

"Chronology of the Apostle Paul"

by

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The Acts of the Apostles is very chary in giving chronological information. We find nothing to indicate the date of the conversion of Paul, nor to show the length of time between this event and his first missionary journey, nor how much time this journey occupied. It is not possible, from data in this book, to determine the date of the apostolic convention in Jerusalem. In the meantime Paul himself tells in Gal. 1:18 that a period of three years passed between his conversion and his first visit in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26), and in Gal. 2:1 that his attendance at the apostolic meeting in Jerusalem occurred fourteen years after that date. There is thus a period of seventeen years between his conversion and the apostolic meeting. In Acts we learn that Paul passed some time in Antioch before he entered upon his second missionary journey, travelled through Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, remained a year and a half in Corinth (Acts 15:36; 18:11) and then returned to Antioch. During the third missionary journey, begun shortly after his return from the second, he remained three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31; cfr. 19:8; 10:22), three winter months in Greece (20:3, 6), arrived at Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost (Acts 20:16), was imprisoned and brought to Caesarea, where he was kept under guard for two years (Acts 24:27), then sent to Rome where he arrived in the spring of the following year (28:11), whereupon a delay of two years followed in Rome (Acts 28:30).

If we add these periods we obtain (seventeen plus at least ten years) twenty-seven years, but likely much more. The second missionary journey may have consumed three years, the third probably four years, the visit to Jerusalem, imprisonment in Caesarea, and winter journey to Rome probably in all four years, all of which, including two years at Rome, add up to thirteen years. Thus the period from the conversion of Paul to the expiration of his (first) Roman imprisonment would be about thirty years.

The next step is to find how this period is to be adjusted within the framework of world history. In this we proceed on the assumption that the death of Jesus occurred in the year 30 A.D. The date of the martyrdom of Stephen cannot be ascertained, nor the flight of Paul from Damascus--only that it occurred before the year 39, the year in which King Aretas died (cfr. II Cor. 11:21 sq.). About the one-year activity of Paul together with Barnabas in Antioch, we know that it occurred before Claudius became emperor (January, 41 A.D.), cfr. Acts 11:26, 27 sq. Furthermore, that the journey of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to convey the gift from the Antioch congregation in relief of the famine in Judea, occurred just before or just after the death of King Herod Agrippa (44 A.D.) (Acts 12). According to Josephus, the famine in Judea began while Fadus was governor (44-46).

The connection between Acts 11:30 and 12:25 shows that the journey cannot have taken place before the year 44 and on the other hand not long after the death of King Herod--very probably in the autumn of 44 A.D.

The first missionary journey must have been begun shortly after the return of the two men from Jerusalem to Antioch. At Cyprus they met the proconsul *Sergius Paulus*. Since this man probably was "curator riparum" in Rome in 47 A.D., he must in any event have been governor of Cyprus before that time.

The next chronological clue is that Paul's sojourn in Corinth on his second missionary journey was contemporaneous with the proconsulate of *Gallio*. This was earlier assigned to the year 52-53, A.D. This had no definitely supporting data. But with the discovery of a Delphic inscription, it is now possible to fix this date with considerable certainty. The inscription, which contains an edict from the emperor Claudius to the city of Delphi from the time between January 25 and August 1 in the year 52 A.D., refers to Gallio as proconsul of Achaia. The term of office of the proconsuls was usually one year and their entrance upon their office (not the departure from Rome) ordinarily occurred in the middle of the calendar year (July 1). Since some time must have elapsed from the transmission of the report from Gallio on the basis of which this edict was issued, there can scarcely be any doubt that Gallio must have entered upon his office not in the midsummer of 52 but in that of 51 A.D. He thus may have served as proconsul in Achaia during the year 51-52.¹

How long a time had elapsed between Paul's arrival at Corinth and Gallio's entrance upon his proconsulate, we have no means of knowing definitely. In Acts 18:11, we read that he remained one year and six months at Corinth. Luke says in Acts 18:12: *But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment-seat.* From this we cannot draw the conclusion that this action by the Jews occurred immediately after Gallio had become proconsul. It does not say "when Gallio had become" but "when he *was*," and even less that he became proconsul after the eighteen months had expired. The statement in 18:11 with its precision plainly embraces the entire sojourn of the apostle in Corinth; and according to 18:18, he remained there a good while after Gallio had rejected the attack of the Jews upon him. This period must then be deducted from the eighteen months. On the other hand, it is probable that most of Paul's work in Corinth was done before the time of the Jewish attack upon him, and that they did not wait very long before they had the opportunity, which came to them upon the arrival of a new proconsul more responsive to their demands. From these circumstances it seems rather more probable that the apostle came to Corinth in the year 50 A.D. than in 51. If Paul came to Corinth for instance in the autumn of 50 A.D., he thus departed for Syria in the spring of 52. But it is also possible that he came to

1 See especially A. Deissmann, *Paulus*, p. 159 sq. "Der Prokonsulat des L. Junius Gallio." The edict which the emperor Claudius issued in 42 A.D. to the effect that the new proconsuls should leave Rome before April 1 and which he the following year changed to "before the middle of April," only shows how difficult it was for the government to get these officers started in time to enable them to enter upon their office at the beginning of the term, July 1 (cfr. Mommsen, *Röm. Staatsrecht II*, p. 256). It is therefore a useless calculation that Gallio must have reached Corinth before the first of May (versus Zahn et al.).

Corinth in the spring of 50 A.D. and remained until the autumn of 51. The latter possibility is favored by another chronological fact. On his arrival at Corinth, Paul met a Jew by the name of Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who according to Acts 18:2 had *lately* come from Rome, because the emperor Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. But according to a note by Orosius (Adv. paganos VII, 6, 15), Claudius issued this edict in the ninth year of his office, which was the year 49 A.D. And thus, the farther back we move the date of Paul's arrival at Corinth, the more does it comport with the *lately* in Acts 18:2.

The next clues for our chronology we find in the record of Paul's imprisonment. But they are not by far so reliable as those just considered. As is well known, the apostle, after his arrest in Jerusalem by the Roman commandant, was transferred to *Felix*, the governor in Caesarea, and after having been heard by him, kept in guard two years, until *Festus* succeeded Felix as governor (Acts 23:23 sq.; 24:27). The time when Felix entered upon his office is fairly well known--in the 11th or 12th year of his [Claudius'] office as emperor (51 or 52). (Cfr. Euseb. Chronicle and Josephus Ant. XX, 7, 1.) When Paul made his speech of defense before Felix, he could say that this man *had been of many years a judge unto this nation* (Acts 24:10). The general opinion is that Festus succeeded Felix in the year 60 A.D. Thus Paul's speech of defense must have been delivered in the year 58 A.D. This opinion, however, is contravened by a datum noted above (Gallio's proconsulate). And according to the chronicle of Eusebius (Werke V, translated from Armenian by J. Karst, Leipzig, 1911), Festus was even sent to Judea in the fourteenth year of Claudius' government (54). This, however, cannot be possible; it would be in conflict not only with Acts 24:10 but also with Josephus, who says that Festus, the successor of Felix, was sent by Nero (Ant. XX, 8, 9). But it is not necessary to go as far down as the year 60. It would harmonize well with Acts 24:10 if Felix had not yet been in Judea more than four or five years, in other words, if we place Paul's defense-speech in the year 56 A.D. and the installation of Festus in the year 58.

In such case the arrival of Paul at Rome would be assigned to the spring of 59 and the expiration of his two-year imprisonment in Rome would occur in the spring of 61. In this case there is room left both for his journey to Spain (Rom. 15:24 sq.; I Clem. V, 7), and for the journey to Macedonia, Asia Minor and Greece, as suggested in his pastoral letters. Presumably Paul was a victim of the Neronian persecution, which began some time after the fire in Rome, July, 64 A.D.

If then we reckon backward from the above date (Gallio's installation in relation to Paul's arrival at Corinth), we obtain the following result: One and one-half years before (the spring of) the year 50 A.D. he began his second missionary journey. The apostolic council in Jerusalem must then have occurred in the year 48 A.D. If we subtract 17 years from this we arrive at the year 31 as the date of Paul's conversion. The events which according to Acts 2-8 occurred previous to this, can easily have happened in the course of the year, or year and a half, which intervened between the first Pentecost and the martyrdom of Stephen.