

# Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature

## Lecture 5: The New Testament as History

### Transcript

<https://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rfst-152/lecture-5>

#### Overview

The accounts of Paul's travels in The Acts of the Apostles and Galatians seem to contradict each other at many points. Their descriptions of a meeting in Jerusalem—a major council in Acts versus a small, informal gathering in Galatians—also differ quite a bit. How do we understand these differences? A historical critical reading of these accounts does not force these texts into a harmonious unity or accept them at face value. Instead, a historical critical reading carefully sifts through the details of the texts and asks which of these is more likely to be historically accurate.

#### 1. Paul's Travels in the Acts of the Apostles

[1] *Professor Dale Martin:* All right, I ask you to come in with definite lists of where Paul was when, according to two different sources. The purpose of the lecture today is to get you to see what you may think of as a historical text as actually not a very reliable historical text. This is not to say anything about your faith; it's not to say anything about how you might use this text religiously or theologically. In other words, it is not my intention to attack the reliability of the Bible for theological reading or for faith, or your personal beliefs about the Bible.

[2] What we will do is demonstrate a difference today between reading this text theologically as scripture, and reading it as historical source, simply as a text, or a series of texts, actually. Because as you know by now the New Testament is a collection of texts. If you all you had were these documents about the first several decades at the beginning of Christianity, and as a matter of fact, all you have as documents for the first few decades of Christianity are the New Testament texts. There are documents not in the New Testament but they tend not to tell us anything we want to know about, for example, the very beginnings of Christianity as a movement. What you've got in the New Testament comprise at least for some of the earliest material we have. If you want to know about

the life of Jesus, for example, the four canonical gospels with perhaps the Gospel of Thomas, which we'll be reading later, give you basically the only information about Jesus of Nazareth available to historians, the same thing for Paul.

[3] There are second century sources that talk about Paul, or that claim to be letters by Paul, but most of us scholars don't believe they have any historical, reliable information. What we've got about Paul is what you had in the New Testament. I'm going to try to get you to use two of those sources, Galatians and the Acts of Apostles, and then we're going to talk about what can we know about Paul from these two texts. Now take your lists out that you made for Acts. When is the first time we see the Apostle Paul in Acts? Chapter and verse. I'm a former fundamentalist, which means I want chapter and verse on everything. Chapter and verse, when is the first time we see Paul? Yes sir.

[4] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[5] *Professor Dale Martin:* 9:1, and where is he?

[6] *Student:* On the road to Damascus.

[7] *Professor Dale Martin:* On the road to Damascus. Starts off in Jerusalem—now is that actually the first time we see Paul in the book of Acts?

- [8] *Student:* In 7:58.
- [9] *Professor Dale Martin:* In 7:58, so we actually see him before then. Where is he there?
- [10] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [11] *Professor Dale Martin:* That's right, he witnesses the stoning of Stephen, who, by tradition, is the first Christian martyr, the first person to die for Christianity in Acts. And he's in what city? Where is he? Come on folks, quicker, quicker. Where is he—
- [12] *Student:* Jerusalem.
- [13] *Professor Dale Martin:* He's in Jerusalem, thank you. Now let's just read that first part there, "They dragged him out of the city," that is Stephen, "Began to stone him, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul," who the writer of Acts will later tell us is also named Paul, so Saul is—Acts depicts Saul as his Jewish name and Paul as sort of his Greek and Roman name. "While they were stoning Stephen he prayed," and so on and so forth. Look at 8:1:
- [14] And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria, devout men buried Stephen, and made loud lamentation over him, but Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house, dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.
- [15] So Saul, as he's known here, is fairly active in Jerusalem as a persecutor of the followers of Jesus. He causes several of them to be arrested, they know who he is, they would recognize him, he's got a reputation, so that's the first time we see Paul in 7:58. Then we—the Acts, as we'll see, does a lot of other things and then comes back to Paul now at 9:1. After 9:1, when is the next time we see Paul in Acts? He's on the road to Damascus—did you all do this homework? Yes sir in the back.
- [16] *Student:* 12:25.
- [17] *Professor Dale Martin:* 12:25—where is that?
- [18] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [19] *Professor Dale Martin:* Okay, Barnabas and Paul go back to Jerusalem. Let's back up a bit though. I think we're missing some stuff. I want every detail of time, every detail of place—look at 9:26.
- [20] When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He spoke and argued with the Hellenists [that is, Greek speaking Jews]; but they were attempting to kill him. When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.
- [21] Notice in Chapter 9 you've got several chronological and spatial details about Paul. That's what I wanted you to notice. Not just read it quickly, don't read this stuff like college students, read it as really critical readers, not just to get the reading done but notice the details. I'm stressing this now because over and over again in this semester we'll try to push you to read it much more carefully. Noticing details, that's the only way to practice close reading. We've got him in Jerusalem, we have him in Damascus, but before 12:25 we have lots of other material with him being in Jerusalem. Introduced to the church there—when is this chronologically? You don't have to know the year but how much time are we talking about between this Damascus period and this time Barnabas introduces him to the rest of the church and gets him accepted by the church. Yes.
- [22] *Student:* It says in verse 23, "After some time had passed."
- [23] *Professor Dale Martin:* "After some time had passed." There's one place where it says he's three days in Damascus after he sees Jesus, before he's baptized, so we have three days, then he's baptized, and then he disputes with other people in Damascus, so basically it's just after some time. It can't—we're probably not talking several years here. You get the impression when you're reading this that it may be months, it may be weeks—this is time

in Jerusalem. What happens after Barnabas introduces him in Jerusalem? Look at 9:30, “When the believers learned of it they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” Again, before we get him in Jerusalem here, he’s in Caesarea, which is a city on the coastline of Palestine, and he’s in Tarsus. Why does he go to Tarsus do you think? That’s his home, exactly. According to Acts, Paul is from Tarsus. Now when we get further I’ll point out when we have information about Paul that we get from his letters, and when we have information about Paul that we only get from Acts. The question I’ll ask you is, are they both reliable? Are they both equally reliable? If you have one piece of information from Paul’s letters and a different kind of piece of information from Acts, is one of them more likely to be historical? Those are the kinds of questions we’ll ask. Yes sir.

[24] *Student:* Where is Tarsus?

[25] *Professor Dale Martin:* Tarsus is in the very eastern part of what is now Turkey. It’s not far from the border of eastern Turkey and western Syria, it’s in modern Turkey. At the time—at that time it was in the area called Cilicia, and that’ll be important because when we get to Galatians Paul talks about going to Cilicia at one point, and I’m going to say, “Why did he go to Cilicia and where is that?” And some smart person’s going to say, “Well isn’t Tarsus the main capital city of Cilicia in the Roman Empire?” I’ll say, “That’s brilliant! You made a very important connection there.”

[26] Okay, so he goes to Tarsus, now you don’t hear much about Paul because then you have other kinds of stuff, and then look at 11:19, “Now those who were scattered because of the persecutions that took place over Stephen,” notice how—we’ll get this when we get to the Acts of the Apostles, the lecture on that, there is as bit of a jump here in the period of time. The stoning of Stephen was way back there at the end of Chapter 7, beginning of Chapter 8, then you had a lot of other material, now the author is kind of taking you back to that stoning of Stephen episode. This is like one of those things that—it’s a cutaway; it’s a time lapse sort of in the filming here.

[27] ... [they] traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. But among them were some

men from Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; for he was a good man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul.

[28] Again, before we get this, we have Saul going to Antioch, again Barnabas being the important figure who does that. When he came he saw the grace of God, etc.

[29] Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”

[30] At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem. [So we have one year here in Antioch before the next incident happens.] One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; this took place during the reign of Claudius. The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the brothers living in Judea; this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

[31] So in 11:30 we have Paul going from Antioch with Barnabas to Jerusalem, taking with them funds to alleviate famine—for famine relief in Judea, from the disciples in Antioch. When’s the—now after that do we have another we see Paul? That’s when you get to 12:25, “Barnabas—after completing their mission Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem and brought with them John, whose other name was Mark.” Actually, I think that may need to be returned from Jerusalem; there’s a manuscript debate over whether they returned to Jerusalem or from Jerusalem. In any case, they’re in Jerusalem, and then 13:1 we find them back in Barnabas, Barnabas and Saul there. Chapter 13 has Barnabas and Saul in Antioch again.

- [32] While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart from me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.
- [33] They went by the Holy Spirit, they went to Seleucia, then we have what’s called the first missionary journey. This is the first missionary journey, Barnabas and Paul, they travel through that part of central and southern Turkey that we call Asia Minor in the ancient world, called Turkey now. What happens next? After 13:1 where does Paul go? Yes sir.
- [34] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [35] *Professor Dale Martin:* Okay, so they have a confrontation with a magician called Bar-Jesus. Where else? Yes.
- [36] *Student:* Cyprus
- [37] *Professor Dale Martin:* Cyprus.
- [38] *Student:* Salamis and Paphos.
- [39] *Professor Dale Martin:* Yes, Cyprus and Salamis, they’re traveling around. Where else? Where do they end up?
- [40] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [41] *Professor Dale Martin:* Iconium, that’s another place they go too. Next?
- [42] *Student:* Lystra.
- [43] *Professor Dale Martin:* Lystra.
- [44] *Student:* Derbe.
- [45] *Professor Dale Martin:* Derbe, next?
- [46] *Student:* Perga.
- [47] *Professor Dale Martin:* Perga. Next?
- [48] *Student:* Attalia.
- [49] *Professor Dale Martin:* Attalia. Where do they end up after that first journey, at the end of the journey?
- [50] *Student:* Antioch.
- [51] *Professor Dale Martin:* Back in Antioch. We’re going to just include all those places you said in the first missionary journey, and they end up in Antioch. Where is the next place they go?
- [52] *Student:* Jerusalem.
- [53] *Professor Dale Martin:* Jerusalem. What do they do this time in Jerusalem?
- [54] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [55] *Professor Dale Martin:* Sorry? They have a debate. The whole—the leaders of the church get together, they debate, what’s the topic of the debate?
- [56] *Student:* Circumcision.
- [57] *Professor Dale Martin:* Whether Gentiles have to be circumcised to be members of the community, and who makes the decision?
- [58] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [59] *Professor Dale Martin:* Pardon? Who makes the decision?
- [60] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [61] *Professor Dale Martin:* Somebody say it out loud enough.
- [62] *Student:* [Inaudible]
- [63] *Professor Dale Martin:* Sorry?
- [64] *Student:* James.
- [65] *Professor Dale Martin:* James. They all make the decision together. In fact, they say, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” That’s an interesting way of putting it because in the Book of Acts the Holy Spirit is actually the main actor of the whole book. The Holy Spirit does all this kind of stuff in the Book of Acts, so that’s why “The Acts of the Apostles” is almost a mis-title. It should actually be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,” much more accurately for the narrative. The Holy Spirit, with all the believers, and James, who’s considered the leader of the church in Jerusalem actually announces a decision, but it’s a decision they all came to by consensus.

- [66] Everybody agrees that, no, Gentiles don't have to be circumcised and they make some rules. They say that they shouldn't eat meat sacrificed to idols, they shouldn't eat blood, they shouldn't commit fornication or sexual immorality, so they make some rules that they expect Gentile followers to follow. They get those rules from the Jewish tradition that these were the rules that were given to Noah after the flood. Therefore, all people in the world, because all people of course that now exist came from the people who lived through the flood. All people of the world were given these rules, even Gentiles, and so even pious Gentiles should keep these rules, although they do not have to be circumcised, so that's the way that happens. Where does Paul go after that? We're going to move quickly now.
- [67] *Student:* Antioch.
- [68] *Professor Dale Martin:* Pardon?
- [69] *Student:* Antioch.
- [70] *Professor Dale Martin:* Antioch, back to Antioch. Then he and Barnabas have a falling out—have a disagreement. What's the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas about in Acts?
- [71] *Student:* Whether to take John Mark.
- [72] *Professor Dale Martin:* Whether to take John Mark with him on them on the next journey they go. Paul wants to—Barnabas wants to take Mark, Paul doesn't, is that the way it goes? Yeah. Then they split up. It's a very amicable split in Acts, right? It's a personnel decision. They don't have any debates about doctrine. They don't have any disagreements about what the Gospel means. They don't have any disagreements about eating or circumcision. Barnabas and Saul, and Paul, split up simply over a personnel decision about whether to take John Mark on the next missionary journey. So that's—notice what we've got. How often is Paul in Jerusalem before that—before this main Jerusalem counsel? How many times?
- [73] *Student:* Once.
- [74] *Professor Dale Martin:* One, two, three, four, five—he's in Jerusalem five times before the general counsel that we sort of ended up our little narrative there.<sup>2</sup> *Paul's Travels in Galatians*
- [75] Now look at Galatians. We don't have to go all the way through Galatians, but we're going to read the part of Galatians much more carefully and closely. It's only basically the first two chapters that we need. Again, we're going to put the details up on the board, because I want you to pay much closer attention to this than apparently some of you paid anyway.
- [76] 1:11, "I want you to know brothers," and it may say, "and sisters" in your English translation, but it doesn't in the Greek, "That the Gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin, for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." First Paul starts out in the letter saying, "I didn't get my Gospel from any human person, I got it straight from Jesus." Now, remember, Paul didn't know Jesus during Jesus' own lifetime, so he's referring to a revelation experience that he had when he saw Jesus in some kind of visionary experience, or another place he says he was lifted up into the third heaven, so we'll talk at some point about what kind of experience was this that Paul had, but that's where he got his Gospel.
- [77] You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. But when God, who had set me apart before I was born, called me through his grace, was pleased so that I might proclaim among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being.
- [78] Now where is Paul at this point according to his own statement? We don't know, right? But we know one place he's not, and where is that?
- [79] *Student:* Jerusalem.
- [80] *Professor Dale Martin:* Because then he says, "I did not, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who are already Apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia and afterwards I returned to Damascus." That's how you know where he was. "I returned to Damascus." Where is the first place we see Paul,

chronologically, geographically, according to his letter, is Damascus. Let's keep—then he says, “I went to Arabia.” Arabia at this time refers to the part of the other side of the Jordan River from Judea, so it's what we would call modern Jordan mainly, maybe eastern Syria, western Jordan but that's what was Arabian desert that's—so he's talking about he went away to that area that we would now call eastern Syria or Jordan. Remember Damascus is one of the large cities in Syria, so that's where he goes.

[81] “Afterwards I returned to Damascus. After three years,” we get a nice little chronological note, “I did go to Jerusalem to visit Cephas.” Who is Cephas? Peter, exactly. Cephas is the Aramaic word for “rock” or “stone,” and Peter is the Greek word for “rock” or “stone.” Again, we have two different names. He goes to Jerusalem to meet Peter, but he says, “And I stayed with him for 15 days.” This first trip in Jerusalem takes 15 days. Notice what he says then, “But I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother.”

[82] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[83] *Professor Dale Martin:* Is that Jesus' brother? Yes, somebody said. According to Roman Catholic tradition Jesus didn't have any brothers, but according to the New Testament he did have brothers and maybe sisters, according to some manuscripts. James is called the brother of Jesus in the Book of Acts. Don't confuse this with James, son of Zebedee who was one of the twelve apostles, that's a different James. There are several James' because it was a very common name in the ancient world. You know of course, “James” is just the Anglicization of Jacob, so it's actually Jacob in the Greek and that's the word it is. It becomes “James” in English. “James, the Lord's brother. In what I'm writing to you before God I do not lie.” What—why does Paul have his panties in a wad? Confirming that he only was there fifteen days, and he only saw Peter and James. I swear it, I swear it, I swear it. “Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” Why do you think he went to Cilicia?

[84] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[85] *Professor Dale Martin:* That's where Tarsus is. Maybe that's a clue that he actually was from Tarsus, although Paul doesn't ever tell us

he's from Tarsus, so we don't know that's his hometown from him but that's what Acts says is his hometown. So maybe he went to Tarsus, we don't know. He just says he went to Syria.

[86] I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only heard it said, “The one who formerly was persecuting us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy. And they glorified God.

[87] “I was not known by sight,”—they heard my reputation, they heard that I had persecuted followers of Jesus, but nobody, no follower of Jesus in Judea knew what I looked like except Peter and James. He swears it, he's very adamant. “Then after fourteen years,” so we have a fourteen year period of time, “I went up again with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me; I went up in response to a revelation.” Why does he say he went up in response to a revelation? Anybody have an idea? Yes, no.

[88] As we'll see throughout this letter, Paul wants to make it very clear that he is not playing second fiddle to anybody in Jerusalem. He didn't get his gospel from those disciples, he didn't get it from Peter and James, he got it straight from Jesus, he didn't check his Gospel out with them at this point. He got it from Jesus. Paul is trying to establish his independence from the church in Jerusalem and he's eventually going to try establishing that “I'm just as much an apostle as they are.” “I went up in response to”—in other words he went up in response to a revelation. God appeared—God told Paul, according to him, “Go to Jerusalem.” He didn't go because the Jerusalem authorities said, “We need to check you out and see if you're going to come to Jerusalem.” They did—this was not a command performance he's insisting.

[89] I laid before them (though only in private meeting with the acknowledged leaders), the Gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. But because of false believers secretly [he calls it false brothers] secretly brought in who slipped in to spy out the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us—we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the Gospel might always remain with you. And

from those who are supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) ...

[90] Notice again Paul is really kind of anxious about not wanting to cede any authority to these Jerusalem leaders except as they are local leaders.

[91] ... those leaders contributed nothing new to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the Gospel for the circumcised (for he worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised, also worked through me and sending me to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, [this is James the Lord's brother, Cephas Peter, and then the disciple John] who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right and the fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

[92] Now there's a big question here. Is what Paul is describing here basically this Jerusalem conference? Is it his version? It's quite different the way Paul—Paul acts like it's mainly him and sort of the leaders of the Jerusalem church who get together. It's not—it wasn't brought about by some crisis. Paul went because God told him to do, so they could all just make sure that they have an agreement. They make an agreement, Gentiles don't have to be circumcised, nobody pressured, except these false brothers, Titus to be circumcised. The pillars Peter, James, and John did not insist that Gentiles be circumcised, they agreed with Peter's—with Paul's gospel.

[93] The next thing that happened though—so look how—what Paul says, he starts in Damascus, he was in Arabia, and here's Damascus. Three-year period of time; he's in Jerusalem but only fifteen days. He only sees Peter and James. Then he goes back—goes to Syria and Cilicia, and then after fourteen years later—some scholars say, well is this fourteen years including the three years? That is, is this fourteen years from his revelation or do we have seventeen years? When you try to figure

out the chronology for Paul's ministry in life you have to make that decision. I think that much more likely is this fourteen years is considered to be fourteen years after these three years, so you've got seventeen years. That would put this Jerusalem meeting about seventeen years after Paul's own conversion if he was converted—he seems to be converted very early or called to be an apostle very early. Jesus died around the year 30 perhaps. Paul—let's just say Paul got his revelation at 34, so you would be talking seventeen years after say 34 or 35, is when you have this Jerusalem conference. Then you have the next thing. Now what happens next though?<sup>3</sup> *Which Account Is More Historically Accurate?*

[94] Now, what that basically is saying—let's just stop here and let me say, how do you make this fit this? How do you make this fit this? Over here you have Paul starting off in Jerusalem, and he's persecuting the disciples. How can he then say over here that they had never seen his face? Were all of them dead by this time? He swears they didn't know his face, which seems to me to say that Paul is claiming he wasn't in Jerusalem when he was persecuting the church. He was persecuting Christians in Syria. He was persecuting followers of Jesus in the Jewish Diaspora, not in Judea at all. That's what Paul's claiming. And then he goes to Damascus, he goes to Jerusalem for fifteen days but only sees these people, and it's seventeen years total is the first time he's seen publicly in Jerusalem by many different followers of Jesus. That just doesn't seem to fit here. Here he starts off in Jerusalem, he's in Jerusalem again, he goes to Damascus, but it seems like it's only in a matter of weeks or months perhaps. He's in Antioch for a year, he goes back to Jerusalem, then he's in Antioch for a year, he goes back to Jerusalem here, he's back to Jerusalem here, back to Jerusalem here, he's in and out of Judea and Jerusalem all the time.

[95] Which one of these is accurate? Or do you believe that—you can find really, really brilliant fundamentalists who believe that the Bible has to be historically and scientifically true in every one of its details, and you know what, they can kind of figure out how to harmonize all this, but it takes a lot of very brilliant work. It's much more likely isn't it that one of these accounts is more accurate than the other. Which one do you believe? That's a real

question, which one do you believe? Somebody make me an argument. Decide. Come on break out of that undergraduate shyness and just make an argument. Yes.

[96] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[97] *Professor Dale Martin:* You believe Acts, why would you believe Acts? Say it loud.

[98] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[99] *Professor Dale Martin:* Acts sounds like a historical account, doesn't it? It doesn't seem like it has a big axe to grind. In Galatians, Paul is—obviously has an axe to grind. He's going all over himself saying, "I'm not lying, I'm not lying, I'm not lying." This fellow says, maybe Paul's protesting too much in Galatians and Acts sounds a bit more like an impartial account. Do the rest of you buy that? Everybody nods their head that sounds good to everybody? Yes sir.

[100] *Student:* [Inaudible]

[101] *Professor Dale Martin:* Galatians is a firsthand account. I mean Acts was written by someone we don't know—even know who wrote it, but it obviously wasn't written by someone who saw this stuff. He says he used other sources, so when we get to the Gospel of Luke and Acts, which were both written by the same person, we'll see that this author admits that he used other sources. He was not an eyewitness of any of this stuff, at least this stuff that he tells about here in this part. There's some debate about whether he maybe was an eyewitness for some of the travels of Paul later in Acts, but at this point he doesn't even claim to have been there. As a historian, wouldn't you take an account by an eyewitness, the person who actually experienced this, over an account written later? This gentleman over here says, no, Paul's account is better historical source because he was there. Anybody else make an argument? Well what about the idea that the writer of Acts is just telling a story. Paul clearly has an axe to grind, not to make a pun. Yes.

[102] *Student:* The writer of Acts [Inaudible]

[103] *Professor Dale Martin:* That's right. The writer of Acts could be having an axe to grind, which is to make the church sound more

harmonious and united, and all that sort of thing. It may also be that the writer of Acts wants to emphasize the center of Jerusalem and Judea, and the leaders there as the central authority for the early Christian movement. And so he's exaggerating Paul's presence in Jerusalem, and exaggerating the role of these leaders in Jerusalem. That's a good point. The writer of Acts, we should all know that every written account of anything, no matter how historically good it is, still has a point of view, still has an agenda. Yes.

[104] *Student:* Was Paul aware [Inaudible]

[105] *Professor Dale Martin:* No, Acts was written after the life of Paul, so Paul doesn't have access to the Book of Acts as one of his sources. Now the other question is did the writer of Acts have access to Paul's letters? We don't know. The basic—it's time for me to wrap up here, the basic question here is whether you decide to trust more Acts or Paul on this issue is a historical question. But the basic point also is to get you by a very, very close reading of this text to see that it's much a better historical practice as a historian to not text—not take any of these texts as simple straightforward history. What I will argue, eventually, is that Paul is probably telling what is more accurately the case. Yes, he has a reason to stress it, but he says it so forcefully and he writes it in a letter, and if he had actually been in Jerusalem as much as Acts says, couldn't the people who received his letter have checked this out? Yeah. They could basically say later, no, Paul, in spite of saying that you do not lie, you're a liar. We know, we've checked it out.

[106] Paul's letter, I would say, is much more likely to contain better historical evidence, but we can argue about that until the cows come home. The main point is that you still have to sift these documents with a lot of careful sifting to get any reliable historical data out of them. For example, later when we get to Galatians for some of these things, we'll talk a bit about what really happened in Antioch that caused the split between Barnabas and Paul. In Acts it's all like, oh no they just had a personnel disagreement, but they parted perfectly in agreement about the basic gospel. According to Galatians, no, Barnabas and Paul disagreed strongly over whether Jews could continue in table fellowship with

uncircumcised Gentiles, and Barnabas went along with Peter and some disciples from James in Jerusalem in saying, no, not even Jewish followers of Jesus shouldn't share meals with uncircumcised Gentiles. Paul believes that Barnabas got that wrong. So according to Paul's letters, Paul split with Barnabas on a serious disagreement over a doctrine in practice in the early church. And again, Acts kind of slides that over because Acts tries to make the church look completely harmonious.

[107] This is historical criticism. Reading these texts just like you would read any other ancient text with just the same amount of scrutiny and suspicion that you would any text. That's what we're going to do in this semester. It's

different from reading the text as scripture. This is not to say that I believe reading the text as scripture is bad or wrong. I believe it's just a different way of reading. I think you can come up with good, true, Christian theological readings of the New Testament and you can come up with very decent historical readings of the New Testament. They just always won't be the same kind of reading. What this class is going to do for the most part is talk about that historical reading, and when we get to Paul, when we get to Acts we're going to pick these texts all apart, we're going to ask questions like, is any of this historical? If so what and why? So start thinking that way, and then I'll see you on Wednesday.

[108] [end of transcript]