

# Notes on Biblical Exposition

By J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D.

Professor of New Testament in Westminster Theological Seminary

## X. PAUL AND THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

*"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to make the acquaintance of Cephas, and I remained with him fifteen days; but another of the apostles I did not see—only, I saw James the brother of the Lord. Now as to the things that I am writing to you, behold, before God, I lie not. Then I went into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia. And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea which are in Christ. Only, they were hearing: 'He who formerly persecuted us is now proclaiming as a gospel the faith which formerly he laid waste'; and they glorified God in me" (Gal. 1:18-24, in a literal translation).*

### Was James an Apostle?

LAST month we began the discussion of this first visit which Paul made to Jerusalem after his conversion. He went there, he says, to make the acquaintance of Peter, and he remained with him fifteen days. It was no doubt an important period in his life, but hardly long enough to make him the kind of mere disciple of Peter that the Judaizing opponents said he was. And as for the other apostles, upon whom, as well as upon Peter, the Judaizers might have held him to be dependent, he did not see them at all. Only, he did see James, the brother of the Lord.

It is a question whether Paul does or does not here call James an "apostle." The phrase which we have translated "only," in the sentence "Only, I did see James," means "except." If so, it might seem at first sight as though Paul does call James an apostle. If he says, "I saw no other of the apostles except James," that seems certainly to imply that his meeting with James was an exception to the general assertion that in addition to Peter he saw no other of the apostles; in other words, it seems to imply that James was an apostle.

As a matter of fact, however, the Greek

phrase meaning "except" is sometimes used to introduce an exception to something that is more general than that which has actually been mentioned. So in Matt. 12:4, it is said of the shewbread: "Which it was not lawful for David to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests." Here the phrase which we have translated "but only" is the same phrase as that which we have translated "only" in our passage in Galatians. If we translated it "except" in the passage in Matthew, we should arrive at a thought which is clearly not intended. If we translated: "Which it was not lawful for David or those with him to eat *except* for the priests," that would imply that there was a company of priests among those who were with David at that time—which is clearly not the meaning. Rather is the underlying thought, to which the phrase that we are discussing introduces an exception, the thought that "it was not lawful for *anyone* to eat the shewbread." Of that general principle, the thought that has actually been *expressed* before—namely, that it was not lawful for David and his company to eat the shewbread—is only one particular instance. The phrase meaning "except" follows after the particular instance, although according to our ways of thinking it belongs rather with the more general principle.

So in our passage, Paul's mention of his meeting with James, even if James was not an "apostle," was in the nature of an exception to the assertion, "Another of the apostles I did not see." If Paul had let that assertion stand without the exception, and had defended himself in doing so on the ground that strictly speaking James was not an "apostle," he would have been engaging in something like a quibble, because even if James was not an "apostle" he was one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church, dependence upon whom on the part of Paul would have established

the Judaizers' point just as much as would dependence upon one of the "apostles." So here again, as in the passage which we cited from Matthew, the Greek phrase introduces an exception—only, it is an exception to something a little more general than what has actually been stated in the preceding words. It is here an exception to what is the underlying sense of the preceding passage—namely, "Another of the Jerusalem leaders upon whom the Judaizers say I am dependent I did not see at the time of that first visit."

Of course what we have said about the Greek phrase in question does not mean that the use of the phrase shows that Paul does *not* call James an apostle; it only means that the use of the phrase does not show that he *does* call James an apostle. It is open to us to translate the words either: "Another of the apostles I did not see except James," or "Another of the apostles I did not see—only, I did see James." The question which of these two translations is correct will have to be decided on the basis of considerations that are not found in this passage itself.

### The Three Persons Named James

When those considerations are attended to, it seems probable that the latter of the two translations is to be preferred. Certain it is that the James whom Paul mentions here was not among the twelve apostles.

The opinion has, indeed, sometimes been held that the "brethren of the Lord," of whom James was one, were cousins of Jesus, the word "brethren" being used in a broader sense than that in which we use the word in English; and that these "brethren of the Lord" are to be identified with persons of the same names who appear in the lists of the twelve apostles. But this opinion depends upon certain rather doubtful combinations, and seems

to be opposed by the fact that specifically in the Gospel according to John (John 7:5) and by implication also in the Synoptic Gospels the brothers of Jesus are represented as not believing on Him during His earthly ministry, and certainly are not clearly designated in any way as being among His intimate disciples.

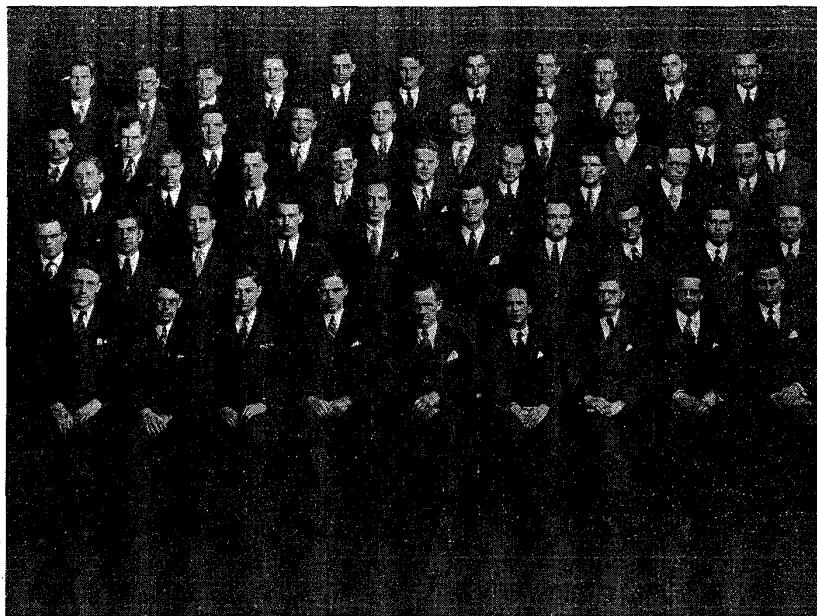
Thus the identification of "James the brother of the Lord" with the "James the son of Alphaeus" who appears among the Twelve must no doubt be rejected. Hence we have in the New Testament three persons who bore the name of "James." They are (1) James the son of Zebedee, who was martyred in 44 A. D. in accordance with the twelfth chapter of Acts, (2) James the son of Alphaeus, of whom scarcely anything is known except that he was one of the twelve apostles, and (3) James the brother of the Lord, who is mentioned here in Galatians.

#### James the Brother of the Lord

This James the brother of the Lord seems, as we have just observed, not to have been a disciple of Jesus during the public ministry. But, according to I Cor. 15:7, he was granted a special appearance of the risen Lord, and it is natural to surmise that, as in Paul's case, this appearance of the risen Lord to him was the means by which he was converted. With the other brothers of Jesus he was no doubt in the little company of men and women who met in the upper room in Jerusalem after the Ascension and before the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). In Acts 12:17 he appears in a position of leadership in the Jerusalem Church; for Peter, after his release from prison, is represented as saying to the company in the house of Mary the mother of John Mark: "Go shew these things to *James*, and to the brethren" (Acts 12:17). In Acts 15:6-29 he appears as presiding over the deliberations of the Jerusalem Church at the time of the "Apostolic Council"; and in Gal. ii. 1-10, in a passage which, as we shall see, probably refers to that same event or to events taking place at that same time, he is mentioned before the apostles Peter and John. In Acts 21:18-25, referring to the time of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, James appears in a similar position of leadership.

When these passages are carefully read,

Group of Westminster Students



A photograph taken eight months ago. A photograph taken today would show thirteen more men than appear in this picture. Sixty-two students now are enrolled from seventeen States, representing thirty-eight colleges and universities. Three students are from foreign countries. Pennsylvania sent the most students, thirteen; and California was second with eight.

it seems clear that James was specifically the head of the local Church in Jerusalem, whereas the twelve apostles had more general duties which increasingly took them on missionary or pastoral journeys outside of that city.

We learn from Josephus, the Jewish historian, that James was killed by the Jews in A. D. 62, after the death of the procurator Festus and before his successor had arrived in Palestine.

This James the brother of the Lord was the writer of the General Epistle of James, which is in the New Testament. The Epistle was no doubt written at an early time, prior to the controversy with the Judaizers and to the "Apostolic Council" of Acts 15:1-29: for its teaching about faith and works exhibits the most beautiful harmony of thought with Paul's teaching; and the writer would no doubt have avoided that superficial appearance of contradiction of Paul which has sometimes been a source of difficulty to devout readers of his Epistle if he had been writing after the terminology had become fixed, as it was no doubt fixed in the course of the controversy with the Judaizers.

#### "Unknown by Face to the Churches of Judaea"

Such was the only one of the pillars of the Jerusalem Church whom, in addition to Peter, Paul met during his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. It is now time for us to return to the account of that visit which Paul gives us in Galatians.

"As to the things which I am writing to you," he says, "lo, the fact that I am not lying stands in the presence of God"—and hence, since it is in God's presence, it is entirely true. Apparently the Judaizers had misrepresented the facts about that visit to Jerusalem, and so Paul is compelled to set the Galatians right about the matter by this strong asseveration. "God knows," he says, "that I am telling you the truth: I went up to Jerusalem not at once, but three years after my conversion; the only ones of the leaders that I saw were Peter and James; and I was with Peter only fifteen days."

"Then," he continues, "I went into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia; and I was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea which are in Christ. Only, they were

receiving the report: 'He who persecuted us formerly is now proclaiming as a gospel the faith which formerly he laid waste.' And they glorified God in me."

Great stress has been laid by certain modern scholars upon the words, "I was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea which are in Christ." If, it is said, Paul was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea, at the time of his departure from Jerusalem, he must have been unknown by face to the church at Jerusalem, since Jerusalem is in Judaea. Therefore, the argument continues, during that first visit to Jerusalem he must have been in hiding, seeing Peter and James, but by no means becoming acquainted generally with the Jerusalem disciples. This representation, it is said, is contradictory to the account in Acts 9:26-30; 22:17-18. According to the Book of Acts, Paul was by no means in hiding when he was in Jerusalem during his first visit there after his conversion, but went in and out in Jerusalem and preached to the Greek-speaking Jews. Thus it is maintained by the scholars to whom we have referred that Acts is quite incorrect in its account of that visit of Paul to the Jerusalem Church.

#### Was Paul in Hiding in Jerusalem?

But surely this attack upon the trustworthiness of Acts is based upon a totally unjustifiable interpretation of the one verse, Gal. 1:22. Paul has just said that he was in Jerusalem; then he says that he was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea. Is not the natural meaning simply that he was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea generally with the one obvious exception of the city that he has just mentioned? Surely I might say today, in speaking about my acquaintance with Presbyterian churches, that I know the churches of Philadelphia, but cannot say that I know the churches of Pennsylvania. It requires only a little goodwill and common sense to interpret Paul's words here in similar fashion.

Moreover, there is some evidence that in the language of that time "Jerusalem" was, sometimes definitely distinguished from "Judaea," the capital city possessing such a unique importance that the name of the district could be used to designate the rest of the district in distinction from

the capital. That usage appears clearly in Mk. 3:7f., where it is said that there followed Jesus a great multitude from Galilee and from Judaea and from Jerusalem. Here Jerusalem is not included in Judaea, but Judaea and Jerusalem are coördinated as two distinct things.

At any rate, whether we appeal to this special usage or not, it is surely much more natural to interpret Paul as meaning that he was unknown to the churches of Judaea generally, exclusive of Jerusalem, than to derive from the passage the very adventurous notion that he had spent his time in Jerusalem during that first visit somewhere in hiding in a back room of Peter's house. If Paul had meant that he went away from Jerusalem without having seen the church that was in that city, surely it would have been natural for him to say that much more plainly; surely it would have been more natural for him to say, after recounting his meeting with Peter and James: "But I remained unknown by face to the church that was in that city." When he says merely, "I was unknown by face to the churches of Judaea," he seems to indicate rather plainly that he did not have the much more definite and much more noteworthy fact to mention, that he did not even see the church at Jerusalem itself.

#### Where Were the Apostles?

Perhaps it may be objected that if we interpret Paul as meaning merely that he was unknown to the churches of Judaea outside of Jerusalem, we are making him say something that had no point in his argument. What possible importance was there, it may be asked, in the question whether he did or did not see obscure country churches in Judaea? Surely the question under dispute was the question whether he had or had not come under the domination of the Jerusalem apostles. Jerusalem, therefore, it is said, was the place where his relationships became important in his argument, and therefore when he says "Judaea" it is primarily Jerusalem, the chief city of Judaea, that he has in mind.

This objection, far from being decisive, only calls attention to the most probable explanation of the whole matter. In all probability, the apostles, at the time of Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, were al-

ready engaged in the missionary and pastoral labors in Judaea in which we know that they did engage at an early time, in accordance with the direction of our Lord that they should be witnesses unto Him "in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria" (Acts 1:8). Therefore it became very much to the point in Paul's argument for him to deny acquaintance with those Judaeian churches. Since many of the apostles were in those churches, he could not clear up the matter of his relations with the apostles without mentioning those churches. "At that time," says Paul, "I went up to Jerusalem and there saw Peter and James; but as for the churches in the country of Judaea—lest anyone should say that it was there, rather than in Jerusalem, that I became a disciple of the apostles—I did not even see those churches at all."

This hypothesis, that many of the apostles were in the Judaeian churches at just that time, is not established by direct testimony. But it is very probable, not only because it is in harmony with all that we know of the movements of the apostles, but also because it serves to explain two things in Paul's account. It serves, in the first place, to explain why he met only Peter and James in Jerusalem. Those were the only ones of the leaders whom he met, not because he was in hiding when he was in Jerusalem, but because the others were out of the city, engaged in missionary and pastoral labors in the Judaeian churches. In the second place, the hypothesis explains, as we have just seen, why he mentions the Judaeian churches at all. Since many of the apostles were in those churches, it became important for him, when he was showing how limited his contact with the apostles was at that early time, to say that those churches knew him only from hearsay.

Let it be observed that Paul's lack of contact with most of the apostles at that time, and his lack of contact with the Judaeian churches, did not indicate any suspicion of him on the part of those churches. On the contrary, he says that when they heard that he was preaching the faith which formerly he had laid waste—not some different faith, be it observed, but the same faith as that which had been proclaimed in Palestine from the beginning—they glorified God in him.

(Concluded on page 18)

## Westminster's Faculty



Photograph taken March 17th, 1931. From left to right: Paul Woolley, Th.M. (Church History), Cornelius Van Til, Th.M., Ph.D. (Apologetics), John Murray, M.A., Th.M. (Systematic Theology), J. Gresham Machen, D.D., Litt.D. (New Testament), Allan Alexander MacRae, M.A. (Old Testament), Oswald Thompson Allis, Ph.D., D.D. (Old Testament), Ned Bernard Stonehouse, Th.D. (New Testament).

## The Ministry of Reconciliation— Concluded

naissance loved to use characteristic backgrounds. Giotto wherever possible introduced his bleak Umbrian hills and Leonardo da Vinci had a predilection for moving waters. In a fuller sense there will be in the Minister's life and work a background dominating the whole scene. Calvary will loom large in every phase of his ministry.

Economically, socially, politically, religiously these are disquieting days in which we live, and the fact that each one of these departments of life is tied in with all the others intensifies the disturbance. But if we are perplexed it need not be unto despair. We are so close to the present that we lose our perspective and forget that many such critical periods have come and gone in the past. Such eras have always prepared the way for mighty victories for the Kingdom of God. It will prove true again. But if it does come to pass it will be because once again the Church of God has found the Scriptures to be the way out of the darkened area where the storm clouds hover. It has never failed that when human eyes have turned to look on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, He has placed upon

them His benediction. He and He alone has the healing power to make the world well. The supreme need of our age like every other age is restored relationship to God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. To this task so abundantly rewarding we commit our hearts and our hands as Ministers of reconciliation.

## Notes on Biblical Exposition— Concluded

In other words, they recognized that the Glory of God had been singularly manifested in the wonderful and blessed change that had been wrought in Paul.

### What is Meant by "The Faith"?

It is a very interesting question what Paul here means by "the faith." We use the word "faith" in two distinct senses in English. Sometimes we designate by the word "the act of believing," and at other times we designate by it "the thing that is believed." We use the word in the former sense when we say that justification is by "faith," or when we call on men to have "faith" in Jesus. We use it in the latter sense when we speak of the Christian "faith" or the Reformed "Faith" or the like.

In our passage, perhaps our first impulse is to take the word in the latter of these two senses; and certainly that sense

fits admirably into the meaning of the passage. It yields a very good thought if we interpret Paul to mean: "They glorified God in me; when they heard that I was proclaiming as a gospel the message about Jesus Christ which formerly I was laying waste."

The only trouble is that it is doubtful whether this use of the word occurs elsewhere in Paul—at least in his earlier Epistles. It certainly occurs in the New Testament, as, for example, in the well-known passage in the third verse of the Epistle of Jude concerning "the *faith* which was once for all delivered unto the saints"; but whether it occurs in Paul's Epistles, and particularly in his earlier Epistles, is a disputed question.

Perhaps, therefore, contrary to our first impulse, we had better abide by the other meaning of the word in our passage; perhaps we had better take the word as meaning, as it commonly does in Paul, "the act of believing." In that case, Paul would here mean to say: "They glorified God in me when they heard that I was proclaiming as a gospel—that is, that I was commending to men as the appointed means of salvation—that trust in Jesus Christ which I was formerly endeavoring, by my persecutions, to root out of men's minds and hearts."

But even if the word be taken in this sense, Paul certainly does not mean that he proclaimed the act of believing as a means of salvation because of its psychological effect, apart from the thing that *was believed*, namely the gospel message. Such a thought, common though it is in the Church today, is just about as far from the teaching of the Apostle Paul as anything that could possibly be imagined. When Paul speaks of his work in proclaiming as a gospel that trust in Jesus Christ which unites men to Him, we may be sure that he thinks of that trust, not as working in itself, through its psychological effect, but as being valuable only because the message which was received by it was true. Thus if we should translate this passage: "When they heard that I was preaching as a gospel that message about Jesus Christ, that 'faith' which consists of what is believed when He is received as Saviour," we might be technically wrong, but we should not be departing, after all, very far from the essential meaning of the passage.