

Paul's second visit to Jerusalem

• 13 years after his conversion

• Acts 11 & Galatians 2

Lessons for us

1. **Obedience to God alone but stay in fellowship with others**

Paul now tells the story of the second visit he made to Jerusalem after his conversion. *'Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas, and I took Titus with me also'*¹. *But I went up in response to a revelation ...'*². Paul did go to Jerusalem **'but'** (as we should translate it), it required a word from God before he would go. It was fourteen years after Paul's conversion. The counting is done in a Hebrew way (an English-speaker would say 'thirteen years'). There does not seem to be enough time in the time-scale of Paul's life for the period to be after Paul's first visit to Jerusalem. The time must be thirteen years after his conversion. The date must have been around AD 47.

Is Galatians 2:1–10 the same visit to Jerusalem as the one in Acts 15:2? Or is it to be linked to the famine visit of Acts 11:29–30? I think there are good reasons for preferring the latter view of the matter.

(i) Galatians 2:1–10 is certainly not **identical** to what happened in Acts 15. For Acts 15 tells of a public meeting, but Galatians 2:1–10 tells of a private meeting. For this reason, they cannot be two accounts of exactly the same meeting.

(ii) If the New Testament is reliable – and I believe it is – then Acts 11:29–30 and Galatians 2:1–10 must refer to the same event. For Galatians seems to be giving a fairly complete account of Paul's relationship to Jerusalem. If Galatians 2:1–10 refers to the same time as Acts 15, then Paul has omitted the 'famine visit' altogether. But surely he would not have done that, and the Greek word 'Then' or 'Next' in Galatians 2:1 hardly allows it.

(iii) If Galatians 2:1–10 refers to the meeting mentioned in Acts 15, then why does Paul not say more about the decisions made at that time? The matter may be followed up elsewhere¹ and the teaching of Galatians is the same whichever opinion is held at this point. But it is easier to reconstruct the history and make sense of it if we take it that Galatians 2:1–10 refers to something that took place at the time of Paul's second visit to Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 11:29–30. On any interpretation there is much for us to learn from these events in Paul's life.

1. **In some ways we have to learn to be obedient to God alone, yet stay in fellowship with others.** Paul was not dependent on Jerusalem. He had been called as an apostle in a distinct way. He was called to a particular group of people – the gentiles – and had no need to get permission from Jerusalem in doing his work. He had no special interest in going there at all. But around AD 47 he received a 'revelation' from God. God spoke to him and led him to visit the Christian leaders in Jerusalem and get their support for his work. Paul was not dependent on Jerusalem but he was ready to go there if God led him to do so. There is a balance here. On the one hand Paul did not feel he had to be a Jerusalem-based preacher. He was called to preach independently of any Christian leader in Jerusalem. But on the other hand he was ready, when God led him, to consult with Jerusalem and the Christians there. We would do well to follow

¹ 2:1
² 2:2

Paul's example. On the one hand we are accountable to God one-by-one. 'Each one of us' ¹ will have to answer to God's questions. Yet on the other hand we do well to keep close to other Christians, and get advice from them. We stand firm in our liberty, but we are not to be isolated.

¹ Romans 14:12

2. Cooperation & fellowship in proclaiming the Gospel

2. There is need of cooperation and fellowship in proclaiming the gospel. Paul says, '*But I went up in response to a revelation, and I set before them the gospel that I proclaim among the gentiles. I did so privately among the recognized leaders. I did so out of concern that I should not be running or had not been running in a way that would fail*' ¹. Paul was concerned for the unity of those who were preaching the gospel. He knew that there were 'Judaizers' trying to creep into the church. He also knew that the 'Judaizers' did not really believe the gospel. And he knew that Peter and John and the other Jerusalem leaders **did** believe in the gospel, but there was a danger that unconverted men should slip into the church with a kind of so-called 'Christian faith' that was more like Pharisaism than the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They would then form a kind of 'Judaized' Christianity and would become very opposed to Paul. (From later times there is a collection of writings called the 'Homilies' in the *Clementine Recognitions*, which has a highly Judaized Christianity and which ignores Paul or perhaps even attacks him.) Paul did not want the Jerusalem-leaders to accept a Judaized Christianity and therefore become his enemies. He did not want what he was doing to fail because of the opposition of a rival legalistic semi-Christian Pharisaism.

¹ 2:2

• **Danger of legalism in the form of "so-called Christianity**

• **As much as possible!**

So the point is: Christians need to agree together in the preaching and the practical application of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was concerned to stay in fellowship with the Jerusalem-Christians, get their support and give them any support that was possible. Modern Christians should do the same. We have no interest in false gospels, but those who know the biblical gospel of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should cooperate as much as they can!

Note

¹. See F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Paternoster, 1977), chapter 15; D.A. Carson, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Apollos, 1992), pp. 293–294; R.N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Word, 1990), pp. lxxiii– lxxxviii. A more recent statement is found in the work of Witherington, mentioned above.

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