

## Why Paul took Titus along to Jerusalem?

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### Abstract

In Jewish society and early Christian communities, circumcision was a sensitive and important issue. While many complicated expositional, historical, and theological issues are related to the interpretation of Gal. 2:1-5, the most important is the question of whether Titus, a Greek, was circumcised or not. Interpretations of the Greek documents have resulted in two possible interpretations about the circumcision or not of Titus. The first is that Titus was willingly to be circumcised. However, the second is that by reading these old manuscripts in another way, he was not circumcised. While many other scholars are interested in this issue of Titus' circumcision, the author of this study focuses more on the contextual meaning of Titus's silence. Paul said that in going to Jerusalem first time he was "going with" Barnabas. However, Paul said that he was "taking [Titus] along" to Jerusalem. These different expressions may imply different meanings. Perhaps Paul was emphasizing God's willingness to free Christians from all religious restrictions, including circumcision.

**Key Words:** Paul, Titus, Circumcision, Gentiles' Freedom, Galatians

### 1. Introduction

Galatians 2:1-5 includes Paul's explanation of his relationship to the church in Jerusalem.[1] In his explanation, Paul's purpose is to convey his conviction to his readers that the gospels come from the works of Christ. In other words, the gospel that Paul received did not come from mankind but from Christ. Still, complicated expositional, historical, and theological issues arise when interpreting Galatians 2:1-5. For instance, the records about Paul's visit to Jerusalem have textual similarities and differences in two gospels— Galatians 2:1-5 and the Acts. Another issue is whether Titus was circumcised or not. Circumcision is the act of cutting off the foreskin of the male genital. Among the Hebrews circumcision was a religious ceremony preformed in the eighth day after birth.[2] Until the end of monarchy circumcision was a self-evident sign of ethnic identity.[3] This paper limits its scope to this second issue and therefore Titus is the main character in this interpretation of Galatians 2:1-5.

Based on Galatians, Paul "went with" Barnabas but "took along" Titus when he visited the Jerusalem church. Scholars agree that both texts after Galatians 1:18 and after Acts 9:11 contain the same event about the first visit of Paul to Jerusalem. However, scholars disagree that both texts from Galatians 2:1-10 and from Acts 15 have same explanation about the Paul's second visit to Jerusalem. With good reasons, many apostles in Jerusalem might have had serious concerns about Titus because he was an uncircumcised Gentile. Even until now, there are diverse and controversial opinions about Titus being circumcised or not.

However, the main topic of this study is not Titus's circumcision. Instead, it is about Titus keeping his silence during Paul's visit to Jerusalem. Here are the main questions: Why did Paul take Titus to Jerusalem? Did Paul have any intention regarding the situation? Interestingly, Titus did not say anything and kept silent.

In this study, the main purpose is narrowing the theological interpretations of these interrelated situations. Finally, the theological interpretations are expected to involve the Gentiles' and Christians' freedom that Paul wanted to emphasize.

## **2. Why Paul visited Jerusalem?: Following a revelation.**

In Galatians 2:2-5, Paul explained why he went to Jerusalem: "I went up because of a revelation...because of false brothers...." Paul acted on the revelation that he should spread the new gospel to the Jerusalem apostles and brothers. Going with his revelation, Paul wanted to get the apostles' and brothers' recognition for his new gospel. The revelation was caused by the false brothers' activities (Galatians 2:4) in Syria and Cilicia where they were opposed to Paul's new gospel.[4]

In short, the situations are as follows: (a) the false brothers were opposed to Paul's new gospel, (b) Paul did not follow these opposing false brothers, (c) Paul had a revelation that he should go to Jerusalem, and (d) Paul finally visited Jerusalem. Galatians chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 describe the results of Paul's visit to Jerusalem.

It is possible to ask an important question from the textual order of Paul's revelation and the false brothers in Galatians 2:1-5. Paul explained the revelation first (Galatians 2:2) and showed it to the false brothers later (Galatians 2:4). Thinking that the false brothers' activities were the cause of the revelation, Paul's explanation is a reverse description. Therefore, it is possible to ask this question: Why did Paul explain the revelation first and show the false brothers later? The question may lead to more questions: Did the false brothers' activities occur after Paul's visit to Jerusalem? Were the false brothers' activities not related to Paul's visit to Jerusalem? For these last two questions, the answer is "No." The answer was given in Chapter 1 of Galatians. The reverse description about the two events (i.e., false brothers' activities and Paul's visit to Jerusalem) was Paul's rhetorical method to emphasize the new gospel. Based on Galatians 1:1 and 1:11, Paul proclaimed that his new gospel did not come from men but from the work of the God. Paul affirmed that he had limited meetings with the apostles in Jerusalem. By affirming the limitation, Paul proclaimed the equality of apostolic succession between him and the other apostles in Jerusalem. In addition, Paul declared that his new gospel was not inferior to the Jerusalem apostles' gospel. Paul said, "To reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to

Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus” (Galatians 1:16-17).

Three years later, Paul went to Jerusalem and stayed 15 days with Peter. However, Paul did not meet any other people, except Jacob (Galatians 1:18-19). By this meeting limited only with Peter and James, Paul affirmed, “I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie” (Galatians 1:20). Since his revelation from God, Paul was an independent apostle who could work alone without any permission or certification by the other apostles. Based on this affirmation, Paul could emphasize his revelation. This was the reason why the revelation came first and the cause (i.e., false brothers) came later in his rhetoric. As a result, the reverse order of the rhetoric was not a surprising explanation about Paul’s second visit to Jerusalem.

Paul tried to make connection between revelation with human beings’ daily lives. For instance, he explained the revelation by using his case that he received a calling with the revelation (Galatians 1:12). Paul explained the endless revelations in the daily lives of Christians (1 Corinthians 14:6, 26, 30; 2 Corinthians 12:1, 7). Based on the verses 2, 26, and 30 in chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians, revelation is strongly associated with spiritual gifts. The verses justify Paul’s perspective that revelation has a situational feature that includes specific events, accidents, and issues. For Paul, revelation is God’s response about specific situations (e.g., events, accidents, and issues). In other words, the specific situations prompted Paul’s revelation. Therefore, Paul’s letters fulfilled the needs of the community where Paul belonged. This relationship between Paul’s revelation and his community’s needs (i.e., specific situations) can help to understand why Paul went to Jerusalem. Paul had this revelation for two reasons: (1) discussions with false brothers in Antioch and (2) meetings with apostles in Jerusalem.

### **3. Issues about Titus being circumcised**

#### **3.1. Ambiguity of the passage: Whether Titus was circumcised or not**

From an interpretational perspective, the statement, “Titus was not forced to be circumcised” is ambiguous. It is hard to interpret this statement because of the ancient Greek textual structure. The sentence structure of the Greek version has two possible interpretations: (1) Titus was circumcised intentionally or (2) Titus was not circumcised. Diverse scholars share a common consensus that Titus was not circumcised. This is shown well in Paul’s vigorous expression, “We did not give in to them for a minute” (Galatians 2:5). In addition, this is also made known by Paul’s criticism of Peter for pushing the Gentiles to follow the Jewish practices (Galatians 2:14). However, other scholars have insisted that Titus being circumcised has background literature.[5]

Most commentaries say that the circumcision of a Gentile would not have happened in the era. The commentaries did not pay much attention the possibility that Titus was indeed required to be circumcised. The text strongly suggest that the false brothers forced Titus to be circumcised. They

tried to throw Paul down when he came back to Jerusalem. They also tried taking advantage of all Gentile Christians by abusing circumcision into something known as the Gentiles' noose. Paul called this group false brothers. They were truly false brothers in their consideration of Paul's visit with his companions, seeing it as a chance to gain an advantage.[6]

The apostles in Jerusalem differed from the false brothers. They did not make a compulsory provision that Titus had to be circumcised as a prerequisite for a cooperative relationship with Paul. The text says that Titus was not forced to be circumcised. However, the meaning of "not forced to be circumcised" did not indicate a situation of "no argument about circumcision." This implies that there was a possibility for the apostles to argue that Titus be circumcised in Jerusalem. Thinking that James and the elders in Jerusalem advised Paul to establish a good relationship with the Jews (Acts 21:17ff), the possibility exists that the apostles in Jerusalem persuaded Paul to voluntarily pursue Titus's circumcision.

The term *freedom* is an important keyword in the phrasing of Galatians 2:4. The term of freedom used by Paul should be explained. We all have freedom in Jesus Christ, and it is possible to interpret the term "we" as both of Jewish and Gentile.[7] Freedom is a main topic in Galatians (Galatians 3:28; 4:22, 23, 26, 30, 31; 5:1, 13). Based on these verses in Galatians, the implication is that Gentiles are free from the Laws of Moses if they believe in Jesus. Unquestionably, this freedom does not mean indulgence. This freedom indicates that all Gentiles are free from following and executing the obligations put forth in Laws of Moses. The freedom is generally expressed as "freedom in Jesus Christ" since it comes from one's belief in Jesus Christ. Paul specifies the cooperation between Gentiles and Jews by expressing "our belief that we have." This implies that the freedom in Jesus Christ influences Gentiles as well as Jews.[8]

In Galatians 5:2-12, it seems that Paul does not permit the Gentiles to be circumcised. However, not so. Paul was facing a situation in which the Gentiles believed in a strong relationship between salvation and circumcision. Gentiles accepted two possibilities as true: (1) circumcision is a mandatory obligation for salvation and (2) circumcision is desirable for salvation. Therefore, by saying, "Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law" (Galatians 5:3), Paul has set a target on a specific audience who were circumcised by force by the Jewish people. Paul indicates the falseness of the concept that one can benefit from following the Laws of Moses simply by having a circumcision.

It is hard to imply that freedom permits a Gentile (e.g., Titus) without a circumcision to have a relationship with the church at Jerusalem. The term *freedom* was given to the church at Jerusalem instead of to Paul. In other words, freedom means, in general, Christians' freedom from the Laws of Moses. Then, how does Paul show this freedom at the church in Jerusalem? Unquestionably, he does not ignore the significance of the Laws of Moses. All of Paul's diverse behaviors do not show that he ignored the significance of the Laws of Moses. Paul had a respectable relationship

with church communities in Jerusalem and was respectful about following the Laws of Moses.

What if Paul permitted Titus's circumcision as in the case of Timothy based on the freedom of Jesus Christ? There is not any requirement for salvation connected to the issue of circumcision. Also, there are no requirements from the Jewish church about fulfilling traditions. However, if Titus get circumcised, there will not any hostility from the Jewish people. This makes Paul's mission with a partner, Titus, effective for the Gentiles.

Paul is a servant of God. His status is the most important condition of his life and apostolic succession. This status provides the reasons for Paul's behavior. Paul mentions about Titus's circumcision for a reason: "This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves" (Galatians 2:4). The freedom of Jesus Christ determines if Titus get a circumcision, not any others' pushing. Paul, as a servant of Jesus Christ, has the freedom of Jesus Christ and does not belong to any false brothers, the Laws of Moses, or apostles in Jerusalem.[9]

### 3.2. "going with" Barnabas vs. "taking" Titus "along"

Remembering Galatians 2:3, most scholars interpret the ancient Greek verb "οὐδέ ἠναγκάσθη" with the meaning of *output*. In the verb, the deniable point is not the pressure but the output. This output means that Titus did not have a circumcision. As in the case of Timothy, Paul permits Timothy to have a circumcision in order to deliver the gospel to the Jewish people (Acts 16:3). The foundation of Timothy's circumcision is the freedom of Jesus Christ. For Titus, the situation is different. Timothy made a voluntary decision to be circumcised to deliver the gospel. However, Titus was facing pressure from the false brothers. If Titus get a circumcision because of this pressure, he is not necessarily following the freedom of Jesus Christ. As a result, Paul decides on circumcisions for Timothy and Titus based on the freedom of Jesus Christ. Paul indicates that Christians are free from all traditional religious regulations by having the freedom of Jesus Christ.[10]

There is still one important point in this explanation. Why did Paul "take" Titus to Jerusalem? In Galatians 2:1, Paul explains, "Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also." As shown in the Greek, the original expressions are different when referring to Barnabas and Titus. Paul *goes* to Jerusalem with Barnabas and *takes* Titus. These different words denote that Titus is in the entourage for Paul and Barnabas.

Barnabas is a Jew born in Cyprus. He moved to Jerusalem and became a Christian. Barnabas sold his land and supported the church. His original name was Joseph, but apostles gave him a new name, Barnabas, which means the son of consolation (Acts 4:36-37). Barnabas introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27) and invited Paul to the Antioch church as his partner when Paul was staying at Cilicia. Barnabas and Paul served the Antioch church for one year

together and went on missions together. These facts imply that Barnabas is a significantly influential person in the era and region. His character was described as (1) a generous person (Acts 4:36-37), (2) a patient person (Acts 15:36-41), and (3) a good person (Acts 11:24). In fact, Barnabas was a famous apostle of the first church (Acts 14:4, 14), preacher of the gospel, and a leader of Antioch church at Syria. Therefore, he was important to Paul (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:1-3; 14:12-14; 15:2, 25, 35). Compared to Barnabas, Titus does not seem to be as significant. Titus was not an apostle who had a calling. He was one of the Gentile devotees that Paul wanted to work with. Therefore, the role of Titus depended on Paul's plans. Titus was: (1) a companion who joined Paul's mission, (2) a mediator for negotiating between the church and the apostles when there were issues in the Corinthian church, (3) a person who was dispatched to the Corinthian church to execute a church offering (2 Corinthian 2:13; 7:6, 13, 14; 8:6, 16, 23; 12:18). Although he had diverse roles in the Corinthian church, Titus's work was not described in the Acts like those of Paul. At this point, remember that the Book of Acts was recorded after Galatians. Based on this fact, Luke considered Titus as a non-significant person in the Acts.[11]

Based on Galatian 2:1-5, Paul explained the situation differently. In terms of the textual amount of Galatian 2:1-5, the significance of Titus (i.e., entourage of Paul) is more noteworthy than Barnabas (i.e., partner of Paul). This fact looks peculiar. This point implies that Titus's silent role during Paul's second visit to Jerusalem might have been more significant than the Barnabas's role. In the entourage, Titus still had a significant role in visiting Jerusalem, but why did Paul take Titus there? Does Paul not anticipate that the false brothers will make an issue about Titus's circumcision? No, but Paul expected issues about Titus. During the second visit to Jerusalem, Paul did not meet with the Jerusalem church but met three major characters individually. This implies that Paul does not want to expose his visit to a Jerusalem church. Therefore, the false brothers said, "some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy" (Galatians 2:4). As a result, it is possible to note that Paul predicted the Jewish people's possible issues with Titus's circumcision.

The role of Titus is important when it comes to issues about the relationship between apostles in Jerusalem and Paul. When Paul is talking with the three major apostles in Jerusalem individually, the issue of Titus's circumcision is unquestionably a major one. This implies that Titus's circumcision is a significant representative case for Paul's apostolic succession and gospel. Titus's circumcision is an appropriate discussion topic between the apostles in Jerusalem and Paul's apostolic succession. Paul discusses his apostolic succession during the visit to Jerusalem. There is a relevance between the Jerusalem apostles' attitude toward Paul and Paul's decision to go with Titus to Jerusalem. If the apostles in Jerusalem were hostile against Paul alone, what would happen when Paul came with Titus? The main issue for apostles in Jerusalem was not "how can we make a relationship with this Gentile?" but "How can we keep our relationship with Paul if he get this Gentile as his partner?" This is the reason why Titus has an important role in Paul's visit to



Jerusalem. It is not a coincident that Paul takes Titus to Jerusalem. Paul has a key message that he would like to declare during the visit, although he took a risk by taking Titus to Jerusalem. By taking this risk, Paul might have lost all Galatians. By taking the risk of losing the Galatian church community, Paul sent a key message that Jewish Laws should not restrict the Gentiles' beliefs based on the gospel from Jesus Christ. As a result, Titus's circumcision did not happened. Even though Titus does not say anything in the text, he was definitely a partner and ministerial partner for Paul.[12]

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the era of Paul, the apostles served Israel first. The dominate consensus was that the apostles would pay attention to the Gentiles after all Jews converted to Christians. Jesus warned 12 the apostles that they should keep away from Gentiles' and Samaritans' cities. Also, Jesus gave advice that the apostles should pay attention to Israel's sheep who lost their homes (Matthew 10:5-6). Paul recognizes the emerging situation in which the gospel should be spread toward diverse Gentiles. The conviction about this emergent situation made Paul visit Jerusalem and gain the Jerusalem apostles' understanding and cooperation for his ministry.

The revelation that Paul had did not come from illusions. Paul did not get any arcane revelation. For him, the revelation was God's response to the situation. Paul visited Jerusalem for two reasons: (1) the false brothers' activities and (2) God's revelation to meet the apostles in Jerusalem.

For Paul the only true Jew is the one who is a Jew in secret, and the only true circumcision is that of the heart(Romans 2:28f.).[13] Paul's greatest concern was to keep the Gentiles' freedom in Jesus Christ when he wrote Galatians. Looking at Titus's case, the freedom in Jesus Christ was respected by famous people but was exposed as a risk among the Galatian people. The issue that Paul was facing was not just individual displeasure. He took the risk that he could lose his apostolic succession and his gospel might lose authority. Paul had to get the Jerusalem apostles' agreements on his past acts and the gospel. Otherwise, Paul would face the splitting of the churches by keeping his own way of apostolic acts. In addition, he could prove that his gospel and apostolic authority truly come from God. If apostles in Jerusalem approved Paul's gospel and acts as equal to their apostolic authority, then Paul could get justification for his gospel and acts.

While visiting Jerusalem, Paul had two thoughts: (1) get approval about his apostolic authority from the apostles in Jerusalem and (2) approve the meaning of freedom in Jesus Christ, which means that Gentiles are free from Jewish Laws (i.e., the Laws of Moses). In other words, Paul had two important tasks: express the freedom of Jesus Christ and remain loyal to the traditional church. Paul knows that these are not optional foundations for his missionary; instead, they are mandatory for his mission. This is why Paul took a Gentile, Titus, to Jerusalem to resolving this ironic situation. Paul had lots of discussions about Titus not being forced to be circumcised. By seeing

Paul's unsure expressions about Titus' circumcision, we can confirm Paul's concept about freedom in Jesus Christ. Regardless Titus having a circumcision or not, Paul's records show God's work on human beings' freedom in Jesus Christ. Paul showed this freedom and the truth of the gospel by taking Titus to Jerusalem. Paul knew that Titus would have two effects: hostilities would break out, but this would be the best strategy for reacting against the false brothers' activities.

## 5. Acknowledgments

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- [4] In Acts 15:1-2, the area is assumed to be Antioch. However, Galatians 1:21-25 cites a broader area including Syria and Cilicia.
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