

ONCE MORE, ACTS AND GALATIANS

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ACTS 15 and Galatians 2 each tell of a council of apostles at Jerusalem, to discuss the admission of gentiles into the church. The parallels between the two accounts are many and detailed. Paul and Barnabas attend the council together (Acts 15 2; Gal 2 1). They travel from Syria (Acts 14 26-28; Gal 1 21) to Jerusalem (Acts 15 2-4; Gal 2 1). They are accompanied by others (Acts 15 2; Gal 2 1). Before the meeting convenes, Paul faces annoying opposition from Jewish Christians at Jerusalem (Acts 15 5; Gal 2 3-5). The apostles meet (Acts 15 6-29; Gal 2 6-10), and prominent parts are taken by Peter (Acts 15 7-11, 14; Gal 2 7-9) and James (Acts 15 13-21; Gal 2 9). Paul reports on his mission to gentiles, and defends it (Acts 15 4, 12; Gal 2 2 ff.). Much discussion ensues (Acts 15 6, 7; Gal 2 6, 7). Finally the council works out a compromise (Acts 15 13-29; Gal 2 7-9, 10). Paul and Barnabas receive no special ordination, but they are permitted to continue their work (Acts 15 22-29; Gal 2 7-9). A few requirements are imposed on the gentile converts (Acts 15 28 f.; Gal 2 10). Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch (Acts 15 30; Gal 2 11-13). Paul continues to act as though he is in the right (Acts 15 30 ff.; Gal 2 9, 11 ff.). Soon he and Barnabas have a falling out, and separate (Acts 15 39; Gal 2 13).

It certainly looks as though these accounts cover the same history, for it would be hard to imagine *two* such councils, on the same subject, involving the same people, with the same sequence of events, in the same places, and with the same denouements — right down to a quarrel between Paul and Barnabas.

Nevertheless there are difficulties in the way of identifying the two narratives. To be sure, some of these have to do only with minor divergences. Acts does not name Titus, but just says that "certain others" accompanied Paul and Barnabas. Acts 15 5 is more reticent than Gal 2 3 ff. about the unpleasantness at Jerusalem. The decision of the council (Acts 15 22-29) contains more than one would guess from Paul's brief summary (Gal 2 7-9), though the two are not mutually inconsistent. If the discrepancies were limited to such things, they would be no more than is to be expected in independent reports of the same event.

There are, however, four other obstacles. Each of them looks, at least on the surface, quite imposing. Singly or together they have, in

fact, persuaded a good many scholars that the two meetings cannot after all have been the same.

1. If the council described in Gal 2 is the one reported in Acts 15, why does Paul not cite the decree of Acts 15 23-29? In his ardent defense against the Judaizers, could he overlook the signal victory he won there? Yes, he could. For one thing, the Acts 15 decree was addressed not to Galatia, but only to gentile Christians in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

Far more important, the decree was no victory for Paul. True, it permitted gentiles to attend church services. But as James pointed out (Acts 15 21), synagogues had been permitting that much for ages. That, indeed, was why James suggested a like procedure for the church. Worse, from Paul's standpoint, the decree imposed certain dietary restrictions on gentile Christians (Acts 15 20b, 29b; cf. 21 25), just as synagogues did with gentile God-fearers. Paul himself rejected the very restrictions which the Acts 15 decree lists: "*Whatsoever* is sold in the shambles, eat, asking no question" (I Cor 10 25, italics added), and he denied repeatedly that any dietary laws are binding (Gal 4 3, 9; I Cor 8 8; Col 2 20-23). The decree likewise forbade attendance at festivals in pagan temples (Acts 15 20a, 29a). Paul insisted that, while one should not embarrass others, going to such parties could in itself do no harm at all (I Cor 9 4-6, 10; 10 27). Still worse, the decree nowhere grants what Paul incessantly taught, viz., that uncircumcised gentile Christians belong to the true Israel. Worst of all, perhaps, the decree contains no slightest acknowledgment of Paul's own claim to apostleship. The best that Paul himself can report (Gal 2 9) is that, while Peter's apostleship was unchallengeable, Paul received "the right hand of fellowship." Paul's anxiety over this matter is evident, for he presses his own apostolic claim again and again.¹

Furthermore, had the council's pronouncement been understood as a decision for Paul's side, it ought to have put a quietus on his opponents. It did not. Jewish Christians fought him to the end (Acts 21 20 f.; I Cor 9 2). Even the Jerusalem apostles seem to have given him little support. During all the anguish of his Jerusalem arrest and two years' languishing in the Caesarean jail, there is no record of their coming to his aid, or speaking out on his behalf (Acts 21 27-26 32), or even visiting him in prison. Centuries later, Jewish Christians were still calling him an apostate and a transgressor.²

Finally, not just in Galatians but in all his discussions of the Jewish-

¹ Rom 1 1; 11 13; I Cor 1 1, 4 9, 9 1, 3, 5, 15 1-9; II Cor 1 1, 11 5; 12 11 f.; Gal 1 1, 17; Col 1 1; I Thess 2 6. Cf. also Eph 1 1; I Tim 1 1, 2 7; II Tim 1 1, 11; Tit 1 1. While these last are probably unauthentic, still they reflect early traditions of what was in Paul's mind.

² Ireneus, *adv. Haer.* i, 26, 2; Eusebius, *H. E.* iii, 27, 4; Theodoret, *Haeret. Fab.* i.

gentile problem, Paul ignores the decree. His silence no more dates Galatians than it dates any other epistle, and certainly it does not date the events of Gal 2. Paul's silence means that, for his cause, the decree was no victory and was of little avail.

2. Paul marvels that the Galatians have "so quickly" defected from his teaching (Gal 1 6). If "so quickly" means on the heels of his earliest work in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 14 1-21), that would seem to be before the council of Acts 15. Yet Galatians was written long after the council that it describes, and "quickly" in that case appears most inappropriate.

One way to get around this would be to say that Galatians was addressed to churches in the north, for if Paul ever preached there, it must have been during his second or his third missionary journey (Acts 16 8, 18 23). Now a north Galatian destination, for Paul's letter, cannot be summarily dismissed. In most inscriptions from the period, "Galatia" does in fact mean the original, northern area. Acts never applies the name to the scenes of Paul's earlier missionary activities. The word first occurs at 16 6, and this could mean that no troubles had broken out in "Galatia" at the time of the Acts 15 council. Furthermore, while "Galatia" officially included the southern territory, Paul often mentions areas by their regional rather than their political names,³ and the *region* of Galatia was in the north. Indeed, one may question whether Paul, himself a native of southern Asia Minor, would so offend the people of Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium as to call them by this northern name. Also, in writing to people in the south, would he omit to mention Timothy whom they knew so well?⁴ Finally, the uncultured inhabitants of the north would probably be more "foolish" (Gal 3 1), more susceptible to Judaizing blandishments, than were dwellers in the southern cities.

Paul had visited "Galatia" twice (Gal 4 13). If this means North Galatia, and refers to the trips of Acts 16 6 and 18 23, the epistle must be dated during or after the third missionary journey. However, even if we hold, as many do,⁵ that the epistle was addressed to churches in the south, a late date is still to be preferred. Paul does not say that the Galatians fell away right after he met them. They defected "quickly" or, rather, "hastily" (*ταχέως*) after Jewish-Christian troublemakers came among them (Gal 1 7 ff.). This could have been at any later time. Actually it best fits the period, *ca.* A.D. 55-60, when the Judaizing con-

³ E. g., at I Thess 2 14; II Cor 1 16; Rom 15 31; and, in particular, Gal 1 17, 21.

⁴ Perhaps he would, out of embarrassment. He had circumcised Timothy (Acts 16 3), whereas Galatians argues that circumcision is not necessary.

⁵ The reasons have been stated so often that it is not necessary to repeat them here. For a convenient summary, see H. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* in the *New London Commentary*, pp. 22-31.

troverſy was at its height.⁶ Furthermore, the whole ſpirit and tone of Galatians correſpond to that later period in Paul's development, and are more like Romans than any other of his letters. From the internal evidence, Charles H. Buck has ſhown, concluſively in my opinion, that Paul wrote I Corinthians, II Cor 1-9, Galatians, and Romans in that order. Then the controverſy came to a head in Aſia, and Galatians was produced, at about the time that Paul was raiſing his collection for the Jeruſalem church.⁷

3. Paul puts the meeting of Gal 2 "fourteen years after" the events of Gal 1. This might mean 14 years after the previous Jeruſalem viſit.⁸ Or, if "fourteen" includes the "three years" of Gal 1 18, it means 14 years after Paul's converſion, and 11 years after the other Jeruſalem trip.⁹ In either caſe, if Gal 2 1 ff. = Acts 15 1 ff., that is a long time for the events of Acts 13 and 14. Some ſcholars think it too long. John Knox, for example, finds the Acts chronology quite wrong. He believes that the council actually met after Paul's ſecond miſſionary journey.¹⁰

This difficulty would be vaſtly modified if we could, with Morton S. Enſlin, emend "fourteen years" to "four."¹¹ However, there is no MS evidence for that. Furthermore, it may be wondered whether the reading "four years" would not create the oppoſite difficulty, of offering too ſhort a time for the manifold activities of Acts 13, 14. The ancients reckoned time incluſively, counting parts of years as whole years. Four years by their reckoning would be only two or three by ours.

Similarly, eleven years for them would be nine or ten for us. Here, it ſeems to me, is the likeliſt ſolution for the preſent difficulty. Nine or ten years is by no means exceſſive for the toilsome travels that Acts 13, 14 deſcribe. There we read of efforts, ſometimes ſucceſſful, ſometimes not, to found churches in Seleucia, Salamis, Paphos, Perga, Attalia, Piſidian Antioch, Lycaonia, Lyſtra, Derbe, and "all the region" (13 49), "and the region round about" (14 6). Acts is diſtreſſingly vague about how long theſe labors took, but it ſpeaks of "a long time" (14 3), "no little time" (14 28); and it implies extended periods for the happenings of 12 25-13 2, 13 6, 12 ff., 49, 14 2, 6, 19, 21. Depending on how many months, or years, Paul ſpent on Cyprus, the period between Mark's deſertion (13 13) and his return to Cyprus (15 39) could eaſily have been five years,

⁶ Cf. Pierson Parker, *The Gospel Before Mark*, pp. 146 ff.

⁷ "The Date of Galatians," *JBL*, 70 (1951), pp. 113 ff.; cf. alſo C. E. Faw, "The Anomaly of Galatians," *Biblical Research*, 4 (1960), pp. 25-38.

⁸ So, e. g., G. W. Wade, *New Testament History* (London: Methuen, 1932), p. 272, n. 5.

⁹ So W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, p. 382.

¹⁰ "Fourteen Years Later: A Note on Pauline Chronology," *JRel*, 16 (1936), pp. 341-49; "The Pauline Chronology," *JBL*, 58 (1939), pp. 15-29.

¹¹ "Paul — What Manner of Jew?," *In the Time of Harvest*, D. J. Silver, ed., p. 160.

or even a good deal more. In that case the supposed discrepancy between the chronologies of Gal 1 and Acts 13, 14 virtually disappears.

4. There remains, however, one very real contradiction between the accounts in Acts and Galatians of the Jerusalem council. Acts puts it during Paul's *third* trip to Jerusalem after his conversion (Acts 9 26, 11 29 f., 15 2-4); Paul puts it during his *second* (Gal 1 18, 2 1). It is hardly an answer to suppose that Paul just ignored or forgot one visit. His whole argument, in Galatians, depends on listing *all* of his contacts with the Jerusalem leaders.

Another suggestion is that Acts 11 29 f. and 15 2 ff. are the same incident, and that Luke did not realize this because he got the stories from different sources. Yet we cannot push the events of Acts 15 back to the period of Acts 11, for no council involving Paul can possibly have taken place that early. At that time Paul had made no extended tour, had stirred up no gentile problem; and he and Barnabas brought no gentile companions to Jerusalem. On the other hand, to date the trip of Acts 11 29 f., 12 25 *after* Paul's first missionary journey is to make mincemeat of the whole Acts narrative. Acts would then be wrong not only about Barnabas and Paul, but about sequences involving Mark and Peter too. In particular, Paul would be taking Mark with him (Acts 12 25) after Mark had deserted him (13 13), even though Paul for that very reason refused to have him along (15 38).

Moreover, if the visit of Acts 11, 12 is hard to square with that of Acts 15, it is just as hard to square with Gal 2. At Acts 12 25 Paul has Mark with him; at Gal 2 1 he has Titus. In Acts 11, 12 Paul meets no antagonism from Jerusalem Christians; in Gal 2 he meets a great deal. In Antioch, after Acts 12 25 there is a spirit of prayer and fasting (Acts 13 1 ff.); after Gal 2 10 it is a spirit of dissension. Actually, the brief visit of Acts 11 29 f., 12 25 sounds much more like the similarly brief one of Gal 1 18.

Now where Acts and Paul disagree about Paul's own movements, Paul is surely right. This leads to another and, it is believed, far more probable solution: the Jerusalem visit of Acts 9 did not occur. The visit of Acts 11, 12 was Paul's first after his conversion, that of Acts 15 his second.

Acts 9 26-30 has it that, upon escaping from Damascus, Paul went back to Jerusalem. Sponsored by Barnabas, he reported to the apostles, preached in Jerusalem, and then left for Tarsus. The latter departure was in order to avoid Jerusalem Jews who sought to kill him. This whole story is in flat contradiction of what Paul himself says. He did not go to Jerusalem at that time, and did not report to the apostles. He went to Arabia (cf. Gal 1 15-17.) Likewise in describing the escape from Damascus (II Cor 11 32 f. = Acts 9 24 f.), Paul says nothing about re-pairing to Jerusalem. Even Acts, when it reports Paul's own words,

leaves no room for the visit of 9 26-30. At 22 17-21, Paul declares that he went to Jerusalem sometime, but he does not say when; and his vision in the temple must have been on the eve of his work among gentiles, and therefore much later than the events of ch. 9. Also at Acts 26 20 ff., Paul says that he went to Jerusalem but does not say when, though again he seems to put it just before his mission to the gentiles:

I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but declared both to them of Damascus first, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judaea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent

At no point does Paul ever hint that his life was threatened on his first return to Jerusalem (contrast Acts 9 29), and at Acts 26 21 he says that the threat occurred on his last visit.

Therefore Acts 9 26-30 is mistaken. In fact it reads like an amalgam from three later visits. Its three parts are easily separated:

(a) *Acts 9 26, 30*: "And when he was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple . . . And . . . they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus."

With this compare

Acts 11 29 f.: "And the disciples [at Antioch] . . . determined to send relief unto the brethren that dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul."

Gal 1 18, 21: "I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and tarried with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother . . . Then I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia."

In the next portion, note the general and rather meaningless statement of the concluding phrase:

(b) *Acts 9 27, 28*: "But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. And he was with them going in and going out at Jerusalem."

With those two verses compare

Acts 15 2, 4: "They appointed that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders . . . And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and the apostles and the elders."

Gal 2 1, 2, 9: "Then . . . I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas . . . and I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but privately before them who were of repute . . . James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship."

Finally,

(c) *Acts* 9 29: "... preaching boldly in the name of the Lord: and he spake and disputed against the Grecian Jews; but they were seeking to kill him"

reminds us of

Acts 21 27 ff.: "... Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the multitude . . . and dragged him out of the temple . . . seeking to kill him . . ."

From these coincidences one can almost see Luke's mind at work; for it is hard to escape the impression that he has simply imagined the Jerusalem visit of *Acts* 9, constructing it out of what he had heard about other sojourns in that city.

If that is so, however, then the rest of the *Acts* chronology fits very nicely with what Paul himself has said. His trips to Jerusalem, after his conversion, turn out as follows:

	<i>Galatians</i>	<i>Acts</i>
	1 15-17. After his conversion, Paul goes to Arabia for <i>three years</i> , then returns to Damascus.	9 23. Paul, "when <i>many days</i> were fulfilled," appears in Damascus.
First visit	1 18. Goes to Jerusalem for two weeks. Sees Cephas and James, but no other apostles. 12 1. Returns to "Syria and Cilicia."	11 29 f.; 12 25. Brief famine trip to Jerusalem. Calls on "the elders." No word about seeing any one else. 13 1. Back in Antioch. 13 13. Goes to Asia.
Second visit	2 1. Goes with Barnabas and Titus to Jerusalem. 2 2-10. Council of Jerusalem.	15 2. Goes with Barnabas and others to Jerusalem. 15 5-29. Council of Jerusalem.

<i>Galatians</i>	<i>Acts</i>
2 11 ff. Back in Antioch.	15 30-35. Returns to Antioch.
2 11 ff. Variance with Peter.	— — — — —
2 13. Variance with Barnabas.	15 36 ff. Variance with Barnabas.
Third visit ¹² — — — — —	21 17. Returns to Jerusalem for the last time.

Thus of the four major discrepancies, which seemed to make the accounts in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 irreconcilable, three turn out not to be real discrepancies after all. The fourth, while very real, is due to an error on the part of the author of Acts. When that error is eliminated, the Acts and Galatians chronologies dovetail quite well, and Acts 15 and Galatians 2 describe the same council in Jerusalem.

¹² Or the fourth, if Paul went to Jerusalem at Acts 18 22. Note that, in that case, Galatians would have to be dated during the second missionary journey, which is almost certainly too early; so that it is unlikely that Acts 18 22 represents an actual Jerusalem trip.