

THE RELATIONSHIP OF GALATIANS 2:1-10 AND ACTS 15:1-35:  
TWO NEGLECTED ARGUMENTS

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One of the classical problems involved in establishing a chronology of the life of Paul is the relationship of the first three visits of the Apostle mentioned in Acts and the two visits mentioned in Galatians. Frequently they are related in one of the following ways:<sup>1</sup>

1. Acts 9:26-28 = Galatians 1:18  
Acts 11:30; 12:25 = Galatians 2:1-10  
Acts 15:1-35 (omitted in Galatians—perhaps because Galatians written before the event)

According to this view the famine visit of Acts 11:30; 12:25 and Galatians 2:1-10 are identical.<sup>2</sup> Some of the considerations given in support of this view are:<sup>3</sup>

- a. the apostolic decree of Acts 15:22f. is not mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10;
- b. Paul could not have omitted mentioning the famine visit, as the next view demands, for his whole argument in Galatians 1-2 might be invalidated by this omission since he would be exposing himself to the charge of dishonest suppression of the facts;
- c. with this view there is “no necessity of ascribing to the author of Acts an error in the number or arrangement of Paul’s journeys to Jerusalem”;<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. H. Talbert, “Again: Paul’s Visits to Jerusalem,” *Novum Testamentum*, IX (1967), p. 26 n. 3 lists seven different positions as to how Galatians 2:1-10 and the visits in Acts are related. These are: (1) Galatians 2 = Acts 15; (2) Galatians 2 = Acts 11; (3) Galatians 2 = Acts 11 = Acts 15; (4) Galatians 2 = Acts 17; (5) Galatians 2 = Acts 15:1-4; (6) Galatians 2 = Acts 11 + 15; (7) Galatians 2 is omitted in Acts. To this can be added the view of D. R. DeLacey, “Paul in Jerusalem,” *New Testament Studies*, XX (1973), pp. 82-86, who argues that Galatians 2 = Acts 9 and that Luke did not know of the Galatians 1:18 visit. The three positions mentioned in the body of the text, however, are the most common.

<sup>2</sup>For the related view that Galatians 2:1-10 refers to the famine visit but that the first two missionary journeys should be placed before this event see C. Buck and G. Taylor, *Saint Paul: A Study of the Development of His Thought* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), pp. 179-190.

<sup>3</sup>See J. J. Gunther, *Paul: Messenger and Exile* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), pp. 25-55 for an excellent discussion and defense of this view.

<sup>4</sup>P. Feine, J. Behm, and W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. by A. J. Mattill, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 196. Kümmel assumes that Paul does not omit any visit to Jerusalem in Galatians, so that if Acts 15:1-35 (visit three) = Galatians 2:1-10 (visit two) Luke must have erred.

- d. according to Galatians 2:1-10 the meeting with Paul and Barnabas took place with the leaders of the Jerusalem church alone whereas according to Acts 15:1-35 it took place before the assembled church;
  - e. Peter's lapse in Galatians 2:11f. is less likely after the meeting of the Jerusalem Conference than before it.<sup>5</sup>
2. Acts 9:26-28 = Galatians 1:18  
 Acts 11:30; 12:25 (omitted in Galatians)  
 Acts 15:1-35 = Galatians 2:1-10

According to this view Acts 15:1-35 and Galatians 2:1-10 are parallel accounts of the Jerusalem Conference. Some of the reasons frequently given in support of this view are:<sup>6</sup>

- a. the main purpose of Paul's visit in Galatians 2:1-10 appears to be the same as that found in Acts 15:1-35, for both deal with the question of the Gentile Christians' responsibility toward the law and especially the issue of circumcision;
  - b. Galatians 2:1-10 bears closer resemblance to Acts 15:1-35 than to Acts 11:30; 12:25 for the geography, persons, subject nature of the conference, and result are the same in Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15:1-35;
  - c. the similarity between Galatians and Romans-1 Corinthians-2 Corinthians argue for Galatians being written at approximately the same time, i.e. after the events of Acts 15:1-35, so that if Galatians 2:1-10 refers to the famine visit it is inexplicable why Paul did not refer to the Jerusalem Conference in Galatians since it would have supported his thesis against the Judaizers;
  - d. Galatians 4:13 is best understood as referring to at least two previous visits on two separate missionary journeys, so that Galatians was probably written after the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15:1-35;
  - e. *espoudasa* in Galatians 2:10 cannot refer to a collection for the poor already in progress, i.e. the famine visit, but must be either prospective or retrospective.<sup>7</sup>
3. Acts 9:26-28 = Galatians 1:18  
 Acts 11:30; 12:25 } = Galatians 2:1-10  
 Acts 15:1-35 }

According to this view the author of Acts has confused Paul's second visit to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1-10) and separated the two-fold purpose of the visit, which was famine relief and settling the circumcision issue, and mistakenly made them into two separate visits—the famine visit of Acts

<sup>5</sup>The question of the historical order of the events of Galatians 2:1-10 and 2:11-21 is frequently discussed in this regard.

<sup>6</sup>For a defense of this viewpoint J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), pp. 123-126 is still valuable. See also D. Guthrie, *The Pauline Epistles* (Chicago: Intervarsity Press, 1961), pp. 80-87.

<sup>7</sup>E. D. Burton, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1952), p. 100, and E. Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles*, trans. by Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p. 377. For the view that *espoudasa* is pluperfect in force see F. F. Bruce, "Galatian Problems," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, LI (1969), p. 305 n. 3 and D. R. Hall, "St. Paul and Famine Relief: A Study in Galatians 2:10," *Expository Times*, LXXXII (1971), p. 310.

11:30; 12:25 and the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15:1-35.<sup>8</sup>

Among evangelicals the third option and its variations have found little acceptance due to the low view of the historicity of Acts. As a result evangelicals have greatly debated whether Galatians 2:1-10 refers to Paul's second visit to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 12:25) or this third (Acts 15:1-35). The present writer would like to present two related arguments in favor of the latter view which have not received the attention they deserve. These arguments basically involve the accomplishments and roles of the Apostle Paul at the time of his second and third visits to Jerusalem. According to Acts 11:25f. one year before the famine visit Barnabas brought Saul from Tarsus to assist him in the work at Antioch. From Acts it is evident that the leader of the team at this point was Barnabas, for when these two men are mentioned together the name of Barnabas is always placed first.<sup>9</sup> It is only during the first missionary journey that Saul, who "becomes" Paul, assumes the leadership role, for now we no longer read of Barnabas and Saul but of Paul and Barnabas.<sup>10</sup> As a result we read that it is Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:2) that are sent up to the Jerusalem Conference.

Acts then portrays the second visit to Jerusalem as a visit by Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30; 12:25) whereas the third visit is made by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:2). Clearly, according to Luke's understanding, Barnabas was the leader of the team at the time of the second visit whereas Paul was the leader at the time of the third visit. At this point a comparison with Galatians 2:10 will be revealing. How did Paul envision his role during the Jerusalem visit referred to in Galatians 2:1-10? The account reads as follows:

Then after fourteen years *I* went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus *along with me*. *I* went up by revelation; and *I* laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which *I* preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow *I* should be running or had 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 brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage—to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to *me*; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to *me*; but on the contrary, when they saw that *I* had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as

<sup>8</sup>Haenchen, *op. cit.*, pp. 375-379.

<sup>9</sup>Note the following: Acts 11:30—"Barnabas and Saul"; 12:25—"Barnabas and Saul"; 13:1—"Barnabas ... Saul"; 13:2—"Barnabas and Saul"; 13:7—"Barnabas and Saul." It should be noted that F. F. Bruce who equates Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 11:30; 12:25 acknowledges that Barnabas was the original leader of the team. See his *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), p. 259 and *New Testament History* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 265.

<sup>10</sup>Note the following: Acts 13:9—"Saul, who is also called Paul"; 13:13—"Paul and his company"; 13:43—"Paul and Barnabas"; 13:46—"Paul and Barnabas"; 13:50—"Paul and Barnabas"; 15:2—"Paul and Barnabas."

Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked *through me* also for the Gentiles), and when they perceived the grace that was given to *me*, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing *I* was eager to do.

Clearly Paul in this passage sees himself as the leader of the team during this visit to Jerusalem whereas during the second visit of Acts 11:30; 12:25 Luke portrays Barnabas as the leader. We then have a conflict between Luke's presentation of the relationship of Paul and Barnabas and that of Paul, if we interpret Galatians 2:1-10 as the second or famine visit of Acts. Furthermore this conflict appears to be too great to be explained away simply as a difference in perspective or viewpoint by the two writers. On the other hand there is perfect agreement between Luke's presentation of that relationship and that of Paul if we interpret Galatians 2:1-10 as the third visit of Acts, for in both these instances Paul is the leader. The view that Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15:1-35 refer to the same event therefore best explains the role of Paul during these events.

A final related argument in favor of this view has to do with the recognition of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles at the Jerusalem visit of Galatians 2:1-10. In vv. 7-8 we read that those "who were reputed to be something" in the Jerusalem church recognized that what Peter was to the Jewish mission Paul was to the Gentile mission. Yet on what basis could this have been discerned if Galatians 2:1-10 is identical to the famine visit?<sup>11</sup> On what basis would the leadership in Jerusalem recognize that Paul was "the Apostle to the Gentiles?" At that time Paul had not been on any of his missionary journeys.<sup>12</sup> His success at Tarsus appears to have been quite limited to say the least.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore Paul came to Jerusalem as Barnabas's assistant during that visit. If anyone were to be recognized as "the Apostle to the Gentiles" during the famine visit of Acts 11:30; 12:25 it would have been Barnabas! On the other hand such a recognition would have been quite in order after the first missionary journey when Paul's ability and role had become evident. The recognition of Paul's apostolic role in Galatians 2:7-8 is best understood if Galatians 2:1-10 is identified with the visit of Acts 15:1-35 rather than the visit of Acts 11:30; 12:25.

For the present writer these two considerations deserve a great deal more attention in the discussion than they have received in the past.

<sup>11</sup>So Lightfoot, *op. cit.*, p. 124; Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 86; E. F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 262.

<sup>12</sup>The present writer assumes here the accuracy of Luke's chronological arrangement in placing the first missionary journey after Paul's second visit to Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 12:25) and before his third (Acts 15:1-35).

<sup>13</sup>We do not possess any letter of Paul to a church Tarsus. In fact we do not read in the New Testament of any Christian community in Tarsus.