

# Paul and Jerusalem: A Case Study

## Acts

The Acts of the Apostles reports three visits of Paul to Jerusalem up to and including the 'Council' of Acts 15. Acts 9:26-30 describes Paul's initial visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. During the visit he is presented to the Jerusalem church by Barnabas and then preaches widely to the 'Hellenists', which leads a threat to his life. Paul is then packed off to Tarsus.

Later Barnabas fetches Saul from Tarsus to Antioch, from where Paul and Barnabas are sent with a collection to relieve the famine in Judea (Acts 11:25-30)

The visit to Jerusalem in Acts 15, then, appears to be at least the third visit by Paul to Jerusalem according to Acts. In this visit a decision is reached about the Gentile mission is reached - circumcision is not necessary, but Gentile Christians are bound by some rules which seem to have some ritual significance - to refrain from fornication, blood, the meat of strangled animals, and that which is sacrificed to idols. (15:20-21.29). The food restrictions would seem to have implications for table fellowship.

## Galatians

In Galatians the story appears to be somewhat different. Paul gives his own partial account of this early history in Gal 1:11-2:10. In Paul's own account there is a three-year gap between his conversion and his first visit to Jerusalem (1:18) - a relatively brief visit of 15 days when he only saw Peter and James (1:19). Following this he says he moved on to "Syria and Cilicia" (21). Tarsus is in Cilicia so this seems to match the first visit described in Acts.

Then Paul mentions a second visit "fourteen years later" in which Paul communicated his gospel "in private" to the "acknowledged leaders" (2:2). These - Peter, James and John are explicitly mentioned (2:9) - have nothing to add to Paul's message but, recognising the grace given to Paul, agree a 'division of labour' - Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles, Peter to the 'circumcised' (2:7). Finally they ask Paul to "remember the Poor", something Paul says he was "eager to do" (2:10)

## Comparing the Meetings

It is immediately apparent that the meeting described in Galatians 2 does not seem to tie up with either of the later two visits described in Acts. The second visit in Acts is connected with a collection, but there the Collection is being brought to Jerusalem, whereas in Galatians a collection is requested during the visit, Acts says nothing about any other aspect of the second visit.

On the other hand the third visit in Acts - which is most commonly associated with the visit described in Galatians - is about the question of what is required of the Gentiles, something which appears to be the subject of the second meeting in Galatians. Nevertheless there are significant differences. Acts describes a public meeting in which certain things were required whereas Paul describes a private meeting in which nothing was added.

### **Table Fellowship**

The strain between the accounts becomes more acute when we consider the question of table fellowship addressed by both accounts. As we have seen, three of the 'requirements' of the 'Council of Jerusalem' concern food to be avoided. Acts presents Paul as agreeing to this, and even as bearing the decree to Antioch.<sup>1</sup> Avoiding certain types of food restricts table fellowship, yet in Galatians 2:11-14 Paul speaks of rebuking Peter for such behaviour.

It should be noted at this point, however, that Paul appears to be fairly sympathetic towards an accommodation on dietary issues in 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14. Here, however, the message is directed to Gentile Christians as a pragmatic principle to avoid scandal and misunderstanding, whereas in Acts it seems to be a basic and unalterable law.

### **Possible Solutions**

#### *Galatians 2 = Acts 11*

This solution assumes Luke is basically accurate, if brief, in describing Paul's second visit to Jerusalem and Galatians fills out some details that Luke fails to mention at this point.<sup>2</sup> The argument turns partly on the fact that Paul speaks of a private meeting in Galatians 2, whereas Acts 15 appears to be a public meeting. This, however, raises some serious questions. It leads to the almost inevitable conclusion that Galatians was written before the Council described in Acts 15 - which would then be seen as a response to the Antioch incident in Gal 2:11-14. But if this is the case then Paul's message of salvation without circumcision was completely accepted by the Jerusalem Church on Paul's second visit. Why then is it under discussion again in Acts 15? A straight identification of Gal 2 and Acts 11 seems implausible.

#### *Galatians 2 = Acts 15*

The majority of scholars accept this solution in some form. It requires that either Paul has failed to mention the trip from Antioch in Acts 11 or (as most seem to suggest) Luke's chronology is awry at this point. The central issue of both meetings seems to be that of circumcision, and differences of detail can be dealt with in one of two ways.

- i) The 'private meeting' of Gal 2:2 only formed part of the overall council. In this model the "false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus" (2:4) would have been 'gate-crashers' of that private meeting who nevertheless did not prevail<sup>3</sup>
- ii) Luke, looking back, is presenting the meeting (and decision) as much more public than it actually was (he does a similar thing with the first meeting). This is a tempting solution, since if the decision had been a very public, central decision it seems surprising that Paul

<sup>1</sup> Paul in Acts even uses it in a later 'apologia' (21:15)

<sup>2</sup> This solution is defended by the commentaries of F. F. BRUCE (NIGTC Exeter 1982) pp. 43-56 and LONGENECKER (WBC, Dallas, 1990) pp. Lxxvii-lxxxiii. Cf. the commentary of Dunn (Blacks, London, 1993) p. 88

<sup>3</sup> DUNN suggests this. *Galatians*. p.93

continued to have problems over the issue. On the other hand we need to be careful not to impose on the early Church a uniformity which did not exist.

Neither of these solutions addresses the issue of table fellowship. Clearly that remained an issue after the Council, at least in Paul's communities, which once again raises questions about Luke's presentation of the wide dissemination of the decree after the Council.

*Acts 11*  $\cong$  *Galatians 2*  $\cong$  *Acts 15*

That is to say Luke's presentation of the story has gathered elements together which do not belong together in a strictly historical sense, and also perhaps kept separate things which belong together - perhaps because he got the information from various sources. This is the argument of David Catchpole.<sup>4</sup> Catchpole also argues that Paul could have had nothing to do with the 'Apostolic Decree' since such a decree would appear to conflict with Paul's basic principles, stated very clearly in Galatians. Catchpole argues that the prohibitions of the decree are dependent on the Mosaic Law for Gentiles living among the Jews (Lev 17:8.10-12) Thus although the decree does not require Gentiles to become Jews, "any Christian theology which recognises these requirements is fundamentally Mosaic".<sup>5</sup> This would have been anathema to Paul, since the Christian is free of the Law. Luke retains the distinction between Jew and Gentile throughout his work and indeed throughout his presentation of Paul, yet Paul himself argues that the distinction has been destroyed. So while the Lukan theology of the decree might be Mosaic, it is equally possible that the original context of the decree may have been more pragmatic. It is "the minimum degree of law observance reckoned necessary to enable conscientious Jews to consort with Gentiles".<sup>6</sup>

But if Paul had been aware of and supported the 'Apostolic Decree' he could hardly have taken Peter to task for following it. Gal 2:11-14 tells us that Paul would have had no part in such an imposition of Jewish requirements on Gentiles. His issue with food sacrificed to idols is to do with confusing other Gentiles – that is to prevent giving the impression that it is OK for a Christian to continue to worship other deities.

Given that the issuing of the Apostolic Decree is almost certainly an historical event Catchpole concludes that a later meeting without Paul came to the accommodation outlined in it. Luke's representation of Paul as supporting it seems to fly in the face of Paul's own writing, especially as Luke presents it in Acts 21 in terms of Paul's continuing observance of the Law, with ongoing separate requirements for Jew and Gentile. But it does fit in with Paul's pragmatic approach in a Gentile context.

### **Disagreement in Antioch**

Following the Council Acts 15:36-40 describes a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. This is presented as being connected with whether John Mark should join them, and the disagreement becomes sharp enough to cause them to separate. Galatians also mentions a disagreement with Barnabas, but in this case it is over a more substantial issue, and the issue is table fellowship. When Paul rebukes Peter he remarks "even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy" (Gal 2:13).

---

<sup>4</sup> "Paul, James and the Apostolic Decree" in *NTS* 23(1977) pp. 428-444

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.* p.429

<sup>6</sup> DUNN *The Acts of the Apostles* (Epworth, Peterborough, 1996) p. 208

While the two could be entirely separate events, Paul mentions Barnabas with particular surprise, which would seem to suggest that there was no rift between them prior to this point. In Paul's account James also comes under censure. 'People from James' are the cause of what Paul regards as hypocritical behaviour. Given that the 'apostolic decree' came from James, at least according to Acts and that its contents would have had an effect on table fellowship, are these perhaps two angles on the same event?

Paul never mentions the outcome of this disagreement, which would lead one to believe that he did not prevail. Even if this event is not directly linked to the apostolic decree, the issuing of such a decree at any stage suggests that the consensus in the early Church – at least in Palestine – was not as radical as Paul might have liked.

### **INTERIM CONCLUSIONS**

What does this tell us about Luke the historian? Firstly that Luke seems not to have "made anything up". But at the same time his arrangement of the information he has does not always seem to be in accordance with the chronology and connections we can determine from other sources. Given that Luke exercised a similar freedom with Mark's Gospel we can begin to understand that Luke's idea of putting things 'in order' is more than a mere chronological concept.

But another almost inescapable conclusion is that Luke cannot have known Paul very well. For it seems almost inconceivable that a close travelling companion of Paul would present Paul as agreeing to, and even promulgating, the 'Apostolic Decree'. This would suggest that Luke is not an 'eyewitness' himself, despite the 'we' passages in Acts 20-21. This is not a particularly radical conclusion. Luke, in his prologue to the Gospel, which surely applies to Acts as well, never suggests that he himself is a primary source of information. He presents himself as a sifter and arranger of reliable material from elsewhere. Thus our primary source for any study of Paul are his letters. Acts can only really act as secondary confirmation

### **CONSTRUCTING A BIOGRAPHY**

Acts, therefore, although a source of reliable information about the history of early Christians, is nevertheless not always a reliable history in itself. This is because it has been assembled out of a multitude of traditions by someone who had no first hand experience of the events behind those traditions.<sup>7</sup>

If, therefore, we seek to build up an outline biography of St Paul our primary source must be the letters of St Paul and therefore

A fact only suggested in the letters has a status which even the most unequivocal statement of Acts, if not otherwise supported, cannot confer. We may, with proper

---

<sup>7</sup> It is not my intention, nor is there scope here, to argue this case beyond the explorations we have already made about Paul's trips to Jerusalem, save to say that this is much the same situation as with the Gospel. Luke as used the material in the Gospel according to a theological schema, and much the same appears to be the case in Acts. For a discussion of the issues leading to this conclusion see e.g. LÜDEMANN *Early Christianity*. For a more favourable analysis of the historicity of acts see FITZMYER *The Acts of the Apostles* (Anchor, Doubleday, NY, pp. 129-147. Murphy O'Connor outlines his approach in *Paul: A Critical Life* p. vi

caution, use Acts to supplement the autobiographical data of the letters, but never to correct them.<sup>8</sup>

With this in mind we will follow Murphy-O'Connor's reconstruction of the life of Paul using the letters as the primary source.<sup>9</sup>

## **DATING PAUL**

### **Birth**

I, Paul, do this as an old man (Philemon 9)

An 'old man' by contemporary reckoning in the first century, would have been in his late fifties or perhaps early sixties. If Philemon was written in the mid fifties (O'Connor argues 53), then Paul's date of birth would have been a few years BCE, that is to say at about the same time as Christ.<sup>10</sup>

### **Damascus and Jerusalem**

In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded the city of Damascus in order to seize me, but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands. (II Cor 11:32-33)

When God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. (Gal 1:15-18)

Aretas became ruler of the Nabataeans in 9 BCE and reigned for 48 years, therefore he died about 39 CE. This provides a latest possible date for the event described by Paul. The text also states that Aretas had control of Damascus, which implies the Nabataeans had control of the city. But Tiberius, who died on 16/3/37 did not use 'client kings' on the eastern frontier of the empire, whereas his successor, Gaius (Caligula), did. Thus we have an earliest possible date of 37 CE. We can further speculate that Paul's move from Arabia to Damascus was caused by his 'getting into trouble' with the Nabataeans, and that once the Nabataeans had control of Damascus he was forced to flee. This would place Paul's departure from Damascus (and first trip to Jerusalem) in 37.

Paul states that he was in Damascus for three years, therefore we can date Paul's stay in Arabia to 34, which gives a conversion date of 33-34. One final date we can gain from these texts is Paul's second visit to Jerusalem. He states it was another 14 years to his next visit and so we have 51 as the date for that visit.

These are all the dates we can discern directly from the letters,<sup>11</sup> so we now turn to Acts.

---

<sup>8</sup> J. KNOX *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (Abbingdon, New York, 1950) p.32 quoted in J MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life* p. Vi Even if my analysis of Acts is, perhaps, over sceptical, this principle is still a sound one.

<sup>9</sup> LÜDEMANN makes a similar reconstruction in *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles*. Roetzel, in dialogue with O'Connor, also comes to different conclusions in places in *Paul: The Man and the Myth*

<sup>10</sup> MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life* pp.1-4

<sup>11</sup> Cf. MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life* 4-8

### **Corinth and the Edict of Claudius**

Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. (Acts 18:1-2)

Suetonius<sup>12</sup> states that Claudius “expelled from Rome the Jews constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus” (*Claudius* 25:4), but does not mention a date. Orosius<sup>13</sup> says it was in the 9<sup>th</sup> Year of Claudius (i.e. 49),<sup>14</sup> but he appears to be working backwards from the information supplied by Eusebius, which is in turn based on Acts. So Orosius is using the dating of Gallio in Acts to work out the date, and hence is not an independent attestation of the date. Further, the annals of Tacitus mention no such event in 49.

Dio Cassius does speak of an impending disturbance among the Jews in 41 which has some parallels with the edict mentioned by Suetonius

As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly by reason of their multitude that it would have been hard without a raising a tumult to expel them from the city, he did not drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditions, not to hold meetings (*History* 60.6.6)

The account disagrees with Suetonius on several points, but is also dubious in itself. It gives no reason for the action, Jews had right of assembly by law, and Jewish citizens could not be expelled from Rome in any case.

What happened? According to the most natural reading of Suetonius only the troublemakers were expelled, but it can also be read to say all were expelled. Perhaps Dio Cassius knew that no such mass expulsion occurred and is correcting that impression. Further, we know that in Rome there were 13 independent synagogues. Any action may only have affected one of these, probably expelling the Christian missionaries (hence “Chrestus”) who were causing the trouble, and perhaps revoking that synagogue’s right of assembly for a while.

Interestingly, Philo, writing in Rome in 41, comments on the fact that Augustus never expelled Jews from Rome, nor did he forbid their assembly. Further, while Claudius appears to be reasonably well disposed to the Jews, he does recommend moderation and warn them about getting ideas above their station. Particularly he warns them not to protest against pagan practises. So a restraining action by Claudius would be in character at least.

If, then, we can date the edict to 41<sup>15</sup> The information in Acts should lead to the conclusion that Paul arrived in Corinth not long after, say about 42. Unfortunately this does not appear to give enough time for the pre-Corinthian phase of Paul’s missionary activity. Thus either the association of Paul’s meeting with Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth with the expulsion from Rome is simply mistaken, or at the timescale is longer than Acts ‘recently’ implies. Given that Luke gets his historical anchors and timescales wrong elsewhere - most notoriously with the census at the time of Jesus birth - such a conclusion

---

<sup>12</sup> Roman biographer & antiquarian, born ca. 70CE

<sup>13</sup> Christian Historian, 5<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>14</sup> *historiae adversus paganos* 7.6.15-16

<sup>15</sup> LÜDEMANN, arrives at this date in *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles* pp.164-171 as well as MURPHY-O’CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life* pp. 9-15

is certainly possible.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless the fact of the expulsion of Jews from Rome is useful information in helping to understand other questions in the study of Paul.

### Corinth and Gallio

But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. (Acts 18:12)

When was this? Fragments of an inscription have been found at Delphi:

Tiber[ius Claudius Caes]ar Au[gust]us Ge[rmanicus, invested with the tribunican po]wer [for the 12<sup>th</sup> time, acclaimed Imperator for t]he 26<sup>th</sup> time, father of the father[land... sends greetings to...]. For a l[ong time I have been not onl]y [well disposed toward t]he ci[ty] of Delph[i, but also solicitous for its pro]sperity, and I have always guar[ded th]e cul[t of t]he [Pythian] Apol[lo. But] now [since] it is said to be desti[tu]te of [citi]zens, as [L. Ju]nius Gallio, my fri[end] an[d procon]sul, [recently reported to me, and being desirous that that Delphi] should continue to retain [inta]ct its for[mer rank, I] ord[er you to in]vite [well born people from ot]her cities [to Delphi as ne inhabitants and to] all[ow] them [and their children to have all the] privileges of Delphi as being citi[zens on equal and like (basis)].<sup>17</sup>

<sup>18</sup>

Since Roman emperors were invested with Tribunican power every year, and Claudius first year of such investiture was 25/1/41 to 24/1/42, then we can date the 12<sup>th</sup> year as 25/1/52 to 24/1/53. However this is itself a reconstruction. Acclamations happen after military victories. Another inscription dated 1/8/52 mentions a 27<sup>th</sup> acclamation so this gives us a latest possible date of July 52. Military campaigns were not fought in winter so if, as seems likely, the 26<sup>th</sup> acclamation happened during the 12<sup>th</sup> year<sup>19</sup> we have an earliest date of April 52.

Proconsuls were appointed for a year July-June. Given that Claudius' reply cannot have been earlier than Gallio's report, that latest possible year for his proconsulship is July 51 to June 52. It could be earlier but other factors mitigate against this. Gallio's brother, Seneca was exiled by Claudius until 49, and that family disgrace would have it unlikely that Gallio could have been appointed Proconsul. This leads us to an earliest proconsulship of 50-51. Further, Claudius seems to have been both fond of Achaia and concerned for local cults, of which the cult at Delphi was a particularly notable and famous example. Thus it seems likely that Claudius responded quickly to the report. Thus we can date Gallio's proconsular appointment to 51/52.

One final piece of information narrows down the dating of the encounter with Paul. Gallio did not actually see out his time in Achaia. According to his brother

When, in Achaia, he began to feel feverish, he immediately took ship, claiming that it was not a malady of the body but of the place.<sup>20</sup>

Given that sea travel was only really possible in the summer, it seems likely that Gallio left Corinth before late autumn 51. Thus we can date Gallio's stay in Corinth as summer 51.

<sup>16</sup> MURPHY-O'CONNOR'S conclusion. LÜDEMANN differs. (*Early Christianity* p.10-12)

<sup>17</sup> See MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life*, pp. 15f, cf. Also FITZMYER "Paul" in *NJBC* 1330. The bits in brackets are reconstructions.

<sup>18</sup> See MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life*, pp. 15f,

<sup>19</sup> Any other conclusion would give a rather uneven spread of acclamations – see MURPHY-O'CONNOR p. 17

<sup>20</sup> See MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life*, p. 19

According to Acts Paul left Corinth for Jerusalem after the encounter with Gallio, and this would fit with a dating of Paul's second visit to Jerusalem in 51. In the light of this, and with no reason to suppose that Acts assertion that Paul was there 18 months is very wide of the mark we can date Paul's initial stay in Corinth as spring 50 to autumn 51.

### **Trial in Judea**

"Take him safely to Felix the governor." (Acts 23:24)

After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. (Acts 24:27)

Felix's accession to the governorship seems, in Josephus, to be immediately prior the grant of territory to Agrippa, which took place, it seems in 53. So we can date Felix's arrival at late 52 or early 53. Festus died in office in 62. When did power change hands? According to Josephus

Porcius Festus was sent as successor to Felix by Nero (*Antiquities* 20:182)

Which means it must have been after 13/10/54. According to Murphy O'Connor, Eusebius dates events subsequent to Felix's demotion to Nero's second year, but Eusebius is out by 4 years on Nero's reign, which would suggest the 6<sup>th</sup> year in reality.<sup>21</sup> (59-60). This fits with a change in local coinage some time in Nero's fifth year (58-59) making 59 the best, if somewhat tenuous, candidate for this year of change of governance. If Paul was indeed in custody two years this means he was arrested in Jerusalem in 57

### **Filing in the gaps (i), 37 - 51**

after three years I did go up to Jerusalem... Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (Gal 1:18.21)

This gives us Paul's itinerary immediately after his first Jerusalem visit.

We did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you. (Gal 2:5)

This summary of the debate at the Jerusalem council implies that the gospel had already begun among the Galatians, which dates Paul's evangelisation of Galatia as prior to the Jerusalem council. Galatia is west of "the regions of Syria and Cilicia" so it is reasonable to conclude that Galatia was indeed the next stop, a fact that Paul would not need to point out to the Galatians.

Paul's arrival among the Galatians was unplanned.

You know that it was because of a physical infirmity that I first announced the gospel to you (Gal 4:13)

This means he was going somewhere else at the time and fell ill. Presumably he continued his journey thereafter, but where too?

---

<sup>21</sup> *Paul: A Critical Life* p.23. I can't find a reference to the date in Eusebius (Book II chapter XXII). A footnote in the *ECF* translation of Eusebius states "The exact year of the accession of Festus is not known, but it is known that his death occurred before the summer of 62 A.D.; for at that time his successor, Albinus, was already procurator, as we can see from Josephus, *B. J.* VI. 5. 3. But from the events recorded by Josephus as happening during his term of office, we know he must have been procurator at least a year; his accession, therefore, took place certainly as early as 61 A.D., and probably at least a year earlier, i.e. in 60 A.D., the date fixed by Wieseler. The widest possible margin for his accession is from 59-61. Upon this whole question, see Wieseler, p. 66 sqq. Festus died while in office. He seems to have been a just and capable governor,—in this quite a contrast to his predecessor."

You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi. (1 Th 2:1-2)

So Paul went from Philippi to Thessalonica ( both of which are in Macedonia)

Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens (1 Th 3:1)

So Paul was in Athens some time after Thessalonica. The letter appears to have been written from a different, unnamed location. Paul's singular anxiety for the Thessalonian church suggests that (i) it is new and (ii) Paul has as yet made no other 'foundations' - this is this is his first trip into Europe.

You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once.

So the Philippians sent assistance to Paul both in Thessalonica and beyond - i.e. in Achaia. Paul speaks of being supported by Macedonians in II Cor

And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for my needs were supplied by the friends who came from Macedonia. (11:9)

This must refer to his first stay, as his second stay (II Cor 1:23-2:1) was brief and would not have required this type of support. There is, however, an apparent contradiction with 1 Cor 9:15-18 where Paul claims to have been self-supporting. However that text only explicitly states that Paul was not supported by the Corinthians. In II Corinthians it seems Paul has been 'found out' - that his claim to be self-supporting is not quite as it meets the eye. In his first trip he was, in fact, subsidised from Macedonia.

Thus we can reconstruct a trip beginning in Antioch in which Paul founded the churches of Galatia, Philippi and Thessalonica, then passed through Athens and finally came to found the church at Corinth. Finally he travels to Jerusalem. This pattern actually fits with the journey described in Acts as occurring after the Jerusalem council (16-18) so we can reasonably safely insert the other stops on that journey.

Dating the journey is difficult. Working backwards we know that Paul left Corinth in the autumn of 51, and so he arrived there in the spring of 50. This would have meant that he spent at least the winter of 49-50 in Macedonia. But given the close relationship betrayed by the letters it seems likely that we need to suggest at least another year. Thus we can place a latest realistic date of arrival as summer or autumn 48. The journey from Galatia would have been some 6 weeks so a late spring departure from Galatia in 48 seems likely. We already know that Paul was in Galatia by accident from an illness, and given his missionary activity in founding a number of churches (Gal 1:2 refers to a plurality) as well as (presumably serious) illness we can reasonably suggest at least two winters there also. This takes us back to the autumn of 46 as the latest reasonable date for his arrival in Galatia.

The journey from Antioch to Galatia would have taken the best part of two months, longer if stops in Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra and Phrygia are taken into account (Acts 15:41, 16:1.6) so we have a departure from Antioch in early summer 46 at the earliest.

On the basis of this (minimum) time scale the idea of this being an earlier Corinthian mission in 41 becomes impossible, since it does not allow sufficient time to get there after

Paul's first trip to Jerusalem in 37. A further observation is that in 1 Thessalonians Paul does not assert his apostolic status in the way he does in other letters - notably Galatians. This would suggest that the trip occurred before the split at Antioch mentioned in Galatians.

What happened in the 'hidden years' between 37 and 46 is another question, although we should bear in mind that our dating so far has been on a 'shortest reasonable' basis, and that any of the stages could have been longer.

### **Filling the gaps (ii) 51-57**

Paul went from Jerusalem to Antioch - both Galatians and Acts attest to this - and presumably wintered there. We also know from Galatians that the collection was agreed upon at Jerusalem, and so any mention of the collection in the letters must refer to 'post conciliar' travels. This we have in respect of Ephesus. Paul after instructing the Corinthians about the collection indicates that he is writing from Ephesus.

But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (1 Cor 16:8-9).

Acts reports that Paul went to Ephesus after Antioch via Galatia ('the high country' of Asia Minor 18:23), which fits in with Paul's statement:

Concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. (1 Cor 16:1)

This implies he had already passed through Galatia. He could thus have reached Ephesus by the summer of 52

If Paul indeed spent 2 years 3 months in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10) then he finally left in the autumn of 54, which is later than his stated plan of 'after Pentecost'. However it is this point that we can place the short, painful trip to Corinth that we see in II Cor 1:23-2:1, 12:14, 13:1-2.

II Corinthians is generally regarded to be a composite letter, with 10-13 being part of a later letter than 1-9. In the first of these Paul make reference to Troas and Macedonia.

When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia. (II Cor 2:12-13, cf. 7:9)

By this stage it must have been autumn and so Paul would have wintered in Macedonia. II Cor 1-9 appears to have been written from Macedonia, and makes reference to the generosity of the collection there.

For I know your eagerness, which is the subject of my boasting about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year; and your zeal has stirred up most of them. But I am sending the brothers in order that our boasting about you may not prove to have been empty in this case, so that you may be ready, as I said you would be; otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—in this undertaking. So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you, and arrange in advance for this bountiful gift that you have promised, so that it may be ready as a voluntary gift and not as an extortion. (9:2-5)

This indicates some level of reconciliation based presumably on encouraging reports. A date of Spring 55 for the letter would then seem appropriate.

Paul planned a third visit to Corinth, which is in view in II Cor 1-9 (9:4), and which is imminent in II Cor 10-13

Here I am, ready to come to you this third time (12:14, cf. 13:1-2).

This trip appears to have taken place, for we have in Romans

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem (15:25-26)

This would suggest he did get to pick up the collection, despite the serious problems witnessed to by II Cor 10-13. Romans also mentions a missionary endeavour in Illyricum (5:19) from which Paul may have heard about the crisis in Corinth which led to his third visit. This would place Paul in Corinth in the Autumn of 55, where he would have stayed until the following spring, and from where Romans is generally thought to have been written. Paul is somewhat concerned whether the gift would be accepted.

Join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf... that my ministry to Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints (16:30-31)

However we can conclude that he did travel once again to Jerusalem at the earliest in 56, though 57 is also possible if one of the periods mentioned here is longer than we have allowed for. Indeed this may be more likely, for it seems more probable that Paul got into trouble fairly quickly in Rome. However Murphy-O'Connor suggests 56, and we will stay with this.

### **The Final Picture**

Putting all together so far we have:

33/4 - 37	Conversion Arabia - Damascus
37	Jerusalem
37-45?	Syria & Cilicia
Winter 45-46	Antioch
Summer 46	Journey to Galatia
Summer 46 - spring 48	Galatia
Summer 48	Journey to Macedonia
Summer 48 - spring 50	Macedonia
Spring 50 - summer 51	Corinth
Autumn 51	Jerusalem (the Council)
Winter 51-52	Antioch
Spring 52	Journey to Ephesus
Summer 52 - 54	Ephesus
Winter 54-55	Macedonia
Summer 55	Illyricum
Winter 55-56	Corinth
Spring 56	Journey to Jerusalem
57	Arrest in Jerusalem
57-59	Prison in Caesarea <sup>22</sup>

It must be borne in mind that a lot of 'educated guesswork' has gone into this reconstruction, and Murphy O'Connor's disclaimer, itself borrowed from JAT Robinson, should be noted:

"All the statements... should be taken as questions"<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Combining the tables in MURPHY-O'CONNOR *Paul: A Critical Life* pp. 8, 28 & 31

<sup>23</sup> *Paul: A Critical Life* p.vi

According to Romans Paul intended to go to Rome and from there to Spain. Whether he achieved this objective is far from certain. Murphy-O'Connor makes a case for it, which we may examine at a later date.

## THE EARLY HISTORY

Paul gives us a series of snippets of information about his past.

I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. (Rom 11:1)

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (Php 3:4-6)

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. (II Cor 11:22)

We will examine the impact of Paul's Jewishness on his theology when we study the relevant texts

Acts connects Paul with Tarsus five times (9:11,30,11:25, 21:39 & 22:3). In the latter two he is presented as identifying himself as having been born there.

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia... (22:3a)

This is almost certainly reliable information since, if anything, it goes against Luke's schema. Luke, in fact, would 'prefer' Paul to be a Jerusalemite, and indeed he makes Jerusalem his adopted city.

I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6a)

Note the plural. Since only men could be Pharisees this must refer to an educational or spiritual sonship. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that Pharisees were not found much outside Jerusalem and Judea, so it is unlikely that Paul's Father (in Tarsus) would have been a Pharisee.

Brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law. (Acts 22:3b)

If this is taken to mean that Paul did his elementary schooling in Jerusalem it is inherently improbable, since it was not common practice to send children away for schooling. Further, locating Paul as firmly as possible in Jerusalem suits Luke's theological schema. However, given that Paul was a Pharisee, it is likely that Paul went to Jerusalem to do his 'further studies' at the age of about 14, when he would have been considered an adult. It was not uncommon for young men of that period to complete their education away from home.<sup>24</sup>

It should also be noted that for Paul to state that he was 'a Hebrew born of Hebrews' meant more than simply being an Israelite - it was a narrower cultural and linguistic identification within Judaism. The identifications in Philippians 3 are not synonyms.

We know that Paul was an educated man. The most obvious proof of this is the body of literature he left behind. It demonstrates both an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures

---

<sup>24</sup> MURPHY O'CONNOR *A Critical Life* p. 52

and a more than passing familiarity with the principles of rhetoric. Paul's elementary schooling, which presumably occurred in Tarsus, would have included a large element of rhetoric. A study of rhetoric and letter writing can significantly assist us in our study of Paul.

**Some final notes about Paul's relatives.**

Now the son of Paul's sister heard about the ambush; so he went and gained entrance to the barracks and told Paul. (Acts 23:16)

This would imply that Paul had a nephew living in Jerusalem, which is not inherently improbable, though the way in which he conveniently appears in and subsequently vanishes from the narrative is curious. Whether it also implies Paul's sister is living in Jerusalem is another point. Perhaps he was following the same educational route as his uncle.

Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord, also his mother and mine (Rom 16:13 RSV)

The maternity here is almost certainly metaphorical - as is brought out in the NRSV

Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother – a mother to me also

In any case Rufus is probably the same Rufus as is mentioned in Mk 15:21 as the son of Simon of Cyrene.