

## Chapter two: Who Paul knew.

From what has been written so far, you will have gathered that Paul was someone with a degree of charisma, a larger-than-life character. He exaggerated his own merits and attributes, he was self-confessedly disingenuous, and he did deceive the Jewish religious authorities in Jerusalem as to what he was doing. His detractors accused him of deceit and double standards. He countered with repeated assertions that he was ‘not lying’.

Paul was certainly a person of some importance, sufficient at least for the Roman tribune to rescue him from a Jewish lynch mob in Jerusalem and then send him under a massive escort to protective custody in Caesarea. A sizeable escort might have been needed, given plots to kill Paul and the fact that the intervening territory was only nominally under Roman control. It was perhaps not quite the ‘two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen’, listed in Acts. But we get the message, it was big.

Paul was also, in his own eyes, pretty assured about his own importance. In his letter to the Galatians, we learn that he considered he was ‘advanced in Judaism’ beyond many of his peers, that he gained his commission by ‘revelation’ from Jesus and God, that he did not then consult with any of his Jesus’ followers for several years and then, and only then, did he go to Jerusalem and talk with someone. It was quite a lengthy stay and thus presumably debriefing, lasting fifteen days. He reiterated his positions about the ‘other apostles’. He wanted to emphasise that he had his authority from a higher source and that he did not gain it through them.

This looks like, from the description, an important point of initial contact, with Paul presumably seeking information about the Jesus he claims to have experienced in a personal vision.

Paul appeared to mix, and to like to mix, in high circles. He was visited while in custody at Caesarea by Herod Agrippa II and his sister Bernice. He had, among his early clientele in his community at Antioch, Manaean, described as having been brought up with (so thus possibly foster brother of) Herod Antipas (Herod the Tetrarch).

Bernice was, for a time, mistress of Herod King of Chalcis who was, in turn, father to Aristobulus and grandfather to one Herod. These latter may, if Paul/Saul were a minor member of the Herodian family, have been referenced in terms of the ‘family of Aristobulus’ and ‘Herodion (little Herod), to whom Paul appended greetings in his letter to the Romans.

These would all, even at some remove, have been his relatives. Paul could certainly have had a claim to kinship to support his aspirations.

The person that Paul went to see in Jerusalem is described as ‘Cephas’, not one of ‘those who were already apostles’ before him. He deliberately avoided these existing apostles; he went over their heads. From Paul’s manifest inclinations, it would likely have been someone who had status and, from a practical point of view, it should have been someone in a position to provide some of the information he needed.

The convention in English is to use a C for the Greek letter kappa. Either way, the sound which is conveyed and the meaning are the same. It would be more accurate, that is more literal, to write Kephias throughout. But I will vary my usage to reflect what is in the material being considered.

So, indeed, who was Cephias?

The name Cephias (Κηφας) is not recognisably a word of Greek origin and in context appears as a transliteration from Aramaic. As with other languages, there are differences in the way sounds were represented and the letters that were used. This can and did lead to mistakes and makes interpretation more difficult.

This said, a reasonable reconstruction is that the letter kappa was in used in this instance for an Aramaic qoph. Since written Aramaic has no vowels, eta would have filled in a gap or alternatively stood in for a letter used as a vowel carrier, in this instance likely a yodh. The letter phi (and also the letter and sound conveyed by pi) was represented in Aramaic by the letter peh. The letter alpha would have conveyed the soundless aleph. As for sigma, this was just a means in Greek of giving a name a masculine case.

Kephias could thus have registered the Aramaic letters qoph, peh and aleph (קפא) or the letters qoph, yodh, peh and aleph (קפיה). It may come as a surprise that the name, in these forms, is already well known. These are the alternative ways of writing the short version of the family title of the Jewish High Priest, known to us through the gospels and the work of Josephus as Joseph Caiaphas. Both these forms are found scratched on the sides of ossuaries, in what is likely to have been the family tomb of the High Priest Joseph (see chapter 10).

Vowels have to be inferred in going from Aramaic to another language such as Greek. It is for this reason that Kephias and Kaiphias in Greek (or English) denote the same Aramaic name.

The short and long versions of the title, Kaiaphias and Kaiphias, are found in New Testament manuscripts, but only the long version Kaiaphias appears in *Antiquities* by Josephus. It may be (see chapter 11) that the long version arose initially from a Greek scribe mistakenly taking yodh as a letter in its own right, rather than as representing the presence of a vowel. Note, incidentally, that the letters in Aramaic read from right to left.

Why did Paul merely transliterate, rather than translate, this Aramaic word? The answer has to be that the title, at least as far as Paul was concerned, did not refer to anything specific. There is thus no recognised translation.

Is it possible that Paul was engaged in a dialogue with a former Jewish High Priest? It needs to be remembered that Kephias/Kaiphias was a family title that could have applied to many individuals. Joseph Caiaphas or Caiphias held his office for a long period, from CE 18 to 36, when he was replaced along with the Roman Prefect, Pilate. He would have been old then, and older still by the time Paul was writing his letter to the Galatians, twenty years or so later. The likelihood is that Paul was talking with another family member, rather than with Joseph himself, probably by then deceased.

Those already in the family of a High Priest had a better chance of later securing the office themselves. Josephus records that five sons of the High Priest Ananus (father-in-law to

Joseph Caiaphas) followed in their father's footsteps. They would have taken some responsibilities, on the way, with the role of deputy/temple captain as a chief stepping stone.

Nothing is known for sure of any offspring of Joseph. None of his sons became High Priest. It may be that Joseph and thereby his family fell out of favour through their association with the intemperate Pilate, who was sacked after a series of conflict-generating miscalculations. It is, even so, quite likely that the High Priest Joseph had one or more sons. Jewish families at the time tended to be large, was the case with Ananus.

Paul contends that, after experiencing his calling, he did not confer with any of the existing apostles but instead went away for a few years. Then, he went to see Cephas. This was a person who, following the line of reasoning given, would have been a member of the former High Priest's family and likely to have had some responsibility. Paul, as has been noted, liked to mix in high circles. He liked to promote himself and he went, as far as possible, to the top.

If the narrative at all reflects an underlying historical reality, then Jesus was crucified when Pilate was the Roman Prefect and when Joseph was probably High Priest. As such, Joseph would in his position, together with those under him, have been responsible from preventing a Roman execution precipitating a riot. His servants were the Temple police headed by the temple captain.

Cephas is likely to have been able to provide Paul with information, by virtue of his link as a member of the former High Priest Joseph's family. He may have been a witness to, or even involved with, events involving Jesus,

There are several references to Cephas in Paul's letters, Galatians and I Corinthians. As the name is a family title, these references could relate to more than one person. The delegate, accountable to James, who was later at odds with Paul at Antioch over the issue of Jews eating with Gentiles, may thus have been a different person from the character that Paul initially went to confer with in Jerusalem.

There are some big issues here. It is very unusual for a character or group of characters to be referred to solely by a family title, when each character could have been more precisely identified through the use of a forename. The strong suspicion is that Paul's letters have been edited, in course of preparation, by the elimination or elision of names that either the scribes did not understand or that failed to suit their purposes.

There is also, as you may have appreciated, an alternative narrative in respect of Cephas. Through imbedded in Christian tradition and thereby the establishment position, this narrative is actually both less plausible and subject to irremediable difficulties.

We will need to travel forward in time just a few years to find out more.