

**"ST. PAUL'S FIRST JOURNEY AS A
NARRATIVE OF TRAVEL"**

by

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Chapter 3

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After these topographical and historical details, it is proposed, as the next part of our task, to go over the first missionary journey as a plain narrative of travel and adventure, and to show how the references, which St. Paul in his letter to the Galatian churches makes to his experiences when he first preached to them, work in with the narrative in Acts xiii. and xiv. to produce a consistent picture. On the theory (which the present writer is concerned to maintain) that Acts xiii., xiv. are founded on, or even embody, with some slight modifications and additions, a document written under the immediate influence of Paul himself, it is absolutely necessary that the epistle should agree with and complete the narrative in Acts. Herein lies what is generally counted one of the strong points of the North-Galatian view: it is contended that the details of the visit to the Galatians mentioned in the epistle are inconsistent with the account of the journey in South Galatia given in Acts xiii., xiv. If that be the case, I fully acknowledge that the North-Galatian view must be adopted, in spite of the numerous difficulties attending it; but then, as I hope to show, it must be admitted that the account of the second journey in Acts xvi. is inaccurate in itself, and written by one who had not access to a trustworthy account of the facts.

Let us try to realize the facts of the journey and the situation of the Apostles. How were they guided on this particular route? At certain points in this and in other journeys we are told what was the guiding impulse; a vision led Paul from Asia into Europe; the Spirit ordered him not to preach in Asia, and not even to enter Bithynia. In the first journey they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit "for the work whereunto I have called them"; and Paul explains in Galatians that the work was to preach among the Gentiles (i. 16ff). There can be no doubt that the expression in Gal. i. 15, 16 tallies exactly with that in Acts xiii. 1, and that it would be appropriate for Paul to address to the churches which he founded on his first missionary journey an elaborate argument in favour of his special call to Gentile work.¹

It is not stated that the Holy Spirit prescribed the details of the route. How then should Paul and Barnabas proceed? To leave Syria they must go first to Seleuceia, the harbour of Antioch, where they would find ships going south to the Syrian coast and Egypt, and west either by way of Cyprus or along the coast of Asia Minor. The western route led towards the Roman world, to which all Paul's subsequent history proves that he considered himself called by the Spirit. The Apostles embarked in a ship for Cyprus, which was very closely connected by commerce and general intercourse with the Syrian coast. After traversing the island from east to west, they must go onward. Ships going westward naturally went across to the coast of Pamphylia, and the Apostles, after reaching Paphos, near the west end of Cyprus, sailed in one of these ships, and landed at Attalia in Pamphylia.

In the east a man with a day's journey before him always rises early in the morning; and similarly we may feel fairly confident that in view of this great expedition the Apostles started early in the year, in April, when the season for navigation began.² It is not possible to allow less than two months in

¹ I do not argue that it would be less appropriate in writing to other churches. I am only concerned to show that it is appropriate on the South-Galatian theory.

² C. H. [Conybeare & Howson] adopt this view.

Cyprus, where they preached in the Jewish synagogues along their route. We must allow a certain time in each of the Jewish settlements to enable the Apostles to test the feeling of the town before they proceeded on their way in search of a favourable opening; and yet, if the document possesses vividness and direct accuracy, it is hardly consistent with the language to suppose that they stayed very long at any place. Nothing of permanent interest occurred until they reached Paphos; and even there the words describing their experience do not suggest any prolonged stay. It seems then a fair and natural interpretation of the document to place their arrival in Pamphylia in the latter part of June. Some slight stay at Perga is implied by the dissension which was caused by the proposal to cross Taurus to the upper country; then they proceeded to the interior without preaching at Perga or in Pamphylia.

We can hardly suppose that this was part of the original scheme, for John Mark was willing to come into Pamphylia with them, but not willing to go on into the country north of Taurus, and therefore he evidently considered that the latter proposal was a departure from the original scheme. Cyprus and Pamphylia were countries of similar situation to Cilicia and Syria, and in the closest possible relations with them, whereas it was a serious and novel step to go into the country north of Taurus. We need not therefore suppose that John Mark was actuated solely or mainly by cowardice; the facts of the situation show that he could advance perfectly plausible arguments against the change of plan, which was to carry their work into a region new in character and not hitherto contemplated by the church. It seems no unwarrantable addition, but a plain inference from the facts, to picture the dissension as proceeding on lines like these; and it relieves John Mark from a serious charge, which is not quite in keeping with his boldness in originally starting on this first of missionary journeys. What then was the motive of Paul and Barnabas in taking this new step? Evidently the Spirit did not order them, for we are precluded from supposing that John Mark actually disobeyed the Divine injunction which he had already obeyed in coming to Cyprus and Pamphylia; and moreover we are not justified in interpolating such Divine action in the narrative without express warrant in its own words. Was it that circumstances independent of their own will dictated this change? To this question Paul himself gives the answer. "Ye know," he says to the Galatians, "that because of an infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel to you the first time" (iv. 13).

Every one who has travelled in Pamphylia knows how relaxing and enervating [exhausting] the climate is. In these low-lying plains fever is endemic; the land is so moist as to be extraordinarily fertile and most dangerous to strangers. Confined by the vast ridges of Taurus, 5,000 to 9,000 feet high, the atmosphere is like the steam of a kettle, hot, moist, and swept by no north winds. Coming down in July 1890 from the north side of Taurus for a few days to the coast east of Pamphylia, I seemed to feel my physical and mental powers melting rapidly away. I might spend a page in quoting examples,³ but the following fact bears so closely on our present purpose that it must be mentioned. In August 1890 I met on the Cilician coast an English officer on his way home from three years' duty in Cyprus; previously he had spent some years in Eastern service. He said that the climate of the Cilician coast (which is very similar to that of Pamphylia, and has not any worse reputation for unhealthiness) reminded him of Singapore or Hong-kong, while that of Cyprus was infinitely fresher and more invigorating.

We suppose then that Paul caught fever on reaching Perga. Here it may be objected by those who have no experience of such a situation that Paul was used to the climate of Cilicia and Syria; why should he suffer in Pamphylia? In the first place, no one can count on immunity from fever, which attacks people in the most capricious way. In the second place, it was precisely after fatigue and hardship, travelling on foot through Cyprus amid great excitement and mental strain, that one was peculiarly liable to be affected by the sudden plunge into the enervating atmosphere of Pamphylia. The circumstances implied in the epistle are therefore in perfect keeping with the narrative in Acts; each of the authorities lends additional emphasis and meaning to the other.

3 The Rev. Mr. Daniell, who travelled with Spratt and Forbes, died of fever at Attalia, a few miles from Perga.

A bad attack of malarial fever, such as we suppose to have befallen St. Paul in Pamphylia, could not be described better than in the words in which Lightfoot (an advocate of the North-Galatian theory) sums up the physical infirmity implied in the *Epistle* iv. 13-15: "A return of his old malady, 'the thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan sent to buffet him,' some sharp and violent attack it would appear, which humiliated him and prostrated his physical strength." I appeal to all who have experience, whether this is not a singularly apt description of that fever, which has such an annoying and tormenting habit of catching one by the heel just in the most inconvenient moments, in the midst of some great effort, and on the eve of some serious crisis, when all one's energies are specially needed.⁴

The treatment for such an illness would be prescribed by universal consent as either the sea or the high lands of the interior. Thus the remarks which have been made above, page 17, acquire much pertinence, now that we have succeeded in eliciting the probable character of the case. In this way Paul and Barnabas were led to visit the Jewish settlement of Antioch, and the evangelisation of the Galatian churches was due to "an infirmity of the flesh."

On the North-Galatian theory, I fail to comprehend the situation implied in Gal. iv. 13. It is remarkable that the long toilsome journey, involving great physical and mental effort, and yet voluntarily undertaken, should be described as the result of a severe illness; such a result from such a cause is explicable only in certain rare circumstances. We have seen that the result naturally follows from a Pamphylian illness. On the other hand, I cannot see any possible circumstances in which a preaching tour in North Galatia could be due to an illness during the second journey. Let those who advocate that theory suggest some actual facts and details which are in accordance with the situation and the record. But this is a point to which I shall return in Chapter IV., p. 86.

It may be suggested in objection to our theory, that if so much importance attaches to this illness, a document composed under St. Paul's influence would make some reference to it. In answer, it might be sufficient to ask whether St. Paul's character would make us expect from him a formal reference to his illness.⁵ But suppose the reference made, what is the result? It would be hardly possible in such a brief account to speak of the illness without giving a worse tone to the action of Mark than it fairly deserved; and the silence preserved in regard to it is perhaps not unconnected with this fact.

4 I have not in the slightest word or detail altered my description to suit the case. The sentence in the text has been often in my mouth in describing what I have seen; and the words "catching by the heel" have become with me a stock phrase to describe the behaviour of this fever, when chronic. Lightfoot's quotation from 2 Cor. xii. 7 has no certain connection with the present case; but the connection is generally admitted.

5 Compare the experiences which became known to us only incidentally through the passage 2 Cor. xi. 23 ff.