those years) are not conclusive (see Schürer, HJP, I. 581f.). R. Jewett, *Dating Paul's Life* (London, 1979), 30–33, suggests that the principate of Gaius (AD 37–41), who re-established a system of client-kings in that part of the world, provides a setting in which Aretas could have acquired control of Damascus; this is possible, but a change of government in Damascus need not be postulated on the basis of 2 Cor. 11:32f. alone. However, the Nabataean territory certainly adjoined the environs of Damascus closely on the southeast, and there were doubtless a considerable Nabataean community in the city, whose interests were looked after by the king's ethnarch. The Jewish community in Damascus was also large, even if its numbers did not come up to Josephus's estimate of 10,500 (War 2.561) or 18,000 (War 7.368). [Bruce, 95–96]

“According to Acts 9:20 Paul spent a little while in Damascus preaching, which suggests that his gospel was already clearly enough defined for him to announce it. But it must have been soon afterwards that he went into Arabia. Bishop Lightfoot comments: ‘A veil of thick darkness hangs over St. Paul's visit to Arabia.’¹ We know neither where he went nor why he went there. Possibly it was not far from Damascus, because the whole district at that time was ruled by King Aretas of Arabia. Some people think he went into Arabia as a missionary to preach the gospel. St. Chrysostom describes ‘a barbarous and savage people’² who lived there, whom Paul went to evangelize. But it is much more likely that he went into Arabia for quiet and solitude, for this is the point of verses 16 and 17, ‘I did not confer with flesh and blood . . . but I went away into Arabia.’ He seems to have stayed there for three years (verse 18). We believe that in this period of withdrawal, as he meditated on the Old Testament Scriptures, on the facts of the life and death of Jesus that he already knew and on his experience of conversion, the gospel of the grace of God was revealed to him in its fullness. It has even been suggested that those three years in Arabia were a deliberate compensation for the three years of instruction which Jesus gave the other apostles, but which Paul missed. Now he had Jesus to himself, as it were, for three years of solitude in the wilderness. [Stott, 34]

Moo:

"Instead" . . . 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" . . . 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."

After his stay in Arabia, Paul says, "I returned again" . . . 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). [Moo, 106-07]

Paraphrase by Lightfoot:

'Then came my conversion. It was the work of God's grace. It was foreordained, before I had any separate existence. It was not therefore due to any merits of my own, it did not spring from any principles of my own. The revelation of His Son in me, the call to preach to the Gentiles, were acts of His good pleasure, Thus converted, I took no counsel of human advisers. I did not betake myself to the elder Apostles, as I might naturally have done. I secluded myself in Arabia, and, when I emerged from my retirement, instead of going to Jerusalem, I returned to Damascus.' [Lightfoot, 82]