

The Origin of Paul's Religion

The Triumph of Gentile Freedom (Part 2)

By John Gresham Machen

At Antioch, the disciples were first called "Christians" (Acts xi. 26). The objections, especially linguistic, formerly urged against this assertion of Acts have now for the most part been silenced. The assertion is important as showing that the Church was becoming so clearly separate from the synagogue that a separate name had to be coined by the Gentile population. Tremendous importance is attributed to the Christian community at Antioch by Bousset and Heitmüller, who believe that the religion of that community had diverged in fundamental respects from the religion of the primitive Jerusalem Church, and that this extra-Palestinian Christianity, and not the Christianity of Jerusalem, is the basis of the religion of Paul. According to this hypothesis, the independence of Paul which is attested in Galatians is apparently to be regarded as independence merely over against the intimate friends of Jesus; apparently Paul had no objection against taking over the teaching of the Greek-speaking Christians of Antioch. This representation is out of accord with what has just been established about the relations between Paul and the Jerusalem Church. It must be examined more in detail, however, in a subsequent chapter.

After at least a year—probably more Barnabas and Saul, according to Acts xi. 30; xii. 25, were sent up to Jerusalem to bear the gifts of the Antioch Church, which had been collected in view of the famine prophesied by Agabus. This "famine visit is the second visit of Paul to Jerusalem which is mentioned in Acts. The second visit which is mentioned in Galatians is the one described in Gal. ii. 1-10, at which Paul came into conference with the pillars of the Jerusalem Church. May the two be identified? Is Gal. ii. 1-10 an account of the visit which is mentioned in Acts xi. 30; xii. 25?¹

Chronology opposes no absolutely insuperable objection to the identification. The apparent objection is as follows. The famine visit of Acts xi. 30; xii. 25 took place at about the same time as the events narrated in Acts xii, since the narrative of those events is interposed between the mention of the coming of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem (Acts xi. 30) and that of their return to Antioch (Acts xii. 25). But the events of Acts xii include the death of Herod Agrippa I, which certainly occurred in 44 A.D. The famine visit, therefore, apparently occurred at about 44

¹ For what follows, compare "Recent Criticism of the Book of Acts," in *Princeton Theological Review*, xvii, 1919, pp. 597-608

A.D. But the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10 took place fourteen years (Gal. ii. 1) after the first visit, which in turn took place three years (Gal. i. 18) after the conversion. Therefore the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10 took place seventeen (3+14) years after the conversion.

But if that visit be identified with the famine visit and the famine visit took place in 44 A.D., the conversion must have taken place seventeen years before 44 A.D. or in 27 A.D., which of course is impossible since the crucifixion of Jesus did not occur till several years after that time. At first sight, therefore, it looks as though the identification of Gal. ii. 1-10 with the famine visit were impossible.

Closer examination, however, shows that the chronological data all allow a certain amount of leeway. In the first place, it is by no means clear that the famine visit took place at exactly the time of the death of Herod Agrippa I in 44 A.D. The author of Acts has been carrying on two threads of narrative, one dealing with Antioch and the other dealing with Jerusalem. In Acts xi. 19-30 he has carried the Antioch narrative on to a point beyond that reached in the Jerusalem narrative. Now, when the two narratives are brought together by the visit of Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem, the author pauses in order to bring the Jerusalem narrative up to date; he tells what has been happening at Jerusalem during the period in which the reader's attention has been diverted to Antioch. The events of Acts xii may therefore have taken place some time before the famine visit of Acts xi. 30; xii. 25; the famine visit may have taken place some time after 44 A.D. Information in Josephus with regard to the famine,² combined with the order of the narrative in Acts, permits the placing of the famine visit as late as 46 A.D. In the second place, it is by no means certain that the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10 took place seventeen years after the conversion. The ancients sometimes used an inclusive method of reckoning time, in accordance with which "three years" might mean only one full year with parts of two other years; January, 1923, would thus be "three years" after December, 1921. According to this method of reckoning, the "fourteen years" of Gal. ii. 1 would become only thirteen; and the "three years" of Gal. i. 18 would become only two years; the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10 would thus be only fifteen (13 + 2) instead of seventeen (14 + 3) years after the conversion.

If, then, the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10 be identified with the famine visit, and the famine visit took place in 46 A.D., the conversion took place in 31 A.D. (46 - 15), which is a possible date. Moreover, it is not certain that the "fourteen years" of Gal. ii. 1 is to be reckoned from the first visit; it may be reckoned from the conversion, so that the "three years" of Gal. i. 18 is to be included in it and not added to it. In that case, the conversion took place only fourteen (or, by the inclusive method of reckoning, thirteen) years before the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10; or, if the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10 be identified with the famine visit, fourteen (or thirteen) years before 46 A.D., that is, in 32 A.D. (or 33 A.D.), which is a perfectly possible date.

² Josephus, *Antiq.* XX. v. 2. See Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes*, Ste u. 4te Aufl., i, 1901, p. 567 (English Translation, *A History of the Jewish People*, Division 1, vol. II, 1890, pp. 169f.).

But of course chronology does not decide in favor of the identification of Gal. ii. 1-10 with Acts xi. 30; xii. 25; at best it only permits that identification. Chronologically it is even slightly more convenient to identify Gal. ii. 1-10 with a visit subsequent to the famine visit.

The only subsequent visit which comes seriously in question is the visit at the time of the "Apostolic Council" of Acts xv. 1-29. The advantages of identifying Gal. ii. 1-10 with Acts xi. 30; xii. 25, therefore, must be compared with those of identifying it with Acts xv. 1-29.

If the former identification be adopted, then Paul in Galatians has not mentioned the Apostolic Council of Acts v. 1-29. Since the Apostolic Council dealt with the same question as that which was under discussion in Galatians, and since it constituted an important step in Paul's relations with the original apostles, it is a little difficult to see how Paul could have omitted it from the Epistle. This objection has often weighed against the identification of Gal. ii. 1-10 with the famine visit. But in recent years the objection has been removed by the hypothesis which places the writing of Galatians actually before the Apostolic Council; obviously Paul could not be expected to mention the Council if the Council had not yet taken place. This early dating of Galatians has been advocated by a German Roman Catholic scholar, Weber,³ and recently it has won the support of men of widely divergent points of view, such as Emmet,⁴ Kirsopp Lake,⁵ Ramsay,⁶ and Plooi.⁷ Of course this hypothesis depends absolutely upon the correctness of the "South Galatian" theory of the address of the Epistle, which finds "the Churches of Galatia" of Gal. i. 2 in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe; for the churches in "North Galatia," if there were any such, were not founded till after the Apostolic Council (Acts xvi.6).⁸

One objection to the early dating of Galatians is derived from the close relation between that epistle and the Epistle to the Romans. If Galatians was written before the Apostolic Council it is the earliest of the extant epistles of Paul and is separated by a period of some six or eight years from the epistles of the third missionary journey with which it has ordinarily been grouped. Thus the order of

³ *Die Abfassung des Galaterbriefs vor dem Apostelkonzil*, 1900.

⁴ "Galatians the Earliest of the Pauline Epistles," in *Expositor*, 7th Series, vol. ix, 1910, pp. 249-254 (reprinted in *The Eschatological Question in the Gospels*, 1911, pp. 191-209); *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 1919, pp. xiv-xxii.

⁵ *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, 1911, pp. 265-304. In a later book, Lake has modified his views about the relation between Galatians and Acts. The historicity of Acts xv. 1-29 is now abandoned. See *Landmarks in the History of Early Christianity*, 1920, pp. 63-66.

⁶ Ramsay, "Suggestions on the History and Letters of St. Paul. I. The Date of the Galatian Letter," in *Expositor*, VIII, v, 1913, pp. 127-145.

⁷ Plooi, *De chronologie van het leven van Paulus*, 1918, pp. 111-140.

⁸ Maurice Jones ("The Date of the Epistle to the Galatians," in *Expositor*, VIII, vi, 1913, pp. 193-208) has adduced from the Book of Acts various arguments against the early date of Galatians, which, though worthy of attention, are not quite decisive.

the Epistles would be Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans. This order seems to tear asunder the epistles which naturally belong together. The objection was partially overcome by a bold hypothesis of Lake, who suggested that the Epistle to the Romans was first composed at an early time as an encyclical letter, and that later, being modified by the addition of a Roman address and other suitable details, it was sent to the Church at Rome.⁹ On this hypothesis Galatians and the substance of Romans would be kept together because both would be placed early. The hypothesis can appeal to the interesting textual phenomenon in Rom. i. 7, where the words "in Rome" are omitted by a few witnesses to the text. But the evidence is insufficient. And even if Lake's hypothesis were correct, it would not altogether overcome the difficulty; for both Galatians and Romans would be removed from what has usually been regarded as their natural position among the epistles of the third missionary journey. In reply, it could be said that reconstructions of an author's development, unless supported by plain documentary evidence, are seldom absolutely certain; the simplicity of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, as over against the great soteriological epistles, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, is no doubt due to the immaturity of the Thessalonian Church rather than to any immaturity in Paul's thinking. There is therefore no absolutely decisive objection against putting the Epistle to the Galatians, with its developed soteriology, before the Thessalonian Epistles.

On the whole, it may be said that the identification of Gal. ii. 1-10 with Acts xi. 30; xii. 25 is perhaps most plausible when it is connected with the early dating of Galatians, before the Apostolic Council. But that identification, whether with or without the early dating of the Epistle, must now be considered on its merits. Is Gal. ii. 1-10 to be identified with the famine visit of Acts xi. 30; xii. 25, or with the Apostolic Council of Acts xv?

The former identification possesses one obvious advantage by it the second visit in Galatians is the same as the second visit in Acts; whereas if Gal. ii. 1-10 is identified with Acts xv. 1-29 Paul has passed over the famine visit without mention. The identification with the famine visit may therefore conveniently be considered first.

According to this identification, Paul had two conferences with the Jerusalem leaders, one at the time of the famine visit and one some years afterwards at the time of the Apostolic Council. Could the second conference conceivably have followed thus upon the former? If the conference between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders described in Gal. ii. 1-10 took place at the time of the famine visit, then would not the Apostolic Council seem to be a mere meaningless repetition of the former conference? If the matter of Gentile freedom had already been settled (Gal. ii. 1-10) at the famine visit, how could it come up again de novo at the Apostolic Council?

⁹ Lake, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul*, 1911, pp. 361-370.

This objection is by no means insuperable. The meeting described in Gal. ii. 1-10 may have been merely a private meeting between Paul and the original apostles. Although the presence of Titus, the uncircumcised Gentile, was no doubt a matter of public knowledge, it need not necessarily have given rise, to any public discussion, since it was not unprecedented, Cornelius also having been received into the Church without circumcision. But if the famine visit brought merely a private conference between Paul and the original apostles, Gentile freedom was still open to attack, especially if, after the famine visit, there was (as is in any case probable) an influx of strict legalists into the Christian community. There was no public pronouncement of the original apostles to which the advocates of freedom could appeal. There was therefore still urgent need of a public council such as the one described in Acts xv. 1-29, especially since that council dealt not only with the general question of Gentile freedom but also with the problem of mixed communities where Jews and Gentiles were living together. The Apostolic Council, therefore, may well have taken place in the way described in Acts xv. 1-29 even if the conference of Gal. ii. 1-10 had been held some years before.

No absolutely decisive objection, therefore, has yet been found against the identification of Gal. ii. 1-10 with Acts xi. 30; xii. 25. But the *prima facie* evidence has usually been regarded as favoring the alternative identification, since Gal. ii. 1-10 bears much more resemblance to Acts xv. 1-29 than it does to Acts xi. 30; xii. 25. Resemblance to Acts xi. 30; xii. 25 is not, indeed, altogether lacking. In both Galatians ii. 1-10 and Acts xi. 30; xii. 25, Barnabas is represented as going up with Paul to Jerusalem; in both passages there is reference to gifts for the Jerusalem Church; and the revelation referred to in Gal. ii. 2 as the occasion of the journey may be discovered in the revelation of the famine made to Agabus (Acts xi. 28). But the relief of the Jerusalem Church, which is put as the sole purpose of the journey in Acts xi. 30; xii. 25, is quite subordinate in Gal. ii. 1-10; Barnabas is with Paul in Acts xv. 1-29 just as much as he is in Acts xi. 30; xii. 25; and it may be questioned whether in Gal. ii. 2 it is not more natural to think of a revelation coming to Paul rather than one coming through the mouth of Agabus. The strongest argument, however, for identifying Gal. ii. 1-10 with Acts xv. 1-29 is that the main purpose of Paul's visit seems to be the same according to both passages; according to both the matter of circumcision of Gentiles was under discussion, and according to both the result was a triumph for the cause of freedom. This identification must now be considered. Various objections have been raised against it. These objections lead, according to the point of view of the objector, either to an acceptance of the alternative identification (with Acts xi. 30; xii. 25) or else to a rejection of the historicity of the Book of Acts.

The first objection is derived from the fact that if Gal. ii. 1-10 is to be identified with Acts xv. 1-29, Paul has passed over the famine visit without mention. Could he have done so honestly, if that visit had really occurred? In the first two chapters of Galatians Paul is establishing the independence of his apostolic authority; he had not, he says, as the Judaizers maintained, received his authority through mediation of the original apostles. At first, he says, he came

into no effective contact with the apostles; it was three years after his conversion before he saw any of them; then he saw only Peter (and James) and that only for fifteen days. Then he went away into the regions of Syria and of Cilicia without ever becoming known by face to the Churches of Judaea; then after fourteen years again he went up to Jerusalem (Gal. ii. 1). Is it not the very point of the passage that after his departure to Syria and Cilicia it was fourteen long years before he again went up to Jerusalem? Would not his entire argument be invalidated if there were an unmentioned visit to Jerusalem between the first visit (Gal. i. 18, 19) and the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10? If such a visit had taken place, would he not have had to mention it in order to place it in the proper light as he had done in the case of the first visit? By omitting to mention the visit in a context where he is carefully tracing the history of his relations with the Jerusalem leaders, would he not be exposing himself to the charge of dishonest suppression of facts? Such considerations have led a great number of investigators to reject the historicity of the famine visit; there never could have been, they insist, a visit between the first visit and the visit of Gal. ii. 1-10; for if there had been, Paul would have been obliged to mention it, not only by his own honesty, but also because of the impossibility of deception. This is one of the points where the narrative in Acts has been most insistently criticized. Here and there, indeed, there have been discordant notes in the chorus of criticism; the insufficiency of the objection has been admitted now and then even by those who are far removed from any concern for the defense of the Book of Acts. Baur himself, despite all his Tübingen severity of criticism, was clear-sighted enough not to lay stress upon this particular objection;¹⁰ and in recent years J. Weiss has been equally discerning.¹¹ In Galatians Paul is not giving a complete enumeration of his visits to Jerusalem, but merely singling out those details which had formed the basis of the Judaizers' attack, or afforded peculiar support to his own contentions. Apparently the Judaizers had misrepresented the first visit; that is the time, they had said, when Paul came under the authority of the original apostles. In answer to this attack Paul is obliged to deal carefully with that first visit; it came three years after the conversion, he says, and it lasted only fifteen days—surely not long enough to make Paul a disciple of Peter. Then Paul went away into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. Probably, for the first readers, who were familiar with the outlines of Paul's life, this departure for Syria and Cilicia clearly meant the entrance by Paul into his distinctive Gentile work. He was well launched upon his Gentile work, fully engaged in the proclamation of his gospel, before he had ever had such contact with the original apostles as could possibly have given him that gospel. At this point, as J. Weiss¹² well observes, there is a transition in the argument. The argument based on lack of contact with the original apostles has been finished, and now gives place to an entirely different

¹⁰ Baur, *Paulus*, 2te Aufl., 1866, pp. 130-132 (English Translation, *Paul* i, 1873, pp. 118-120). Baur does maintain that Gal. ii. 1 renders improbable a second visit of Paul to Jerusalem before the conference with the apostles which is narrated in Gal. ii. 1, but points out that in itself the verse is capable of a different interpretation.

¹¹ J. Weiss, *Urchristentum*, 1914, p. 14, Anm. 2.

¹² *Loc. cit.*

argument. In the first chapter of Galatians Paul has been showing that at first he had no such contact with the original apostles as could have made him a disciple of theirs; now, in the second chapter he proceeds to show that when he did come into conference with them, they themselves recognized that he was no disciple of theirs but an independent apostle. Apparently this conference, like the first visit, had been misrepresented by the Judaizers, and hence needed to be singled out for special treatment.

It must be admitted that Paul is interested in the late date at which it occurred—fourteen years after the first visit or fourteen years after the conversion. Probably, therefore, it was the first real conference which Paul held with the original apostles on the subject of his Gentile work. If the famine visit had involved such a conference, probably Paul would have mentioned that visit. But if (as is not improbable on independent grounds) the apostles were away from Jerusalem at the time of the famine visit, and if that visit occurred long after Paul had been well launched upon his distinctive work, and if it had given the Judaizers so little basis for their contentions that they had not thought it worth while to draw it into the discussion, then Paul was not obliged to mention it. Paul is not constructing an argument which would hold against all possible attacks, but rather is meeting the attacks which had actually been launched.

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