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THE DATE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

I

THE date of the Epistle to the Galatians is still a storm-centre of theological argument; and much depends upon it. The theory of a continued conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians, our ideas of St. Paul's theological development and the historicity of Acts are all bound up with the dating of the Epistle.

Internally, there are three points for fixing the date. (a) From iv. 13 it is seen that St. Paul had already made two visits to the Galatian Church; for although τὸ πρότερον (iv. 13) may contrast the former visit with the present letter, it is better taken (because of its emphatic position), to imply two visits.

(b) "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto another gospel" (i. 6) indicates that the letter was written *soon* after the second of these visits. The question disputed is whether these visits are the two of the first missionary journey or those of the second and third missionary journey. The reason why the matter is open to dispute is that the term 'Galatia' is ambiguous. It may be used of the Roman province which in the first century included many of the cities visited by St. Paul on his first missionary journey, or it may be used of Galatia proper, in the interior of Asia Minor, with its capital Ancyra. St. Paul did not visit this district on his first missionary journey, but seems to have done so on his second and third.

(c) Galatians ii. 1 tells of a visit to Jerusalem with Titus and Barnabas. Lightfoot took this to refer to the visit narrated in Acts xv. But Ramsay has pointed out how closely St. Paul's account in Galatians ii. coincides with Acts xi. which tells of a visit to Jerusalem by Saul and Barnabas (prior to the council visit) for the purpose of bringing relief to the Church at Jerusalem.

These correspondences are as follows:

(i) In Galatians ii. 1 St. Paul says "I went up by revelation". In Acts xi. the exact details are given. As a result of a revelation vouchsafed to Agabus whereby he predicted a famine in Jerusalem, the Church at Antioch sent Saul and Barnabas to the mother-city to relieve the necessities of the Christians there.

(ii) From Galatians ii. 2 we learn that St. Paul took the opportunity of obtaining the advice of our Lord's disciples with regard to his own teaching. "I laid before them the gospel which I preached . . . but privately." All this fits Acts xi., but by no means Acts xv., when St. Paul's visit to Jerusalem resulted not from "revelation" but from "no small dissension and questioning" with Judaizers. The word "privately" (Gal. ii. 3) suggests that in the visit mentioned in Galatians the talk about St. Paul's teaching was incidental to the chief end of the visit (namely, the relief of the famine, not mentioned in the epistle, being unconnected with the argument). The word is out of keeping with Acts xv., when a public discussion was held.

(iii) In Acts xv. 29 decrees were published regulating Gentile conduct. However, in Galatians ii. these are not mentioned (though the writer himself delivered the council's decrees to the churches in Galatia on his second missionary journey—Acts xvi.), and St. Paul concludes his account of this (Galatian) visit to Jerusalem with "Only (*μόνον*) they would we should remember the poor, which very thing I was also zealous to do." (*ὃ καὶ ἐσπούδασα αὐτὸ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι.*) The emphatic words *καί, αὐτό,* gain their point from the fact that St. Paul's visit (Acts xi.) was the result of "remembering the poor".

The identification of the Galatian visit with Acts xi. allows the epistle to be dated before Acts xv. and so solves the difficulty why St. Paul referred in the Epistle to only two contacts with the Apostles, while in Acts three are mentioned. Since the argument of the first two chapters of Galatians rests on the slightness of St. Paul's contacts with the Apostles it is inconceivable that he should have deliberately omitted one such meeting completely. The only alternatives to the identification of Acts xi. with Galatians ii. is to assume that Acts, chapters xi. and xv. are doublets or that the former is unhistorical. This identification also answers the question why in Galatians St. Paul did not refer to the authority of the council's decisions when he was dealing with the Gentile's relation to the Law, the very subject on which the council was convened, and which completely endorsed his own position. Such a silence would be the more inexplicable because St. Paul had himself delivered to the Churches in Galatia "the decrees for to keep which had been ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem" (Acts xvi. 4, 6).

The absence in this epistle of any reference to the collection towards "the saints at Jerusalem", which St. Paul was making among the Churches he had founded, is another piece of evidence for an early date. On the third missionary journey this collection was much in the Apostle's mind. In his defence before Felix he gave it as the chief reason for his "fourth visit" to Jerusalem. And he referred to it in each of the three epistles which can be dated with any certainty as belonging to the third missionary journey (Rom. xv. 25; 1 Cor. xvi. 1; 2 Cor. viii. 3). Yet in Galatians there is no reference to the collection. Nor can its omission be explained on the view that St. Paul was confining it to the Churches of Macedonia and Achaia (Rom. xv.); for in the first Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul said explicitly that he "gave order to the churches of Galatia concerning the collection" (1 Cor. xvi. 1). The absence of any reference in the Epistle to the Galatians to a matter that was in the forefront of St. Paul's mind on the third missionary journey confirms the conclusion that the Epistle belongs not to a time between the writing of 2 Corinthians and Romans, as Lightfoot contended, but to an earlier date.

II

Other small indications confirm the early date,—points that are in themselves not weighty, but in their cumulative effect worth considering. (i) In the Epistle St. Paul referred three times to St. Barnabas who seemed to be known personally to the recipients. He had been St. Paul's colleague on the first missionary journey to South Galatia; but he would not be known to the Churches of the North, which is the destination of the epistle on the theory of the late date. (ii) St. Paul's use of such terms as "Pedagogue" and "Adoption" is more natural if he were writing to the Greek cities of the South than to the Celtic people of the interior. (iii) South Galatia was the scene of St. Paul's first missionary activities and was readily accessible both by sea and by the overland routes from Tarsus and Ephesus. It is more probable that the Judaising party should have put forth their effort among these cities (of Pamphylia and Lycaonia) than that they should have journeyed three hundred miles up country to work among Churches of so little importance strategically that St. Luke is able to dismiss

them in a summarising statement (Acts xvi. 6). Finally, the phraseology of the epistle is thought to support an early date.

Lightfoot, who favoured the late date (placing Galatians between 2 Corinthians and Romans) said that it belonged to the second group of St. Paul's epistles (i.e., 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, and Galatians). The features of this group are stylistically a tension of feeling and a fiery energy, variety and abruptness of expression, frequent use of interrogation and profuse quotations from the Old Testament. Doctrinally, these epistles deal with justification by faith; the contrast of law and grace; the relation of Jew and Gentile; and the liberty of the Gospel. It will be seen that this is a grouping of subject matter and style. It is true that Galatians falls within this group to some extent. But it does not follow that because an epistle belongs to the same type, it belongs to the same date. The subject matter and style of an epistle depend on the cause that evoked it. Granted similarity of cause and the same writer, the resultant method of argument and style of writing will be the same. This is the case in 1 and 2 Corinthians which resemble Galatians chiefly in their tone.

Lightfoot, arguing in detail, selected Romans and 2 Corinthians as being closer to Galatians than 1 Corinthians, but admitted "In the case of the second epistle to the Corinthians the similarity consists not so much in words and arguments as in tone and feeling". As has been said, "tone and feeling", when a writer's character is formed, give no indication of date of writing. In both 2 Corinthians and Galatians St. Paul is refuting those who deny his apostleship. It is natural that both epistles should share a sharpness of tone and tensivity of feeling.

In Romans there is none of the vehement personal intense feeling against his detractors, but instead, a deliberate and restrained argument waged with a hypothetical Judaiser. Romans does not resemble Galatians in tone nor share its intensity of feeling; but the verbal similarities and the train of argument of the two epistles are very close. Plainly Romans is an expansion and generalisation of Galatians. It was this that compelled Lightfoot to connect the two in date. But such a connection is not necessary. If Galatians is early, that is *c.* A.D. 47, it would be St. Paul's first theological treatise, and it is intrinsically likely that he kept a copy of it. The epistle contains, in a systematic argument, St. Paul's doctrinal position.

His subsequent epistles dealt with disconnected practical topics. The Apostle must often have thought of composing an amplified treatise, but the opportunity did not come till towards the end of the third missionary journey. He then wrote Romans using his copy of Galatians as a base and sent it to the Church at Rome as the most strategically placed Church in the Empire.

III

Many different arguments come together to show that the epistle was written early. Its date would be *c.* 47, soon after the return from St. Paul's and St. Barnabas' missionary tour recorded in Acts xiii.—xiv.; the place of writing would be Antioch; and the Judaising mission in Galatia, part of the same movement described in Acts xv. 1 where "certain men" came to Antioch and "taught the brethren 'Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses ye cannot be saved.'" The arguments enshrined in Galatians would have been developed by St. Paul in the "no small dissension and questioning" which he had with them.

Thus the epistle was written to the Churches of the south part of the Roman Province of Galatia; but a strong argument advanced against this conclusion is that *St. Luke, recounting St. Paul's movements subsequent to the Council at Jerusalem, clearly indicates that he visited North Galatia.* The argument is as follows:—

(*a*) Acts xvi. 1–5 recounts St. Paul's visits to the cities of South Galatia, when he entrusted to them the decrees of the council. In Acts xvi. 6 St. Luke begins a new paragraph "And they went through the Phrygian and Gallic land". Διήλθον δὲ τὴν φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν. This has been taken as a recapitulation of the previous five verses. But it cannot be this. The intensive preposition, and the finite form of the verb indicate that the travellers were making a new departure. The participle διελθόντες, which could perhaps be interpreted as summing the previous verses, is read in the *Textus Receptus*, but the form διήλθον δέ, has overwhelming MSS. authority (⌘ BCDE 81).

(*b*) The belief that St. Paul visited North Galatia is strengthened by St. Luke's careful use of words. He prefers in general the ancient district names to the new-fangled Roman

nomenclature. Names like Mysia, Pisidia, Phrygia, were ancient district names, not the names of Roman provinces. Thus it is *a priori* probable that "Galatia" in Acts refers to the ancient district rather than the Roman province, and is clinched by St. Luke's use, in the *same verse* (xvi. 6) of Asia, not of the province, but of the district.

(c) In Acts xiii-xiv is the account of St. Paul's visit to the cities of South Galatia. They were Galatian only because they were within the Roman province. Therefore it is not surprising that St. Luke does not use the name "Galatia" but the old district names. He speaks of "Antioch of Pisidia" (xiii. 14) and Lystra and Derbe "cities of Lycaonia," (xiv. 6). In xvi. 6 and xviii. 23 St. Luke says that St. Paul visited "the Galatian district": (τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν.) It is inconceivable that he should be so inconsistent as to use two systems of nomenclature for the same places. ἡ Γαλαπκὴ χώρα must refer to North Galatia. Confidence in St. Luke's accuracy in detail is confirmed by the very order of his words. In xvi. 6 he writes τὴν φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν; in xviii. 23 when the direction of St. Paul's journey is reversed, τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ φρυγίαν.

(d) The phrase ἡ Γαλατικὴ χώρα, which St. Luke uses in both passages is curious, and its meaning is not clear. If St. Luke meant to indicate the Roman province, the natural words would be ἡ Γαλατία, or, more exactly, ἡ Γαλατικὴ ἐπαρχία. The use of the phrase ἡ Γ. χώρα seems to indicate that St. Luke deliberately wished to exclude the idea of the Roman province. The Revised Version translates "the region of Galatia". But it is more literally, "the Galatian country", i.e., the district inhabited by the Galatians.

There is one further minor point confirming the belief that St. Paul visited North Galatia. In xviii. 23 St. Paul "went through the region of Galatia and Phrygia". In xix. 1 he is spoken of as having made this journey through the upper country τὰ ἀνωτερικὰ μέρη. The phrase calls attention to the fact that St. Paul made a journey into the interior and did not take the direct route to Ephesus which led through South Galatia. Confirmation that this is the right interpretation of τὰ ἀνωτερικὰ μέρη is found in Col. ii. 1. There we learn that at the time of his captivity St. Paul had visited neither Colossae nor Laodicea. The direct route to Ephesus, however, led down the Lycus valley through both these cities.

The two conclusions so far reached are that St. Paul wrote to the Churches in South Galatia, *c.* A.D. 47, but that St. Luke records two visits to North Galatia, *c.* A.D. 49 and *c.* A.D. 55. Thus St. Paul and St. Luke use the word Galatia in two different senses, to refer to two different districts. Nor is this inconceivable, for the term could have these two connotations. It is not unlikely that St. Paul, writing in *c.* A.D. 47, completely independent of St. Luke, (whom he does not seem to have met till two years later), should have used the word in a different sense to the other writer. Indeed, it is intrinsically probable. For St. Paul was a Roman citizen and without the antiquarian bent of the historian. ἡ Γαλατία, the Roman provincial name, was the natural word for him to use when referring in the first epistle to the Corinthians, (xvi. 1), and again in Galatians 1. 2, to the Churches of that province. Similarly, in addressing his readers he calls them Γαλαταί (iii. 1). There was no other term which St. Paul could use. "Pisidians" would exclude the Churches in Lystra and Derbe; "Lycaonians" those of Antioch and Pamphylia.

St. Luke was under no such necessity. He was an historian, meticulous, careful of detail. Over and over again he prefers the district name to the Roman name. As we saw, he does not speak of Antioch, Lystra and Derbe as cities of Galatia, but of "Pisidia", and "Lycaonia", reserving "Galatia" for its ancient designation of the district inhabited by the Celtic Galatians.

If this conclusion is correct, that St. Paul and St. Luke refer to two different places when the one speaks of ἡ Γαλατία and the other of ἡ Γαλατικὴ χώρα—it is of great moment, for it removes the one argument of any strength against the early date of the Epistle. In fact, the whole question of whether in Acts xvi. 6 and xviii. 23 St. Luke is referring to North or South Galatia has no bearing on the date of the epistle, once it is seen that St. Paul's use of Γαλατία is independent of what St. Luke recounts in Acts xvi and xviii.

Thus the early date of the epistle is confirmed, and with it a great deal follows, especially our view of the development of theology in the early Church, and in the mind of St. Paul himself.

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