

Chapter 4 Paul the Storyteller

“The art of perspective is to see yourself small on the stage of another person’s story.”¹

Against a background of a seminary library shelves filled with titles reflecting what Paul thought and believed, I want to emphasize a topic rarely considered. Paul was primarily a storyteller. There are multi-layered narratives to be discovered in Paul letters. We have some detective work to do. We will discover many clues to Paul that let us understand him as a real person at a particular moment in history. I’m convinced we can learn a great deal about Paul’s own story from these letters, and see him in his social world negotiating his Jewish traditions in light of his “call” while taking his message and story into a non-Jewish world.

Like all of us Paul was inside a much larger story. In Paul’s case he was born into the Jewish story of God. It was a story that gave him his identity as a Jew. Then it was no longer just his story *alone*, or of his Jewish brothers and sisters, but that of the whole world. The *ethnic* side of that story, that which once differentiated Paul from others, mattered no more. We will spend some time reflecting on this powerful tsunami-like transformation in Paul’s life, but we also seriously consider that Paul remained true to his roots as he became the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul had been brought up knowing from the Passover celebrations the Jewish story of deliverance from slavery in Egypt: Paul always had been a character in that story. He had to remember as a child from more than one Seder celebration how he was always called to see himself as one of the people of the Exodus. That story never ceased for Paul. But in the middle of his life the story was *extended*—not ended! Through his encounter with Christ Paul saw *all* who were oppressed (the Gentiles, the *Others*) who he may had never considered as part of that story now as God’s people. He was after all, in his own discovery, “...the unique apostle to the gentiles...”²

Critical to this process of finding Paul in his words is that we do not fall into the trap of separating his life from his understanding of God’s story. It was one continuous story for Paul, albeit marked by ineffable mystical experiences and one narrative of God. Nicholas Lash said of the mystery of God that it is “...the story of a single process, a divine self-bestowal, a single 'economy' of creation and salvation.”³ In a nutshell, if that dense phrase can qualify for a briefer metaphorical sentence, it states: Paul discovered in Christ the new Adam, or better yet, a “New Human Being.”⁴

¹ Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

² Wright, 2000, *Letter to the Galatians*, 211

³ Lash, 1986, 27

⁴ Wright. 2008, 385

The primary pronoun in all of Paul's letters, by the way, isn't the singular pronoun "I" but the plural "we." When Paul went back to the story of Abraham, and then took an even larger leap back to creation itself he was thinking about the whole world. He saw the *entire narrative* and the background of every action of God in history in light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. In and out of this grand historical panorama were the personal elements and the stories Paul shared of his life, but also of the lives of his co-workers, the other apostles, and even those who opposed him. The social and communal aspects of Paul's story must always be kept in view, lest we see him as this unique individual standing apart from the religious and political world of the first century.

Paul was grounded in a tradition (the one going back to creation, Adam, and most importantly the stories of Abraham). He belonged to a communal story that wasn't of his own making. This is true for each and every one of us. The difference is that in our world we tend to think of ourselves as unique discrete individuals. That wasn't the case in Paul's world.

He wasn't thinking of himself as having discovered the truth about God's story on his own. This is in such contrast to our perception of an Einstein who discovered the theory of relativity, or an Isaac Newton who invented calculus.⁵ MacIntyre, the Aristotelian philosopher, notes, with some regret, I might add, "...we live in a world that assumes the egoistic nature of human beings – that we are primarily individuals."⁶

Paul wouldn't understand our focus on being individuals and doing your own thing. Never would he sing along with Simon and Garfunkel the lyrics, "I am a rock, I am an island."⁷ As we will learn many of his letters might have even been composed with the help of his co-workers. He might be one of those people we meet every now and then who use the third person pronoun "we" when talking about something personal. We want to interrupt and ask "What's with the "we" pronoun?" Paul would most likely reply, "I am and always will be a "we."

We should try to keep in mind an important question that MacIntyre once asked:

"... In what larger story or stories, if any, is the story of each individual embedded? And in what still larger story is that story in turn embedded? And is there then a single history of the world within which all other stories find their place and from which the significance of each subordinate story derives?"⁸

⁵ That was his claim and history generally gives him the credit, but during Newton's life a claim was made by Leibnitz that he should be credited with having discovered calculus. Thus the modern world of individualism was already in existence.

⁶ MacIntyre, 2007, 229.

⁷ From the song, "I am a Rock."

⁸ MacIntyre, 1990, 144

It is clear that Paul was convinced there was a single history of the world that extended back to creation and to the story of Adam. Paul, with his rootedness in Torah and a special Hebraic way of life, had in his past a community of friends, family, and devoted Jews who shared a common life of faith and practice. For the first part of his life that story gave him an ethnic identity. Then he changed. What changed was his understanding of *who belonged* to that story. The category of *ethnicity* no longer mattered. As we will see the categories of slave/free and male/female also disappeared into some kind of cosmic dust.

His grounding in scripture gave him the insight that this had been part of God's plan all along, especially as it was revealed to Abraham, father of all the nations. The basic dichotomy in Paul's Jewish world when he was growing up had been "Jew" or "Non-Jew." Those categories of distinction were smashed into non-existence when Paul became "the least of the apostles." (1 Cor. 15:9) Gaventa says that all the *worlds* that made such distinctions definitional had also come to an end.⁹ These differences implied worlds of privileges, Gaventa notes, but "the pairs no longer exist."¹⁰

As a young man Paul knew himself privileged to be a Jew—recipient of the promises of the covenant. After God's revelation to him of Jesus Messiah, however, he would claim those same promises *only* as they extended *to everyone* in the world. He re-visited the Abraham story and God's covenant: it became the springboard into his ministry to the non-Jew world—or what is usually called the Gentile world.¹¹

We have to be careful with the term "Gentile world." If we say that Paul's world was divided between Jews and Gentiles, we're using, to be sure, a traditional Jewish perspective from the first-century. (Paul would tell us that *was what was* part of his story.) Even though Jew's were not the dominant culture in that world and even though they were spread throughout the Roman empire and even beyond its borders (*the diaspora*), their identity was to claim themselves as separate from others.

There is another set of glasses we need to wear and this is the perspective that helps us see the world from the point of view of a Roman citizen.¹² Paul's world, especially in political and military matters, was dominated by Rome! The Romans divided the world in terms of themselves and *all others* who were either just Greeks or Barbarians. Sometimes both terms were used to describe the *others* who weren't Romans. Jews, who were considered strange by the Romans, were also in the category of Barbarians.

The lens of ethnicity is still with us. For many it is still the world of "we" (our world as we like it) and "them" (all the others, no matter who they are). We are not like them. We

⁹ Gaventa, 2007, 68

¹⁰ Ibid, 72.

¹¹ N.T. Wright, 2013, 1471. "Paul reads Israel's scriptures as a vase and complex narrative... They narrate a faithfulness, and in doing do, invite the whole world into the faithful family whose source and focus is the crucified and risen Messiah."

¹² I will argue that Paul was *not* a Roman citizen further on in this book.

don't think like them. In some ways it seems we haven't changed much in the past 2,000 years knowing as we do wars and tribal conflicts causing so much death and creating millions of refugees throughout our so-called modern world.

Rather than simply reproach the reality of human beings holding views which allow them to claim a unique identity vis-à-vis others, however, we also need to understand the *positive side* of a social identity which shapes a view of the world and of others. Charles Taylor describes a “politics of identity” as that recognition we give to others in which we appreciate their “investment in a particular language, religion, customs, their construction of gender and racial difference, etc...”¹³ The assemblies Paul was writing to were composed of people with great differences that remained, but which were, in Paul's view, not meant to be divisive.

What is important to understand is that Paul came to see how the story of *his* people (Jewish people) had become the world's story. Paul discovered *a single history of the world into which all other stories were meant to find their place*. What is astounding about this revelation is that Paul's life was no longer one of privilege and status, or special claims based on ethnicity. He left that world behind and essentially became one of the “others” or one of the “no-bodies” of his time.

Paul would be surprised to find someone trying to tell *his* story, for Paul felt shaped by Christ and saw himself part a community in Christ—a family of brothers and sisters shaped around Christ-crucified. He was living the story of God, and it became the story of Christ best framed as a family created in the image of Christ. His letters were addressed to various families of believers called to live as witnesses to the world *of the way the world was suppose to be*. In Paul communal ethics always trumped theology! This doesn't mean for a second that the story of what God had done in Christ was secondary. Paul was focused on what *had* happened (*past*) with Christ crucified and raised from the dead (*present*) as evidenced in *the creation* of communities of faith who were living the story on a daily basis in anticipation of Christ's *parousia* (*very near into Paul's future.*) The story of the world was changing before his eyes!

We have already noted that Paul's story was a proud one. He declared in Philippians that he was “...circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews...” (Phil. 3.5). Yet just two verses later he declared that nothing in his previous story, the admirable credentials he once assumed were important or mattered any more. “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.” (Phil. 3.7) What Paul once knew was still there in memory, but of such insignificance. The past was still inside him, but it wasn't directing his new life. He began living a life in a community he could never have imagined.

No one has a singular story to tell, and neither did Paul. MacIntyre observed, “We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. Each of us being the main character in his own drama play subordinate

¹³ Volf, 1996, 19

parts in the dramas of others, and each drama constrains the others.”¹⁴ Even though we will want to understand more about Paul (knowing that there are so many questions we cannot answer), he would be saying, “I’m not the main story. Christ is the story.”

Essentially the Jesus story is “A plot played over and in him.”¹⁵ Paul kept telling Christ’s story in his life, and that is the way for us to see his life! At the same time were the many friends, and some who differed with Paul, in those living communities that claimed Jesus as their Lord and Messiah, and who *received* those letters we still have. Thank God he had a reason and reasons to write those letters, where he did indeed boast about himself, in a very strange way, as an example to follow.

MacIntyre, in the previous comment may have suggested we “...play subordinate parts in the drama of others...” but did Paul? It may be challenging to imagine Paul taking orders from anyone, but we must always remember his claim of being a *slave of Christ*. We will be looking carefully at those places where Paul was boastful because he could be the master of irony. Certainly within the larger context in which Paul placed himself, he was sincere in claiming a life lived more with others, especially the *others* he avoided prior to his life in Christ.

To whatever extent Paul was actually a Pharisee or lived a Pharisaic way of life, in the past, by virtue of that title, he lived a separated life. The Greek word for such is “...*aphōrismenos*,” which meant *separated*. “*Aphōrismenos* is nothing more than the Greek translation of the Hebrew term [Pharisee].”¹⁶ The word Pharisee, in turn, is an Aramaic word. In actuality Pharisees distanced themselves from common people, called the “people of the land.” (In Hebrew the “*am-ha’arets*, people of the earth, were the ignorant farmers who did not follow the law,”) ¹⁷ The rough callused hands those farmers developed were going to become Paul’s hands. Paul would have friends and co-workers who had to struggle literally for “daily bread.” In the second part of his life he was not *separated* from them. Our story of Paul examines the times he looked back on his previous life, but not with regret!

MacIntyre makes some remarkable observations about the way we can retrospectively learn to put into question some or many of the distortions and errors of the social and cultural traditions which initially form and shape us. He suggests that we can look back on our lives seeing both failures and success, and can also discern a “directedness” in our lives that brings us to “conclusions” which we could never have formulated in the beginning.¹⁸ At the same time is it possible to go on living while “...repeating and

¹⁴ MacIntyre, 2007, 213.

¹⁵ Wilder, 1973,58. “That which makes the peculiar mystery of the life of a Christian is that the world plot plays itself over in him, yet in such a way that it is always unprecedented...”

¹⁶ Agamben, 2005, 45

¹⁷ Ibid, 45-6

¹⁸ MacIntyre, 2016, 74

transmitting the mistakes and distortions” characteristic of a particular culture or social world that has formed and shaped us.¹⁹

One theme that MacIntyre emphasizes in his latest book is that those who lead “excellent lives” (his term) are those who identify and learn from their mistakes. He maintains that the “capacity for rationality over any extended period of time” requires engagement “in mutual criticism with those who share their practical concerns.”²⁰ This is exactly the perspective found in Paul who admits his mistakes (i.e. as one who began persecuting followers of Jesus and as one who made a painful visit to the Corinthians. 2 Cor. 2:1.)

His writing also emerged from the conversational world in which he lived. Paul was not even the sole author of the first of the seven letters which was sent to the community in Thessalonica. Its authorship was shared: “Paul, Silbanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Tesselonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ; Grace to you and peace.” (1 Thess. 1:1) In another sense each of the seven letters has strong echoes of previous and future conversations, and each in turn would have been heard, when read in community, as the very voice of Paul.

The truth about telling Paul’s story is that we actually don’t know much—or at least the kinds of things we usually want to find in a biography. When and where was he born? Acts offers an answer about the where (Tarsus) but not about when. We’re actually better off taking a guess about when he was born, rather than where. We also know nothing about his family, except for a brief reference to a relative at the end of Romans. Acts also mentioned the help given by the son of Paul’s sister who gave a warning to Paul allowing him to escape a deadly trap. (Acts 23:16.) It is a small detail from Paul’s life—maybe it was true.

4.1 Paul’s Memory Regarding History

Before we examine some specific autobiographical memories found in Paul’s letters—the process will continue throughout this book—we must consider our understanding of the role that memory plays in our understanding of history. To the extent that we might have been influenced by a Freudian concept of memory, we think of memories as hidden away, and maybe dark and fearful. That certainly doesn’t apply to Paul’s memory, or our consideration of the way he kept reminding others about God’s story.

We also tend to think of memory as personal and individualistic. My memory of the accident we just watched is different from your’s, perhaps, if we were on opposite sides of the street. I didn’t really see the accident clearly because I was leaning over the front my brake fixing it’s brake when the accident occurred. You were watching the traffic waiting for the light to change. Two perspectives and two different accounts of what happened in the same accident. The world we live in is often suspicious of stories drawn from memory, because they may be biased.

¹⁹ Ibid, 75.

²⁰ Ibid, 224.

These examples of “witnesses” fits with the enterprise of listening more closely to Paul, because his letters serve as our doorway into his witness to his faith in Christ crucified. Giorgio Agamben offers a helpful understanding of the specific kind of witness which is found in Paul. There are two words in Latin for “witness.” The first word “*testis*” is like the third party sitting on the witness stand describing how they saw the accident take place. Such a witness (a *testis*) “...is in the position of a third party.”²¹ The other word is “*superstes*” which describes someone “...who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it.”²² Paul is a “*superstes*” with regard to his call as an apostle. He saw the risen Lord! “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Cor. 15.8). His other unabashed claim is that he is an apostle. Galatians simply begins with two words in Greek: “Paulos apostolos.” Our translations usually make it three words: “Paul an apostle.” (Gal. 1.1).

The word for a “witness” most often used within the Christian story is *martyr*. It’s root is the Greek verb *martureo*. (The noun in Greek is *martus*.) In the many places in the New Testament where it is used it doesn't mean “dying for what you believe,” but more prosaically means simply being a “witness to some person, something, or some truth.” To describe someone as a *martus* in the New Testament means they are standing for something or declaring some truth. Consider Paul’s use of this word in the introduction to Romans, “For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness (*martus*) that with out ceasing I remember you always in my prayers.” (Rom. 1.9) It is God who is the witness (*martus*) for Paul!

While this work is focused on finding Paul in history, that is a concept that would have been puzzling to Paul. I’m sure he didn’t see himself playing a role in history, or having any impact on the direction in which the history of the world was heading. He certainly, though, had a sense that he was a witness to what God was doing, and how God’s amazing connection to a crucifixion outside Jerusalem of a peasant from Galilee was continuous with a history of revelation that had formed and shaped his people. And even Paul probably had to admit that it was a strange message that embraced him and called him to take this “good news” to those so unlike himself.

Paul’s understanding of what was happening in his world requires us to consider the apocalyptic expectations that swirled around Jews in the 1st century, and how, for someone like Paul, the sense that God was acting in history was an essential part of their story. The scriptural story from God walking in the Garden, to the call of Moses, and raising up the prophets, speaks of those *unexpected* times when something from God’s world was unveiled and disclosed on earth.²³ Equally unexpected was God’s revelation to Paul, who, as we will see, declared he even had an unexpected birth, or in his words, it was “untimely.” The real sense of revelations of God, though, were something that was

²¹ Agamben, 2017, “Remnant of Auschwitz,” 772.

²² Ibid.

²³ Wright, 2007, “Paul as Preacher: The Gospel Then and Now,” 321.

meant to happen, and which was a window into the future—a future made present, as it were.

There is something else in this view of revelation in the sense that God is acting in history, but the main actors are often the least expected ones to play a significant role in the things that ultimately matter in history. David Toole suggested that real power comes from the unexpected places in our world. “To adopt an apocalyptic style is to follow the biblical lead and turn our attention away from the power of kings and toward the power of ravens and peasant prophets in the wilderness.”²⁴

One aspect of Paul’s story we will probably never be able to fully explain is why he felt driven to persecute the early followers who were declaring Jesus to be risen from the dead. I called it a matter of “pure speculation” in my chapter on Paul in Arabia. What I didn’t say there, but what must be clarified at this point, is that Paul was acting with a purpose to somehow preserve or protect the practice of Judaism from some kind of perceived threat. He was acting in history. He was trying to be effective, which we will discover was what he no longer choose as his path to follow with Jesus as Messiah.

Then came God’s apocalypse—the revelation that Jesus was the Son of God, and was raised from the dead.²⁵ It wasn’t just information for Paul. It was a whole new way to live the story of God. While it meant being in the world, it wasn’t a life meant to change the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil. 3:18). Their days were numbered. Paul clearly lived with a sense that the second-coming of Christ would come in his life-time. It was a story all in God’s hands, except he was to take the story to the “ends of the earth.”

Paul was not thinking that he or others could actually influence the course of history. John Yoder saw the same in the way Jesus accepted the cross and in so doing “...renounced the claim to govern history.”²⁶ Some parts of the coming history would simply be unavoidable. In Philippians Paul proclaims the end coming to those who were the “enemies” of the gospel. “Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and their glory is their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.” (Phil 3:19). What followed were Paul’s thoughts on already having a citizenship that is in heaven and a future glory. Paul’s best advice isn’t to change the world, but to live in such a way as God’s people that we’ll be ready when the world ends.

What is especially relevant to our pursuit of Paul is that Paul was asking followers of Jesus to live the story and let that be their witness to God. In a very real sense, while not trying to change the trajectory of the Roman Empire, Paul was living in an alternative society which “...is in its very existence a point of resistance because of the way in which it recodifies power relations.”²⁷ This is where we find Paul. He is sharing leadership with

²⁴ Toole, 1998, 210.

²⁵ In Section 4.3 of this chapter the focus is on God’s revelation or apocalypse to Paul.

²⁶ Yoder, 1972, 234.

²⁷ Toole, 1998, 224.

others. He works alongside of them and earns his daily bread. He even thinks of himself as a “slave.”

One more perspective is helpful in understanding my claim that Paul wasn't trying to change history, but certainly believed it was in God's hands. The insights of John Yoder are helpful regarding the distance between so called “modern” or “post-modern world” *and* the first century. We think we can explain the cause of most things. In Yoder's words, “...we take for granted a deterministic, even mechanistic vision of human affairs.”²⁸ The philosopher Charles Taylor described a long process in which the world has been purged “...of its connection to an enchanted cosmos...”²⁹ Paul could never have imagined that such a world was possible, steeped as he was in the possibility of always seeing God's hand at work in this world. “Ever since the creation of the world his [God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.” (Rom. 1:20). It's fair to say Paul always kept his eyes open to the possibilities of God incarnate!

What Paul said about himself whether in story form or narrative or simply with little pieces of personal identity are thus the forensic footprints we will follow to have a better picture of this enigmatic figure. The diverse topics covered in this book indicate how much material is actually available for us to have a clearer picture of this Apostle to the Gentiles. While we might wish for more source material, we have his letters. “Paul's letters contain a great deal that is clearly autobiographical, but not autobiography.”³⁰ As George Lyons observed Paul's writings stand out in the corpus of the New Testament for the number of autobiographical statements found in his epistles. Such a phenomenon was common in the ancient world.

4.2 *A man with an “untimely” birth*

We begin with an intriguing comment Paul made regarding his birth. He told the church in Corinth how Jesus came to him: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.” (1 Corinthians 15:8) Notice he did not say that the appearance of Jesus was untimely. He described *his* birth as “untimely.” A reasonable question to ask is “Does Paul mean that he was born prematurely?”³¹ As we'll discover shortly there's a good reason for wondering about this.

The phrase “untimely born,” cannot mean that he somehow arrived late in his life to the truth about Jesus. (He was still a young man when his life changed!) The Greek term for “untimely born” could be translated as “miscarriage” but that doesn't make sense given the context of this statement by Paul. What if he was born prematurely? Few such babies

²⁸ Yoder, 1972, 234.

²⁹ Taylor, 2007, 155.

³⁰ Lyons, 1985, 60.

³¹ Aasgaard, 2007, 141. In much of what follows in this section I am indebted to this article by Aasgaard. He is one of the few scholars to study the various references to birth and childhood in Paul's letters.

probably survived, but a few must have. And what if Paul, perhaps a premature baby, was stunted in his early growth? We'll look at this question more thoroughly further on when we examine a 2nd century word picture of Paul.

Paul never made any mention to his own family, but there was one woman whom he cherished as a mother. Years after meeting Jesus, while Paul was waiting to go to Rome, and by this time an older man, he declared that the mother of Rufus had been a mother to him. "Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also." (Romans 16:13) Many of us can testify to having more than one mother in our life, in the sense of someone who cared for us as a mother would.

More questions come to mind. What about his early years as a child and a youth? There is nothing direct in any of his letters, but we ought to take notice of some references that suggest a more tender and understanding appreciation of the challenges facing children.

Was he possibly an orphan? He shows empathy for a child alone in the world when writing his first letter to the Thessalonians. He wrote: "As for us brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you—in person, not in heart—we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face." (1 Thess. 2:17) Perhaps Paul might have resonated with the title of the folksong "Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child." There is nothing in the historical record about Paul's birth family, but there are clues here that make us wonder.

There are added echoes in Paul of what it is like for an orphan to be adopted into a family. Writing to the Romans Paul said, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba!"³² Father!" (Romans 8:15) The Romans also used adoption as a way to preserve a families reputation and place of honor in the world. For a man to die without a male heir meant the end of that family name. Adoption was the answer to the future of a family.

The most famous adoption in the time of Paul had to be the story of Octavian, who became Ceasar Augustus. Octvian was the great nephew of Caesar, who made him his adopted son and rightful heir to his fortune. In March 44 BCE Caesar was brutally assassinated, thereby making Octavian the rightful heir. From that point on he hardly ever used his old name—it was much better just to be Caesar's son! One early move was to have the Roman senate declare that Caesar, now dead, was divine. From there it was a simple matter for his adopted son to be called a "son of God."³³ A conflict was sure to come from those who called Jesus "the Son of God" and it was a title Paul never shied away from using.³⁴

³² "Abba" is the Aramaic word for "father." Paul, writing to Greek speaking members of those Roman assemblies of Greek speaking followers of Jesus knew they had this Aramaic word in their vocabulary.

³³ Beard, 2015, 339-340.

³⁴ The chapter "The Subversive Paul" is where I focus on the language Paul used for the Jesus story. Paul was borrowing from imperial ideology to tell that story.

Having looked at the passage from Romans where Paul used the “orphan” metaphor, it is important to note that it was followed with the declaration that we are all the children of God. “...it is that very Spirit bearing witness[n] with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8:16-17) Can you imagine a pastor coming before his people on a Sunday morning and calling them all children? That’s what Paul did here. In another place he called those in Corinth and in Philippi “his children.” (1 Cor. 4:14-21; Phil 2:22) Remember, as well, as far as we know Paul was never married.

Paul remembered being a child. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child...” (1 Corinthians 13.11) That phrase can evoke all kinds of memories for each of us, and it must have done the same for Paul. Was he remembering certain words he said when people corrected his pronunciation? Most likely! Did he remember having some argument with his father, but learned that the reasons he offered didn’t perhaps persuade his father? Perhaps..

It is important to note that childhood was so different from what any of us experience. It basically was non-existent. Mary Beard in her history of Rome notes that many children “worked as soon as they were physically capable, whether slave or free.”³⁵ Beard discussed the archeologists who’ve studied the bones of the children in a cemetery outside of Rome. What those bones and joints revealed were signs of the hard physical labor those children endured. The fact that Paul recognized the reality of children as much as he did is probably the more surprising fact of this story.

There’s another interesting reference to a child and education in Galatians. Paul was discussing the role that Torah played in the lives of those who were raised within the Jewish world. He said, “Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:24) The word “ disciplinarian” in this verse, in Paul’s Greek, was “*paidagogos*.” A number of Biblical scholars have commented on this single word as if it contains a world of stories.³⁶ It does!

The word *paidagogos* is a compound word connecting the word for child “*pais*” with the word for someone who is a leader an “*agogos*.” The genitive construction of *pais* is *paidos*. The child, as it were, was never without the one who leads. Indeed in Paul’s world a child, if they came from a household of wealth, would usually, in public, be accompanied by their *paidagogos*, or literally their tutor. Often the tutor was one of the slaves, albeit one with some education. That person was, therefore, responsible for bringing up the child.

³⁵ Beard, 448.

³⁶ See, i.e. W.A. Criswell, <http://www.wacriswell.com/transcript/?thisid=1179EAEF-4E38-491C-80A24258891BD818>

Notice that a word which could have simply been translated as “tutor” became “one who disciplines” or as in the NRSV translation, “. . .the law was our disciplinarian.” To be sure some of the stories from that world were of stern, disapproving, even harsh servants bearing the title of *paidagogos*. But were they all this way? Krister Stendahl had a more holistic understanding of a *paidagogos* as “. . .a sort of ambulant baby sitter, a slave who took children to school, taught them outward manners, saw to it that they did not fall into sin and difficulties. . .”³⁷ He suggested that “custodian” was a better translation, and that it was a role played out only “until Christ came”—exactly what Gal. 3:24 states!

Remember that the methodology undergirding this enterprise is to discover pieces of the story of Paul’s life. This is one instance when I wonder if Paul might have been thinking back to a *paidagogos* in his life as a child. Even if this seems like a stretch, please bear with this line of thought for a few moments. We must keep in mind that for at least 500 years since the Reformation, and maybe the 1500 year period that takes us back to St. Augustine, Paul has been pictured as guilty and troubled with regard to his conscience and the supposed burdens of the Jewish Torah. It was *assumed* he saw the law as his “disciplinarian.” Stendahl translation of the passage focuses on the “law” as Paul’s *custodian*. If so we do not have a Paul giving up on Judaism.

To consider Paul having had a more positive assessment of the Jewish law is a difficult, but critical concept to any reassessment of Paul. A case in point is the preacher W.A. Criswell who first offered an understanding of the word *paidagogos* more as a “tutor”—meaning an image in relatively neutral terms. Then Criswell, perhaps putting on a Reformation perspective, focused on the limits of Torah, emphasizing it only in negative terms. Criswell said, for example, “. . .the purpose of it [Torah] was to lead us to a despair of ourselves and a *paidagogos* to lead us to the Lord Jesus Christ.”³⁸ That observation brings us to the concept of *supersessionism*, which in the world of Biblical studies, means all of those descriptions of Christianity as the religion that comes after Judaism. “According to supersessionists the church has replaced or superseded Israel in God’s program.”³⁹

Was this the story Paul was telling? I don’t think so! But we must face the fact that church history has been marked, quite sadly at times, with this presumption. In another chapter in this book we will look more carefully at all the ways in which Paul always thought of himself as a Jew—most especially as a Jew who knew Jesus Messiah. It is sometimes forgotten that Paul as the Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles was still a Jew.

Paul’s story, certainly in the centuries since St. Augustine, has been of a man with guilt, who was unable to find the grace and mercy of God within Judaism. This is the story, many of us learned, but it *wasn’t* his story. “Paul’s experience is not of that inner experience of conversion which Western theology has taken for granted.”⁴⁰ Paul felt

³⁷ Stendahl, 1976, 21.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Zuck, 2011, 487

⁴⁰ Stendahl, 1976, 12.

indebted to God's story that defined Israel. Then in light of the story of Christ he wished for all his brothers and sisters, who defined themselves in terms of Israel to also see how God was in Jesus Messiah. (Romans 9-11)

A case can be made, I'm sure, that Paul never meant to say that the law was a disciplinarian. There is just one other time that Paul used this particular word. Another translation is possible, and this is a case where it would be *wrong* to translate *paidagogos* as disciplinarian.

In the fourth chapter of 1 Corinthians Paul discussed at some length the ministry of the apostles, and in particular what the life of an apostle looks like. This is a critical passage leading us into Paul's story, which will be unpacked later when we examine in detail what Paul meant by describing the ministry of the apostles as "fools for the sake of Christ." (1 Cor. 4.10). Our focus at this moment is Paul's other use of the word *paidagogos*, albeit in its plural form, where the word is translated as *guardians*.

"For though you might have ten thousand *guardians* in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." (1 Cor. 4:15)

What a difference there is between one who is a *guardian* and one who is a *disciplinarian*! If Paul was thinking back to his childhood with the passages we've discussed, did he have in mind one who was his tutor or guardian—someone who genuinely cared for him—or one who was harsh, maybe even like a prison guard? We know that Paul also met many a prison guards later on in his life and the record is that they could be terribly corrupt and brutal.⁴¹ In total contrast to the guards in a prison, or even a harsh *paidagogos* Paul saw the whole story of God not as punishment, but as *gospel* or good news!

When I think about Paul's deep faith in the Jewish story that led to God's covenant with Abraham I only see God's love reaching to the ends of the earth, including all humans. Having had that revelation of Jesus as Messiah we know that Paul reached back into his knowledge of scripture to see how it had been God's plan, all along, to reach this penultimate moment when Jesus was brought to that cross. I see Paul telling us the whole story of God, as it were, in this passage from Galatians:

"Therefore the law was our *guardian* until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24)

Calling the law our guardian has a more positive connotation. It fits with all the other things Paul said about God's love of Israel. He didn't tell us much at all about his early days and those who nurtured that love and respect he had for God's story. Uniquely, or so it seems from his words about being the apostle to the Gentiles, he wanted to share that story with those who could never claim a heritage like his. But then, as he said, to the Phillipians, none of those credentials mattered anymore.

⁴¹ Wansink, 1996, 51.

Trying to meet St. Paul isn't easy because there are all these gaps in the story that in many places really isn't a story at all. What we have in a metaphorical sense are a few snapshots left behind and they are few and far between.

There is one story of Paul, though, that has been greatly magnified. Acts tells of Jesus encountering Paul, not once, but three times. That version deserves our consideration even though we are going to let Paul have the last word on what happened.

4.3 The Story of Paul's Calling to be an Apostle

The title of this section uses the word "calling" and not "conversion." These two words get at the heart of a serious contentious debate among New Testament scholars. This is a huge topic taking up many shelves in our theological libraries. I can't make an argument that settles the issue, but I believe that in answer to any of the major questions which swirl around St. Paul, we always should pay utmost attention to his own words. Paul said he was "called to be an apostle." To be called doesn't mean there is less drama in the story, but it may not give us the cinematic picture we were given from the accounts in Acts.

Writing about the narrative imagination, Barbara Hardy, a critic and novelist, has said, "...so a great story-teller naturally seizes every chance to tell a story."⁴² This is true for the apostle Paul, when we pull him from the dusty shelves of dogmatic theology, into the flux of real life as most of us know it. In his letters he was telling stories again and again, or at least was alluding to them. Sometimes his story references were subtle, which means we have to use our imaginations to wonder at the possible stories Paul had in mind. There are a great many times, though, when Paul declared something God had revealed to him. Paul's use of the word translated as "revealed" applied to those unexpected events when his life was changed or altered.

This isn't the world of the predictable; in fact it is the opposite. Paul, in his earlier life, had probably lived in a fairly consistent world as a serious Jew⁴³, but that changed, or rather what happened changed the course of his life—even though, by his own account, the basic stories that shaped and formed him were always there!

Those amazing Renaissance artists with their paintings of the conversion of Paul sometimes depict a face of a man absolutely stunned and blinded. Did you ever hear a reference to Paul getting thrown off his horse when he met Jesus? That's a detail found neither in Paul or Acts. Caravaggio, the Italian Renaissance painter created a masterpiece titled "The Conversion of St. Paul" (1601). The artist saw Paul, who has met the Lord, fallen off his magnificent horse looking up at the light shining from above. It's a gorgeous painting—not true—but a masterpiece! [NOTE to Readers from this website

⁴² Hardy, *Tellers and Listeners*, p. ?

⁴³ In Paul's words, "...as to the law, a Pharisee." (Phil. 3.5) It could mean simply that he was telling us he was something like a Pharisee who lived according to the Torah.

version: a photo of Caravaggio's painting is intended to be inserted in the text at this point.]

I believe it's important to take Paul's account of what happened to him as the main story, and we have it in the letter to the Galatians.

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and *called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me*, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles... (Galatians 1:15-16a)

What needs to be emphasized is that *this is Paul's reflection* on what happened to him and brought him forward to the point that he was writing to the Galatians. It's a past-tense event informing his present ministry, except it shouldn't be seen as a punctiliar event as in any sense completed and past tense. In Paul's understanding of his call it had been pre-ordained when he was in his mother's womb.⁴⁴ Like the prophets of old, whose words were inside Paul, his belief was that God had set him apart before he was born. He wasn't born again, to leave behind his Jewish identity as a Christian. He was part of a divine plan, but did not see it initially unfolding before him. This event was, however, what led him forward to the ministry he'd had for years leading up to the time of writing to the Galatians. Krister Stendahl said,

"The emphasis in the accounts is always on this assignment, not on the conversion. Rather than being "converted," Paul was called to the specific task—made clear to him by his experience of the risen Lord—of apostleship to the Gentiles, one hand-picked through Jesus Christ on behalf of the one God of Jews and Gentiles."⁴⁵

One word that needs to be unpacked in Paul's account is the word translated "revealed." In Greek it is *apokalypsai*. We could easily translate what happened to Paul was that Jesus as God's Son had been *apocalypted* to him. Such a translation suggests something sudden, dramatic, and in a moment, life-changing. That is actually the way J. Louis Martyn translated the verse: "So when it pleased him apocalyptically to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles."⁴⁶

If we used the picture from Acts to interpret Paul's biographical account in Galatians we would be tempted to assume that Paul had a dramatic and sudden realization of all that was wrong with his past life, and how he would now live in a different way. Paul's story of *call* can be understood as a revelation with mystical aspects to the event to be sure. If we think it was some kind of conversion the best advice may be to use the word "conversion" for him with some caution. Whatever happened the meaning took time to be

⁴⁴ Lopez suggests that Paul is presenting himself as "fatherless" and that's exactly in the model of "the First Testament prophets." Lopez, 2008, 134.

⁴⁵ Stedahl, 1976, 7.

⁴⁶ Martyn, 1997, 144.

fully embraced. Segal who wrote a book with the title “Paul the Convert” explains it this way:

“Although conversion is often thought of as a sudden change that alters one’s life immediately, the study of modern conversions shows that Paul’s own description is more characteristic.... That Paul claims the conversion took place without the help of flesh and blood underlines the extraordinary circumstances of the religious decision, but it does not mean that he immediately realized all the implications of his conversion experience. Only time could've disclosed these to him.”⁴⁷

While there must have been a mystical component to his call, as there usually is with some kind of strangeness in all such accounts, there had to be something of this call requiring deep thought and reflection before it could even be partially comprehended. N.T. Wright observed, “The point about the single call' is that it is not "an invitation to enjoy a new kind of religious experience'. It is a sovereign summons to acknowledge the risen Jesus as lord.”⁴⁸

One aspect of this call to preach “among the Gentiles” which we must not forget is that Paul never lost sight of the story of God that shaped and formed him from his earliest days. Paul had not broken away from his Jewish past. “He has not abandoned his Jewish roots and meanings, but simply gained a radical new insight into them.”⁴⁹

4.3 Paul and Peter: A Contested Memory

This book is only possible because there are stories that Paul tells, and allusions to other stories that are like windows into the scrapbooks we wish we might have of Paul’s life. An extended part of this story that encompassed at least three years and certainly a few more of Paul’s life was summed up in the nine verses that conclude the first chapter in Galatians. The story following Paul’s call begins with the line “I did not confer with any human being.” We need to keep in focus the single reference to the absence of any human being as well as this entire passage before us at this point.

15 But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and *called me* through his grace, was pleased 16 *to apocalypse* [reveal] his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; 19 but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord’s brother. 20 In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie! 21 Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, 22 and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in

⁴⁷ Segal, 1990, 13.

⁴⁸ Wright, 2013, 955.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 1422.

Christ; 23 they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy.” 24 And they glorified God because of me.

Talk about stories! Consider all the people who were part of this account, whether named or not. Who traveled with Paul to Arabia? Who did he meet there? As noted in Chapter 2 he must have landed in trouble there with some of the authorities.

Was it in Damascus that he found other followers of Jesus? Maybe he found them in Arabia. Somewhere along the way Paul learned some things about the Jesus story and more importantly met people who were present certainly with regards to the crucifixion and resurrection stories. In I Corinthians he referred to the traditions Paul learned which were given to him—what “he received.” (1 Cor. 15.3). Paul was imbedded in one large story of God and found it enlarged and more deeply explained through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the year or two that followed the death of Jesus there were small communities of remembrance telling this story. Paul must have made friends of some of them, but he also, waited to go to Jerusalem.

When he was writing to the Galatians he had to be fully aware that Peter and James would have their story about meeting Paul for the first time. They, in effect, would confirm that Paul was also not known to the churches of Judea, but they also knew Paul’s previous reputation. They had heard about Paul and finally met him. We can only wonder with what fear or skepticism they had upon first meeting him. What we do know, and which is a fact critical to this enterprise, is that Paul had not hurried off to Jerusalem to meet the disciples of Jesus right after his call from God.

There are only two written accounts of the relationship of Paul and Peter. This is a good place in this story to note the difference between the “biographical memory” of Paul and the “cultural memory” of the author of Acts. The difference isn’t that one memory is necessarily more accurate than the other, because we know personal memories can be flawed or biased. One of the scholars studying the theory of memory in relationship to history wisely observed that “...the theory of memory has the priceless advantage of also being the theory of forgetting.”⁵⁰

What is described as “cultural memory” is also known as “collective memory” in that it belongs to a community with various rituals, calendars, texts, and art forms that preserve their foundational narratives that allow the past to be present. Sometimes it is also understood to be the “traditions” of a community, but that term may suggest a hardening, or rigidity that isn’t indicative of the way “cultural memories” actually move through time. It is precisely this move through a moment of time where we find the account of Acts as a transition point in the story of early Christianity. We can reclaim the word “traditions” in studying early Christianity if we understand that what we call “traditions”

⁵⁰ Assmann, 2011, 48. He is referring to the work of M. Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, 94.

were often born in contentious or changing times, and served to preserve significant memories and stories, that had to stand the test of time.⁵¹

What we know about St. Paul from the written sources in the 2nd and 3rd centuries is that no matter what the issues were which divided and challenged these early Christian communities they nearly always appealed to Paul when seeking an authoritative voice of to defend and support a particular belief or practice. A perfect case in point regards Marcion (140? C.E.), who sought to uproot Christianity from its Jewish roots. In the process Marcion, according to some of more orthodox church fathers, tried to edit out elements of Paul's letters to accord with his non-Jewish understanding of Jesus. (Editing Paul's letters seemed to also happen with in those who came from more orthodox circles.)

Followers of Marcion continued to remember his views for centuries afterwards in places as far apart as France and Syria. Congregations with Marcionite beliefs may have lasted into the 10th century in places far off to the east in Iran and Afganistan.⁵² To this day Pauline scholars like N.T. Wright invoke the term "Marcionism" to refer to any attempt to pull Christianity from its Jewish roots.⁵³

If Marcion stands for placing the Jewish story at a distance, the account in Acts fully endorses a connection of the story of the gospel with Jerusalem and to worship in the synagogue. We need to remember how often Acts places Paul in a synagogue upon beginning ministry in a new community. This account in Acts 17 is illustrative of this point. "After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of Jews. And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures." (Acts 17:1-2). Even more telling for Paul's relationship to the leadership in Jerusalem, especially to Peter and James, the decision to come to the Jerusalem conference was because Paul and Barnabas were "appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question (i.e. circumcision) with the apostles and elders." (Acts 15:2). Paul's reason for going was quite different. He went because he'd received a "revelation" (an apocalypse). (Gal. 2:2). Paul in telling the Galatians about his relationship to the leaders in Jerusalem emphasized his independence from their authority. Paul was an "independent missionary" who felt connected to the work of those in Jerusalem and Judea, but not in any subservient way. It helps to see this from a series of passages in Galatians:

"Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from *human* authorities..." (Gal.1.1)

"For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed to me is not of *human* origin; for I did not receive it from a *human* source, nor was I

⁵¹ White, 2014, 70-79 for an extended discussion about "traditions."

⁵² Diamong, 2010, 126.

⁵³ Wright, 1995, 107. "Yes, the Torah simply intensifies the sin of Adam in the people of Israel. No, this does not lead to Marcionism."

taught it, but I received it through a revelation (*apocalypse*) of Jesus Christ.” Gal. 1:11-12)

“But when God, who has set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal (*apocalypse*) to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any *human* Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went at once into Arabia and afterward returned to Damascus.” (Gal. 1:15-17)

“..but we did not *submit* to them even for a moment...” (Gal. 2:5)

These claims of,” so densely packed together, are clearly part of Paul’s argument with regard to the issues facing the Galatian communities from the unnamed opponents of Paul who were preaching “a contrary gospel.” Paul was clear that he was the apostle to the uncircumcised, while Peter “...had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised...” (Gal. 2:8) At the same point reading between the lines in Galatians there is no doubt of the respect that Paul had for the apostolic witness in Jerusalem, but it was also clear that his own mission was to the non-Jewish world. He kept his distance as having just two visits in a 14 year period demonstrates. He was only subservient to Jesus.

For our purposes it is important to understand Paul’s claims of independence coming from his “memory.” He did not belong to the community of believers in Jerusalem. Those who were his opponents in that mission field may have tried to make the case that they were *sent* from Jerusalem making their credentials more authentic than those of Paul. We don’t know. What is evident from what Paul wrote is that his “calling” was the only credentials he needed for his work in preaching the gospel.

After Paul discussed the nature of the conference in Jerusalem he added one more little story regarding his relationship with Peter. From Paul’s point of view the question about eating with Gentiles never occurred in Jerusalem, but afterwards in Antioch. It was there that Peter drew back from eating with Gentiles and “kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.” (Gal. 2:12) Clearly the issue was sharing the same table at the Lord’s supper and not any restaurants in Antioch. Peter had, according to Paul’s account shared the same table with Gentiles: “...for until certain people came from James, he (Cephas) used to eat with Gentiles.” (Gal. 2:12)

Paul’s last words regarding Peter tell us his side of the story. He confronted Peter as a hypocrite, as one who used to eat with Gentiles now wanted to compel Gentiles to live like Jews. Paul distinctly remembered this encounter. We can only wonder how this part of the story would have been different if Paul had known about Peter’s visit to the home of Cornelius.

The story in Acts regarding Peter and Cornelius is often understood as critical to that account because Peter entered the house of a Gentile and after a dream of all kinds of “four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air” he was told to get up and eat.” That meant Peter was commanded to eat what he knew to be “profane or unclean.” (Acts 10: 12, 14) In the long story that follows Peter met Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian

Cohort (i.e. a Roman soldier and officer). The entire encounter concludes, not with the circumcision of Cornelius, but with the baptism of the entire household of Cornelius. (Acts 10:1-48).

One interesting detail about the whole encounter of Peter and Cornelius is the little story cleverly embedded in Acts regarding the night prior to meeting Cornelius. Peter stayed with a tanner by the name of Simon in Joppa, which was a town near the Dead Sea. Years ago I asked Walter Dunnnett to help me with my Greek New Testament skills.⁵⁴ I remember him saying that Peter went as far as any Jew could go in terms of reaching out to other Jews with the Gospel and still be a Jew. To be a tanner mean engaging in a necessary task but in a process that was “primitive, malodorous” and one which was required to be done at some distance from any town. Those who were “tanners” were “...exempted from appearing at the Temple on pilgrimage feasts because their unpleasant odor prevents them from going up with all the men.”⁵⁵

Walter Dunnnett in his commentary on Acts noted how righteous and traditional (according to Jewish expectations) Peter sounded when God asked him to eat unclean food. Peter replied “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” (Acts 10:14). The telling comment in Dunnnett’s book is worth quoting: “How orthodox he sounded (yet all the while living in a tanner’s house!)”⁵⁶ Peter who had gone as far as he could as a law-abiding Jew, but he was about to go much further—only, according to the account in Galatians, it didn’t last!

A major discrepancy between Acts 10 and Galatians 2 is that Paul *never* made a comment about Peter once entering the home of Roman officer. Marcus Bockmeuhl asserted that if Paul had known of this event he certainly would have referenced it in his account of the Jerusalem Conference.⁵⁷ Galatians which predates Acts by at least 40 to 50 years placed Peter on the side of first sharing the Lord’s Supper with gentiles and then withdrawing in what turned out to be a rather dramatic encounter with Paul. It must be admitted that we only have Paul’s account of what happened. Even so the story that Paul told was that Peter accepted the authority of James. Nonetheless, both James and Peter had given Paul the “right hand of fellowship” and sent Paul off to the gentiles. (Gal. 2:10)

Earlier I framed this part of the differing accounts of the conference in Jerusalem as the difference between a “biographical memory” and a “cultural memory.” Paul’s memory of going to Jerusalem on two occasions emerged in the context of a serious issue requiring his attention with regard to the communities of faith he knew in Galatia. What we have with the account in Acts isn’t a fully-formed “cultural memory” connected with any rituals or celebrations, but it was clearly important for some more established faith

⁵⁴ At the time he was the Professor of New Testament studies at Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota.

⁵⁵ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/leather-industry-trade>, 1.

⁵⁶ Dunnnett, 1981, 72.

⁵⁷ Bockmeuhl, 2007, 78.

communities to see Paul in a relational context to the founding figures of the apostolic faith. The intent of the author of Acts was for this story to have a wider audience in the early second century. Paul also sought a wider audience for the story of Christ crucified.

Both accounts of that conference are important to us. We ought to give priority to Paul's version, while, at the same time, acknowledging that he remembered the facts as they suited his purpose in writing that epistle. The story told in Acts also served a purpose, and its author may have been trying to correct the account told in Galatians. There are scholars who believe Acts was written knowing at least one of Paul's letters. "It is likely that Luke used the Pauline material in Galatians but intentionally shaped the narrative to support his own literary and theological purposes."⁵⁸

It hasn't been my intention to dive deeper into all the differences between the accounts in the two sources for the conference in Jerusalem. Commentaries on both Acts and Galatians are filled with noting those differences. What matters to *finding Paul* is that we have two dense narratives with different purposes in mind. In both there are images of Paul. One reflects the traditions that made Paul if not the last, but in some ways, the only or most significant of all the apostles. In the other source—Galatians—we can almost hear Paul's anger, imagine the story of his call, and start to see him in the midst of the kinds of company he most cherished. That is the story which continues.

⁵⁸ Smith and Tyson, 167.