

Why Paul, not Peter, is our apostle

I have arranged the scriptural references in the historical order in which the events described occurred or the epistle was written. God has progressively revealed things to his people and it is of crucial importance to understand that prior to God revealing new information, nobody knew about it. We view these events with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight so we must remember that the people involved only knew things as God revealed them.

There is much debate about the actual year of the Lord's crucifixion. I am not qualified to enter into this debate but it seems that the main contenders are the years from A.D.30 to A.D. 33. My use of A.D. 30 is only a best guess.

I am presently of the opinion that Galatians is one of Paul's earliest epistles, written around A.D. 49. Some bible commentators (including Rev. Scofield) place this letter in the same time frame as his letter to the Romans (around A.D.58). Why would Paul marvel that the Galatians were 'so soon removed from him' if over a decade had passed since he first visited them on his first missionary journey in A.D. 45?

"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:" (Gal 1:6 AV)

Circa A.D. 30–35: Great commission halted. Paul saved.

The great commission of Mark 16:15 states;

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15 AV)

It is clear by the context that the them the Lord was speaking to were the eleven surviving, chosen representatives of his holy nation of priests, Israel;

"Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." (Mark 16:14 AV)

The eleven were restored to twelve (Acts 1:26) and began their commission of Mark 16:15 after the prophesied outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The gospel that Peter and his little flock were initially sent to preach to all the world, was the gospel that was inseparable from prophecy: that after great tribulation, the Lord would return and restore the physical and political kingdom to Israel – i.e. the millennial kingdom. That was their initial expectation.

"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts 1:6-7 AV)

The distinction between Peter's preaching according to prophecy and Paul's preaching according to the revelation of the mystery, can be seen quite clearly by comparing Acts 3:21,

*"Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."
(Acts 3:21 AV)*

with Romans 16:25.

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began," (Romans 16:25 AV)

The former had been spoken by the mouth of God's holy prophets "since the world began". The latter was "kept secret since the world began". Please note that Peter, and any other apostles of the circumcision, who believed the ongoing revelation given by the Lord to Paul, remained within the household of God as the Jewish remnant according to the election of grace.

"Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (Romans 11:5 AV)

The gospel, or good news, of the finished work of redemption that the Lord had accomplished at Calvary, gradually became more important than the expectation of the Lord's return to restore the kingdom to Israel. Acts 2:38 is perhaps the best example of the early gospel of the circumcision. Note that the Jewish listeners had to do things (repent and be water baptised) in order to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38 AV)

This can be contrasted with the later gospel of the uncircumcision preached by Paul, which was all about the hearing of faith and not about doing anything.

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." (Acts 16:30-31 AV)

"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2 AV)

Though initially sent to preach their gospel to every creature in the world, the twelve apostles of the circumcision were not to know that it would be rejected by the first and

most essential nation that it was offered to - God's own holy nation Israel. They met with ferocious persecution from establishment, unbelieving Israel (spearheaded by one called Saul) and all but the apostles were dispersed after Stephen's martyrdom.

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles." (Acts 7:59-8:1 AV)

The twelve initially had no idea that the Lord had a hidden plan to conclude all in unbelief and offer salvation to the whole human race on the basis of faith in the extraordinary event that had already occurred – that the Lord had already accomplished all that was necessary to save the human race at Calvary's cross. This became clearer to them over time through their own experiences and with help from the ongoing revelation given by the Lord to Paul.

By Acts chapter 10, the gospel of the circumcision has greater emphasis on the Lord's name and on believing in him. Although Peter water baptized the people who were saved on this occasion, they had already received the Holy Ghost prior to their water baptism, so it was a mere formality. There is also no mention of them repenting. They simply, genuinely believed (the hearing of faith) what Peter had told them about the life, death and resurrection of the Lord, and that was enough for them to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. This occasion also has great significance in that for the first time the Holy Ghost was poured out on the Gentiles.

"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 10:43-45 AV)

God, with foreknowledge, knew the gospel of the circumcision would be rejected by Israel. He withheld his prophesied wrath (the prophesied great tribulation) and instead set in motion his hidden or mystery plan of grace by concluding Israel in unbelief along with the rest of the world.

"For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all." (Rom II:32 AV)

He recruited the point man of the Jewish opposition, Saul, and stated that it would henceforth be his commission to go to the Gentiles, to kings and to the Jews.

"And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he

prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:11-16 AV)

To Saul, later Paul, was revealed God's hidden or mystery plan to offer salvation by grace through faith in the Lord's finished work of redemption at Calvary. Paul's preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, must have been a new commission because it was a mystery prior to the Lord revealing it to Paul. If Paul's commission was within the great commission to the twelve, why did the Lord need to recruit a thirteenth apostle?

The great commission, being within God's prophetic program, has gone on hold, along with the great tribulation and the millennial kingdom. The great commission will be resumed, and the gospel of the circumcision will be preached to the whole world, when the current grace period ends with the rapture, and prophecy resumes with the great tribulation.

Paul's commission was to preach the Lord's previously unrevealed gospel of grace to the whole world and the twelve apostles of the circumcision only fully learned about this new commission after it had been revealed to Paul.

"Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began," (Rom 16:25 AV)

Circa A.D. 45-47: Paul rejected by Jews, turns to Gentiles.

Paul was violently opposed and persecuted by most Jews during his first missionary journey to Cyprus and Galatia. He had abandoned his Jewish name Saul during this journey, using instead his Greco-Roman name Paul; a more appropriate name for a Roman citizen preaching to the Gentiles. The children of Israel were included in Paul's initial commission but they proved themselves unworthy and the Gentiles became the main target of his preaching.

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed." (Acts 13:46-48 AV)

Circa A.D. 49: Council at Jerusalem. Gentile requirements, Paul and Barnabas' Gentile apostleship given heavenly ok. Paul's grace commission progressively revealed to him by the Lord.

At the council at Jerusalem, Peter declares how that God 'a good while ago made choice among us' that the Gentiles should hear the gospel by his mouth. He is referring to his vision and his visit to the house of Cornelius in Acts 10 (around A.D.35).

"And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;" (Acts 15:7-8 AV)

Peter was the apostle unto whom the Lord had given the binding and loosing power on earth (in other words, the power to 'ring the changes');

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Mat 16:18-19 AV)

By the time Paul wrote to the Galatians from Antioch (also around A.D.49), Peter's binding and loosing power had given heavenly authorization to the sending of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles and the restricting of the twelve to the Jews. This agreement was probably reached during the latter stages of the council at Jerusalem, though it may have been reached at a private meeting before or after the council. Paul says of it;

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." (Gal 2:7-9 AV)

Paul also tells us in his letter to the Galatians that he did not receive his gospel 'of man' but that he received it by the 'revelation of Jesus Christ'. Paul did not receive his gospel from the earthly Christ; neither did he receive it from Peter, nor James nor John nor any of the twelve. The gospel of the twelve was embedded in the prophetic context of God's dealings with Israel since the time of Abraham. After the Jews rejected their Messiah and the Holy Spirit, the risen, glorified Christ sent Paul to the Gentiles with a new dispensation of God – the dispensation of the grace of God.

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal 1:11-12 AV)

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward:" (Eph 3:2 AV)

Circa A.D. 56: Paul leaves off water baptism.

Regarding the query which provoked this investigation it seems clear to me that by A.D. 56 or thereabouts, Paul had left off water baptism. Although he was water baptised himself and also baptised a few others in his early ministry, by the time of his first letter to the Corinthians it had been fully revealed to him that the preaching of the cross is the power of God.

"I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God." (1Cor 1:14-18 AV)

The Spirit is received by the hearing of faith alone.

"This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:2 AV)

Circa A.D. 58: Paul now sole apostle of the Gentiles.

If there remains any doubt, Paul makes it quite clear in his letter to the Romans that he is now the sole apostle of the Gentiles.

"For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:" (Rom 11:13 AV)

Circa A.D. 63: Peter expresses continuing love for Paul and respect for the wisdom given unto him.

Peter has read all of Paul's epistles written at the time and does not raise any objection to Paul calling himself the apostle of the Gentiles, even going so far as to class Paul's epistles with "the other scriptures". He continues to love and respect Paul and writes in his second epistle;

"And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things

hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction." (2Pet 3:15-16 AV)