

“Paul in Arabia”

Kenneth S. Wuest – Word studies in the Greek New Testament

Gal. 1:15-17

“But I went into Arabia...” Paul does not state his purpose in doing so, but his statement to the effect that after his conversion he did not consult with anybody but went into Arabia, leads one to the clear inference that he wanted to be alone with God. The word Arabia is the transliteration (spelling) of a Hebrew word meaning “an arid, thus a sparsely populated place.” He needed to be alone with God. He needed time and isolation in order to think. The revelation of the Son of God had blasted away the foundations of the Pharisaic thought structure which he had been building up with such consummate skill and zeal, and it had come tumbling down in ruins about his head. This revelation also furnished him with another foundation upon which to build a new theological structure... There in Arabia, isolated from all human contact, alone with God... Led by the Holy Spirit, with the central fact of the Cross of the Lord Jesus as the controlling factor in his meditations. Out of all this study emerged the Pauline system of doctrine as we have it presented in Romans.

The word Arabia was a term applied by Greek writers from Herodotus down, to the whole or various portions of the vast peninsula between the Red Sea on the southwest, to the Persian Gulf on the southeast, and the Euphrates River on the northeast. There is nothing to indicate exactly where in this vast territory Paul went. It is not necessary to suppose that Paul went far from Damascus, for the Arabian deserts were within reach of that city. It is not likely that Paul went to Mt. Sinai, as some suggest, for that would have constituted too effective an argument for the divine origin of his apostleship, to be omitted here. Furthermore, Sinai was a long way from Damascus, the journey was at all times dangerous for travelers without armed escorts; and in A.D. 37, the most probable year of Paul’s conversion, a war between King Aretas and the Romans was in progress, which fact would have made such a journey very doubtful.