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The Development of the Mission of the Church in Acts 1-15

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH
IN ACTS 1-15

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by

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This study was undertaken so that the writer would achieve a greater understanding of the development of the mission of the church as portrayed by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles. Casual reading of Acts reveals many councils, disputes, and discussions. One could get the impression that the early apostles were a diverse lot, and that the church only developed as it did because the strongest wills won the battles. Revelation is a prominent feature in Acts. To what extent did that influence the direction taken? Is it true as some have claimed that Acts can only be trusted insofar as it can be verified by Paul's epistles, or can Acts be seen in a more positive light? Such questions prompted the writer to undertake a detailed study of the development of the Christian church in the first two decades of its existence.

Method of the Study

In order to get a general feel of the ideas of the apostles concerning the purpose and mission of the church, the writer first scanned the first fifteen chapters of Acts. All passages pertaining to the mission of the church were listed and put in chart form. This showed where similarities and differences existed among the various apostles. The most uncertainty seemed to exist in questions pertaining to the direction of the mission. At some points the church seemed to think the mission was only to Israel, while later it was extended to Samaria and throughout the empire. As more Gentiles

entered the church, there also seemed to be differences of opinion regarding the necessity of Gentiles keeping the Jewish law.

It was decided to zero in on these concerns, to ask specifically why the mission was gradually expanded. The writer looked for material that indicated how the apostles solved their problems, and to what extent they listened to the revelation of God.

The study concentrated upon the first fifteen chapters of the book of Acts. Materials from the first two chapters of Galatians and other Scriptural references were used insofar as they pertained to the central theme. The writer was concerned as to whether the materials from Acts and Galatians could be harmonized in such a way that the two books would complement each other.

A summary is included at the end of each chapter, which is designed to suggest the most logical sequence of events for that time period. It is designed to show how the material presented in the bulk of the chapter can be fitted together in a meaningful way. While these summaries do not claim to be the final answer, they do show that the events of Acts and Galatians can be harmonized without sacrificing the validity of either. They also show how the apostles worked together and made use of God's guidance, as their ideas of the mission of the church were gradually clarified.

CHAPTER I

THE JERUSALEM CHURCH (Acts 1-5)

The Commission

The mandate for the mission of the early church is contained in the words of Jesus recorded in Acts 1:8: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." This simple statement states: 1) the power behind the mission, 2) the form of the mission, and 3) the direction and scope of the mission. The first of these, while of the utmost importance, is generally beyond the scope of this paper. The second will be covered in this chapter as necessary background material for a study of the extension of the church's mission. The third, the direction and scope of the mission, is of central importance in this study.

Form and Content of the Mission

The key word concerning the message of the church's mission in Acts 1:8 is "witnesses" (*μαρτυρες*). This is in the strict sense a legal term which

denotes one can and does speak from personal experience about actions in which he took part and which happened to him, or about persons and relations known to him. He may be a witness at a trial, or in legal transactions of different kinds, a solemn witness in the most varied connections.

Here the apostles are directed to tell of what they have actually seen. This explains the concern in 1:21, 22 to replace Judas with one who had actually been an eye-witness. Luke also uses the term in the more general sense, as a witness to facts, and so Stephen and Paul may witness to what they have not "seen" in the legal sense.² Luke also uses the term to imply evangelistic confession, "But witness cannot be born to these facts unless their significance is also indicated and an emphatic appeal is made for their recognition in faith."³ Thus the disciples are commanded to: 1) relate the facts about Jesus Christ, and 2) to relate them in such a way that others are compelled to accept or reject them in faith. These two facets of witnessing are inseparably interrelated in the book of Acts. Stephen Wilson claims that this is already clear in Jesus' command in chapter one: "It is implied in vv. 6-8 that the essence of the church is its mission . . . On Luke's definition, a church with no missionary activity is not a true church."⁴

The early church in Jerusalem followed this commission. The words "witness" or "testify" occur some thirty-five times in the book of Acts.⁵ The content of their message was still very simple. Foakes-Jackson describes it: "The context of this message was that Jesus was the Messiah, and this, rather than the announcement of the Kingdom of God and the need for repentance became central in their teaching."⁶ The message that comes across loud and clear in these early chapters is that Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, was crucified, but rose again from the dead. (For a more detailed breakdown of the form and content of the early proclamation see Appendix A.)

The content of their message was what they objectively had seen. There was virtually no theological speculation of their own. In 2:32, 3:15, 4:20, and 5:32 the disciples contend that they are merely setting forth what they had seen and experienced.

Direction of the Mission

The church in these chapters directs its attention solely to Jews. This narrow idea of the mission is found already in 1:6, when the disciples asked the Lord if he was now going to restore the kingdom to "Israel". Frank Stagg comments on the significance of this query.

They assume that the kingdom is Israel's. The only question is one of time. Doubtless they have by now been freed from the earlier concept of a temporal and political kingdom, but they still place a national interpretation on the kingdom.⁷

In verse seven, Jesus tells them that it is not for them to know times or dates. Whether in verse eight he "corrects" an "erroneous" viewpoint concerning the direction of the mission is a matter for discussion. Many commentators see "to the end of the earth" as referring already to the Gentile mission. Wilson opts for this position, writing that the words can be paralleled to Luke 24:47 and Acts 13:47.⁸ However, an examination of the first reference shows that it is just as ambiguous as the present passage, and while the second clearly refers to Gentiles, the setting is completely different. Furthermore, the acceptance of such a view would make it hard to explain why the disciples were so reluctant to undertake such a mission. Rengstorf argues that the disciples

understood these words to mean "to the Jewish dispersion", which did indeed go to the ends of the earth.⁹ Such an interpretation best fits the context which follows. It is impossible to say conclusively what Jesus meant by the words. Perhaps he left them purposely ambiguous. It does seem clear, however, that the disciples understood them to mean a Jewish mission.

The first great outreach of the young church was to the many who heard the preaching on Pentecost. There were men from nations in virtually all parts of the world. F. F. Bruce points out that there were many Jews living in all the areas mentioned.¹⁰ Peter in his sermon addresses his listeners as "Men of Israel" (2:22), showing that these were indeed Jews from the Diaspora that he was addressing. They included at least some "proselytes" (those who had become Jews by 1) being circumcised (males), 2) undergoing a purificatory self-baptism in the presence of witnesses, and 3) offering a sacrifice¹¹). Peter quotes the prophet Joel's words saying that "all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved." That Peter takes the "all" of this reference to include "all Jews" is made clear by 2:36 in which he proclaims that the entire "House of Israel" can be certain of what God had done. The "all" of 2:21 refers to "all of those to whom he is currently speaking."

That Peter and the early church are directing their mission exclusively to the Jews is shown clearly in the following chapters. Peter, before the Sanhedrin, proclaims that he would be glad to tell the "whole people of Israel" (4:10) how the lame man was healed. There is no evidence that the apostles showed any exceptional malice

towards Gentiles; they just naturally assumed that their mission was to the Jews.

Acts 5:19-21 is of the utmost importance in assessing the adequacy of the disciples' perception of their mission. Here an "angel of the Lord" frees the disciples from prison and tells them to stand in the temple. Perhaps what is "not said" in this divine revelation is more significant for our purposes than what was actually commanded. They had been witnessing in the temple previously, and so this divine command affirmed their actions. It did not tell them to leave the city or even the temple so that they might be more likely to encounter Gentiles. The message shows that at this point God was not displeased with the direction they were taking, since he directed them to continue as before. The above reasoning would not stand if "ἄγγελος" would here mean simply "messenger". Bruce suggests this possibility, implying that it doesn't make any great difference whether the disciples were freed by an earthly or heavenly messenger of the Lord.¹² Kittel states that "ἄγγελος" almost always means angel in the New Testament literature,¹³ and in the absence of any significant evidence, we can assume that it also means an angel, or heavenly messenger in this instance.

Location of the Mission

The early mission was limited to Jerusalem. We cannot be sure of the reason for this. Perhaps the Church took Jesus' words in 1:8 literally and thus began in Jerusalem as the first step in carrying the witness to the ends of the earth.¹⁴ Perhaps they were

still thinking eschatologically, and expected that Christ's reign would commence soon in Jerusalem.¹⁵ Since Jerusalem was the main city of Judea and the center of the Jewish faith, it is not surprising that this should be the place where the apostles first witnessed the faith.

A question arises concerning the seeming lack of concern in regard to carrying the mission outside of Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and beyond. According to these chapters the Twelve are permanently settled in Jerusalem. Later we read how Peter travels throughout Judea, but little is said of the remaining members of the Twelve. The Samaritan and worldwide missions are left to Paul, the Seven, and others. Two explanations are possible. The first sees the disciples as recognizing that Jesus' directive applies to the Church, of which they are but a small part. They are fulfilling their duties by directing the Jerusalem efforts. The second explanation would say that the Twelve were very active in the worldwide mission, but it was not the purpose of Acts to relate their exploits. There seems to be strong evidence for this in the early Christian writers, such as Clement, Justin, and Hermas.¹⁶ The various early traditions such as Peter going to Rome and Thomas to India would probably not have been promulgated if there was not some reason to believe that the apostles had indeed ministered outside of Jerusalem. The truth could very well be a combination of the two. The disciples in these early chapters seem happy to have others bring the Gospel to other nations, and they may very well have joined in the mission in later years.

The mission in Jerusalem seems to have been a successful one. The 120 (1:15) are joined by 3000 on Pentecost (2:41), and the number is soon thereafter set at 5000 (4:4). While the message was proclaimed only in Jerusalem, we read that people from surrounding towns came to Jerusalem to benefit from the signs and wonders performed. The high priest accuses the disciples of having "filled Jerusalem" with their teaching (5:28).

Here again the revelation in 5:20 is significant. The disciples had been ministering in Jerusalem. Non-Jerusalemmites had to come to Jerusalem if they wanted to hear the message. But yet the angel of the Lord did not rebuke them for not spreading the message to Samaria and beyond. On the contrary, they were commanded to go and stand in the temple (as they had been doing). Here is divine sanction upon the initial location of the mission.

Relationship To Law

There is no evidence from these early chapters to suppose that the Twelve even considered departing from the keeping of the Jewish laws. An example of this is their close contact with the temple. They went as a group every day (2:46), meeting in the Portico of Solomon (5:12), and daily preaching there (5:25,42). At least initially they do not seem to have encountered significant opposition. Scharlemann maintains that "there was room in the Judaism of that day for many points of view."¹⁷ Foakes-Jackson speculates that they were possibly regarded by the Jews as a new Jewish sect, perhaps the "Nazarenes" were even welcomed into the temple.¹⁸ Had

this group advocated the overthrow of God's law, they would not have been welcome in the temple.

Rather than being looked down upon for not keeping the law we read that they "were looked up to by everyone" (2:46) and that "they were all given great respect" (4:33). By chapter four we know that there is definite opposition coming from the Sadducees. But their concern is that the disciples are promulgating the "resurrection of the body".¹⁹ This was a doctrine that their religious rivals, the Pharisees, accepted. In chapter five they are arrested because of jealousy on the part of the high priest and the Sadducees. They are never once accused of breaking the law, a charge which would have stood up much better before the authorities.

The apostles were certainly not keeping the law because of fear of reprisal. They openly defied the warnings given to them by the Sanhedrin on two occasions (4:20, 5:29-33), and could very well have been put to death for their actions. Luther gives good insight as to why the early Jewish Christians would continue keeping the law.

Custom is of such force, that whereas nature is of itself inclined to the observation of the law, by long continuance, it so confirmeth nature, that now it becometh a double nature. Therefore, it was not possible for the Jews which were²⁰ newly converted to Christ, suddenly to forsake the law;

These early apostles were keeping the law because it was their natural way of life, and they had no good reason to change. Here again, in 5:20 the angel of the Lord could have reprimanded them for observing the law, but instead directed them to go to the temple-- which for many was the very symbol of the law!

Summary

The disciples received their mandate and direction from Jesus' words in 1:8. They were to be witnesses of what they had seen in Jerusalem and the world. Their mission was to confront others with the message of Jesus' death and resurrection. They took the message to their own people, the Jews, who were supposedly waiting for the Messiah. Their first thought was to build up the church in Jerusalem, which would serve as a center for the future outreach to the Jews of the Diaspora. They certainly had all they could do with the great numbers joining their ranks. They kept the law in an exemplary manner, arousing opposition in the temple only because of their doctrine and their success in attracting followers. They saw that the Lord was guiding and protecting them by the divine revelation in 5:20. The apostles have here made a good beginning in laying the foundation of the Christian Church.

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- ¹Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 9 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:476.
- ²Ibid., p. 492.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴Stephen G. Wilson, The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), p. 95.
- ⁵Floyd. Filson, Three Crucial Decades (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 35.
- ⁶F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, editors, The Beginnings of Christianity, 5 vols. (London: MacMillian and Co., 1920-1933), 1:305-306.
- ⁷Frank Stagg, "The Purpose and Message of Acts," Review and Expositor 44 (January 1947):8.
- ⁸Wilson, p. 8.
- ⁹K. H. Rengstorf, "The Election of Matthias," in Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation, editors, William Klassen and Graydon Snyder (New York: Harper, 1962), pp. 186-87.
- ¹⁰F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts: The English Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 61-63.
- ¹¹Ibid., p. 54.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 120.
- ¹³Kittel, 1:83.
- ¹⁴Ernst Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), p. 144.
- ¹⁵Foakes-Jackson, 1:304.
- ¹⁶Haenchen, p. 144.
- ¹⁷Martin Scharlemann, Stephen: A Singular Saint (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968), p. 187.
- ¹⁸Foakes-Jackson, 1:304-05.
- ¹⁹Bruce, pp. 95-96.

²⁰Martin Luther, St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1953), p. 91.

²¹Ibid., p. 93.

CHAPTER II

THE EARLY MISSIONS (Acts 6-8)

Hebrews and Hellenists

In the first verse of the sixth chapter there seems to be a division within the community. There are clearly two groups at this time, the Hellenists and the Hebrews. Our concern is to consider the basis of distinction between these two groups and the significance it played upon the future mission. The first step is to identify the characteristics of a Hellenist (in contrast to a Hebrew). Hellenists have been variously identified as the early Christians who 1) spoke Greek, 2) were from outside Palestine, 3) were more open in their thinking, 4) were against the Jewish law, or 5) were Gentiles.

The last suggestion, that these Hellenists can be equated with Gentiles is offered by Henry Cadbury. He reasons that one can only find a decisive definition of *Ἑλληνοιστῆς* in Acts 11:20 (although it is only the alternate reading, he assumes that it is correct). There it would clearly refer to Gentiles as opposed to *Ἰουδαίους* of verse 19.¹ There are two basic problems: 1) the associating of *Ἕλληνας* and *Ἑλληνοιστῆς* in 11:19 attempts to identify words coming from two distinct roots, and 2) it assumes that there were already a sizable number of Gentile Christians at this time, which is highly unlikely.²

Others would not go so far as to say the Hellenists were Gentiles, but would attribute a liberal attitude to them. Charles Kent

sees them as perhaps being better educated and having a more tolerant attitude. For example, he claims that they accepted the apocryphal books. These "loose ideas" earned them the contempt of the Hebrews.³ Jamison maintains that

they viewed the appearance of the Messiah as somehow making obsolete the hallowed observances of historical Judaism, perhaps even nullifying the authority of the Law as the norm of Jewish life and worship.⁴

This view, however, seems to read too many of the later individual viewpoints back to this time. If the Hellenists as a group were opposed to the law, one would expect to read of some dissension in the early chapters of Acts. It has already been seen that these chapters are void of conflict in regard to attitudes toward the law.

Most scholars see the main distinction as having to do with language differences. According to Filson, the Hebrews spoke Aramaic in their everyday life and the Hellenists spoke Greek.⁵ Scharlemann sees the differences as probably relating to the languages used for religious services.⁶ Moule raises an interesting observation concerning the problems of a simple division along language lines. Paul referred to himself as one of the "Ἑβραῖοι" in 2 Cor. 11:22 and also Phil. 3:5, but yet he spoke Greek. Moule concludes from this that the Hellenists were those who only spoke Greek, while the Hebrews might know Greek but could also speak a Semitic language.⁷ Wilson offers what is probably the best solution. He contends that one can generally characterize the groups by their place of origin, or common language, but that the final difference

would come from the individual's "attitudes and way of life".⁸ Those who called themselves Hellenists probably spoke Greek because they preferred that language and the way of life that it represented.

What are we to make of the argument between the two groups in chapter six? Bruce maintains that there was a natural tension between the two groups in the Jewish world. This tension and difference in attitudes only naturally carried over into the Christian community since members of each group had become Christians.⁹ There is no need to stretch the argument out of proportion so as to accentuate differences among the two groups. For the differences were in regard to lifestyle, not theology. Luke probably only wrote of this incident because it served to explain why the Seven were chosen. The change in manner of administration seems to have remedied the problem at hand.

The Seven

The widows among the Hellenistic group were not getting their fair share of the daily distribution of food (or money for food). This was perhaps a large group since many of the Jews from the Diaspora returned to Jerusalem for their waning years.¹⁰ It cannot be determined if the Twelve had previously been supervising this work and now found that it was taking too much of their time, or if they were simply called upon to step in and settle the problem since some were unhappy. They gave this duty to seven men who were selected by the community. Questions that need to be considered

include: 1)Who were these men? 2)What were they expected to do?
3)How did at least Stephen and Philip come to be more famous for their preaching than for their social work?

The seven men selected all have Greek names. The traditional assumption has been that this means they were all from the Hellenist group.¹¹ This conclusion raises a problem. Since the election came as a result of the disagreement between the two groups, it would seem rather odd that a peaceful solution would come from a committee in which only one group was represented. Wilson suggests that if the elections were by majority vote, the larger party would naturally be able to fill all of the positions.¹² However, such a solution would certainly not have been agreeable to the Hebrews. He suggests that another way of looking at it is to guess that the Hebrew leaders perhaps decided to let them take care of these trivial duties, so that they would not seek to interfere with theological matters.¹³ This seems to assume that the Hellenists were not too bright, an assumption which has no basis. In the light of such difficulties, several scholars now suggest the possibility that the seven might have included both Hellenists and Hebrews. Munck anticipates arguments from those pointing to the Greek names.

But too much attention should not be attached to the names. At the time there were many Jews with Greek names--there are two among the twelve apostles. An examination of Jewish tombs excavated in Jerusalem and its vicinity shows a considerable number of Greek names in Jewish families whose other members bear Semitic names.¹⁴

Scharlemann agrees that the names do not imply that all seven were Hellenists. He cites the names of Andrew and Peter, the Lord's "Hebrew" disciples as an example.¹⁵ Munck contends that to conclude that the early church would elect seven men from one party would be taking a low view of the efficiency of that church.¹⁶

What were to be the duties of these seven men? According to 6:2 they are "to serve tables" (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις). This can be taken to mean either 1) a money changer's table (bank), or 2) a dining table. It has usually been assumed to mean the second, that they actually waited on the people. Foakes-Jackson contends that "it is not impossible that it was intended in the first sense to cover the general financial administration of the community."¹⁷ It is in this sense that it is translated in Today's English Version. The reasoning is that the responsible task for which these men were elected must be more than the simple sense of waiting on tables.¹⁸ Lenski sees their duties as administering the distribution of the common funds. According to him the disciples had been doing this, but complaints had arisen, perhaps because the disciples were not able to give proper supervision to the growing program. The task to which the Seven were elected was not menial labor, but responsible supervision.¹⁹ That this has not been realized in the past is due to the identification of this group as the first "deacons", an identification which is not warranted by the text. That seven were elected may be traced to the custom of Jewish communities in which

the local council consisted of seven men known as the "Seven of the town" or "Seven best of the town".²⁰ If this is the case, it would seem to imply that the Seven's duties were essentially administrative.

Finally it has seemed strange to many that these seven men, who were appointed to relieve the Twelve of some of their local administrative work, are never heard from after this time, except in a preaching capacity (and then seemingly independent of the Twelve).²¹ This can be explained in several ways. Although in our text the story of Stephen working miracles and preaching follows almost immediately after his election as one of the Seven, this does not mean that he did not initially spend a period of time at his administrative work. Verse seven tells how the word of the Lord spread and the number of disciples increased. We do not know the length of time covered in that verse, but we can assume that Stephen, Philip, and the rest carried out the duties set before them. Just because these seven had been elected to this particular capacity, would certainly not mean that they had to fulfill the same tasks for life. That they were elected by their peers, probably showed that they were capable men, some of whom were soon able to accept greater responsibilities. Their places would then have been filled by others.

Stephen

Many of the same possibilities concerning the background of the Seven (discussed above) apply also to Stephen. Tradition has

regarded him as a Hellenist, although he could have been a Hebrew. We can assume that he was not a proselyte, since Luke gives that characteristic only to Nicolaus (6:5). Kent maintains that he might have been a Hellenist from north Africa, since he first entered the synagogues made up of people from there, and also because he believes Stephen's speech shows Alexandrian elements.²² Scharlemann suggests the possibility that he is a Greek-speaking native of Ephraim, since there he would have been in contact with certain traditions concerning Joseph, Moses, and Joshua. He would have been influenced by their theology, which Scharlemann maintains shows up in his speech.²³ Scharlemann also contends that while Stephen was influenced by Samaritan thinking, he was not himself a Samaritan, for Luke would not have hesitated to mention it.²⁴ Sometime after Stephen had been elected one of the Seven, he began preaching and performing miracles. He preached in the synagogues of the Hellenists. Whether he preached in one "Synagogue of Freedmen", containing people from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia--or if this refers to synagogues for each of these national groups is unclear, but not of great importance.²⁵ Since Saul was from Tarsus of Cilicia, he probably first heard Stephen's preaching in this setting.

The two accusations directed toward Stephen include: 1) that he used blasphemous language against Moses, and Moses' Law (6:11, 13,14), and 2) that he was speaking against the temple, and therefore God (6:11,13,14). Since these are only accusations, we have to consider how reliable they might be in giving an honest picture of Stephen. Scharlemann believes that the charges are at least based on fact.

The nature of this charge, as it relates to the activity of Stephen, would suggest that the witnesses are called "false" because they brought their accusations with malice aforethought and not because they had themselves invented the substance of their charges.²⁶

Bruce adds that the witnesses were probably careful to present Stephen's thoughts "in the most damaging light".²⁷ It seems safe to assume that the charges give us some idea of Stephen's preaching.

Stephen's speech makes it very clear that he was indeed opposed to the institution of the temple, not only the current use of it, but its entire history. In Israel's early days God's revelation was not limited to the temple. The temple had not even been built, but God could and did reveal himself to the fathers wherever they happened to be. The temple was built as a result of a misunderstanding of the concept "house of God". The true house of God referred to the promised Messiah, not a static stone building. Whether Stephen believes Solomon built the temple out of disobedience²⁸, or just as a temporary measure until the Christ would come²⁹, cannot be determined conclusively. Stephen argues that what he has said in regard to the temple is only considered to be blasphemous because Israel is once again showing her tendency to misunderstand God and even to rebel against his will. The Samaritans also maintained that it was not necessary to worship in Zion. Scharlemann concludes that early Samaritan influences led to the development of Stephen's thought, and these ideas were confirmed by what Stephen had heard Jesus preach. He cites a number of specific points which seem to stem from a Samaritan background,

including language peculiarities, the possibility Stephen quoted from a Samaritan Penteteuch, the origin of circumcision, allusions to Shechem, and other similar points.³⁰ Stephen certainly knew of the Samaritans' ideas. Exactly how much of his theology is taken directly from them can never be determined conclusively. The important point for our purposes is that Stephen and the Samaritans shared a common attitude toward the necessity of worshipping in the temple.

Stephen's thinking concerning the necessity of the Jewish law is not as clear as his attitude towards the temple. Rather than arguing in his speech that the idea of the law was wrong (which would be parallel to his approach to the accusation concerning the temple), he turns the tables on his accusers, showing how the entire history of Israel has been an example of opposition to the law, as exemplified by the idolatrous use of the temple. Some believe that this indicates Stephen's thinking was detached from the mainstream of Judaism, and a logical next step would be to reject that law upon which the temple customs were based.³¹ If this is true, the charges against Stephen concerning the law are based upon more than just his attitude toward the temple. Scharlemann points out that reading such a complete rejection of the law in Stephen's views is probably going too far. In verse 51 Stephen refers to his accusers as "uncircumcised in heart and ears". If Stephen had rejected circumcision it would have seemed rather foolish for him to use the term in this way.³² Perhaps Stephen does not place a great deal of emphasis upon keeping the law, but we cannot say that

he maintained that it was wrong or evil to follow it in a legitimate way.

To what extent did Stephen influence the theology and mission of the early church? We can only attempt to answer this question by examining the later attitudes and actions of those who followed Stephen, and by examining the context within which Luke places this story. Scharlemann believes that Luke inserted this section concerning Stephen immediately before telling of the Samaritan outreach because Stephen had dealt with the idea of a Samaritan mission in his discourses at the synagogues.³³ The main hurdle to such an outreach dealt with the problem of the temple. Since in Stephen's view, worship in the Jerusalem temple was not a requirement for Christians, there would be no reason why Samaritans should not be encouraged to join the community. It would not be necessary to reject the law to undertake such a mission, since the Samaritans also followed the Law of Moses. Such an interest in uniting the Jews and Samaritans would certainly have provoked sufficient anger in the synagogues of the Hellenists to lead them to first debate with him, and then set up false witnesses to get rid of such a person.³⁴

That Stephen referred to Jesus as the Son of Man might indicate that he saw Christianity as more than a Jewish phenomenon. Stagg comments on the significance of the term.

Jesus accepted the term 'Messiah' but discouraged its use. This was because it had for the majority a national significance. Jesus used for himself the term 'Son of Man' because it went beyond the Jewish Messiah concept. Stephan alone uses the term Jesus preferred, the term which presented Jesus in relation to the world rather than merely to Israel.³⁵

Some have contended from this that he advocated a universal church of Jews and Gentiles. That is possible, but the literature we have seems to indicate that he was primarily concerned with the next step of the mission, the expansion into Samaria.³⁶

We know that soon after Stephen's death the Samaritan mission began, and it is very possible that Stephen's thinking influenced that. Perhaps the persecution gave some of his listeners the added incentive to work in this new mission field. Other than this, Stephen does not seem to have had a great influence upon the Church. It is generally agreed that his ideas were too radical for general acceptance. His insistence that the new age made the temple (and possibly the Torah) obsolete, put a clear line of separation between the Messianic community and traditional Judaism. The other disciples were not yet ready to go that far.³⁷ It would not be fair to speculate that his views led to divisions or even arguments among the Christians, for the text does not hint at that. Scharlemann guesses that he probably had few direct adherents, and that his radical position was not accepted by the early community.³⁸ While Scharlemann concludes that he exerted no long range influences on the development of Christian thought and theology³⁹, Bruce sees his work as influencing both Paul and the author of the epistle to the Hebrews.⁴⁰ Filson maintains that Stephen was best known and remembered for his witness in word and faithful life.⁴¹

Persecution

On the same day Stephen died a general persecution was initiated against the Church. The passage which is of greatest importance for our purposes is that which proclaims "they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles". This seems odd since the apostles were the leaders. Many have looked to this statement as evidence that there must be some difference between the apostles and the others which would account for the difference in treatment. The easiest answer would be to say that the apostles, or leaders, felt a certain responsibility to stay.⁴² Perhaps they faced the same hardships as the others, but they stayed and endured them as "a captain who would go down with his ship". Such a hypothesis would have to assume that the persecution was eased up fairly quickly, for the apostles do not seem to be actively persecuted in the following chapters.

Another explanation assumes that there was a distinct difference in the beliefs of the Hebrews and the Hellenists. Proponents of this view usually consider all of the Seven to be Hellenists. This Hellenistic group might have carried on work among the Gentiles, and perhaps did not insist upon a literal interpretation of the law. While the Hellenists might have been tolerated as an extreme group while within Judaism, it would not do for them to be also preaching Jesus the Messiah.⁴³ According to this view, the apostles are believed to have been spared because they faithfully kept the law⁴⁴ and did not reach out to the Gentiles.⁴⁵ This viewpoint is not

flattering to the Twelve when it is presented in the words of Filson.

Only because the Hellenistic wing of the Jerusalem church had been ejected from the city by persecution did the church there and in neighboring places have peace. It was by fitting into the conservative Jewish setting and taking a lagging role in the expanding push of the church that the Jerusalem church obtained temporary quiet. This left the future expansion of the church and its theological development in the hands of those driven from the city. Key leaders in Jerusalem were to understand the necessity of the expansion and approve it as truly Christian, but the actual expanding ministry was to be almost entirely in the hands of others than the Twelve.⁴⁶

The problem with the conforming, peaceful picture of the apostles is that it does not fit the picture which has been drawn of these men since Pentecost. Before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John proclaimed that they could not promise to stop their proclamation (4:20). They were later arrested because they continued their ministry in spite of warnings (5:18). When they had been beaten and warned again, we read that they were glad to have suffered for Jesus (5:40). These passages show us two things: 1) the Twelve were men of courage, who would not go along with the authorities to protect themselves, and 2) there was plenty of antagonism toward the Hebrew apostles. While they were not arrested for breaking the Jewish law, they were persecuted because the high priests were jealous of them (5:17). It is doubtful that these men who had roused the wrath of the authorities repeatedly would have been spared in a persecution of Christians just because their beliefs were somewhat different.

Philip

The narratives concerning Philip start rather unobtrusively. He is simply one of those who escaped the city as a result of the persecution upon Stephen's death. The importance of his work for our purpose is that 1) he brought the message of Jesus to the Samaritans, the first non-Jews, and 2) he taught and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, one who could not be expected to fulfill the law.

We know no more about Philip than we can speculate about the Seven in general. We can only assume that he was probably a Hellenist, but he might have been a Hebrew. The arguments have been discussed earlier.

Philip went to Samaria. The cleavage of Judea and Samaria dates back to the division of the empire after Solomon's death. The northern kingdom, cut off from the Jerusalem temple, erected its own rival temple at Gerizim. They also were regarded as "half-breeds" because they had intermarried with the foreigners brought to Samaria by the Assyrians, after many of their leaders had been deported. The antagonism between Judea and Samaria is amply evident in Scriptures.⁴⁷

Various reasons have been suggested for Philip's venturing into Samaria at this point. It might have been as a result of the rejection of the Word by the Israelites.⁴⁸ While the leaders had never accepted the Christian claims, perhaps this new general persecution was a sign to the Christians that it was time for them to move on in the expansion of the mission. It seems clear that this persecution

was a direct cause of many of the Christians to abandon the Jerusalem ministry,⁴⁹ but this alone cannot tell us why Samaria was the next step. Perhaps the Church had been convinced by Stephen's arguments that the temple should not be a division between the two areas any longer. Scharlemann would say that this is probably not so, or that Luke would have told us that Philip had been influenced by Stephen.⁵⁰ But it could be argued that Luke has told the reader that Stephen's ideas opened the way for this outreach, because he has included Stephen's speech immediately before this story. Another possibility is that Philip knew that Jesus himself had ministered to the Samaritans (John 4:7-42), and so he was really doing nothing different than his Lord had done earlier.

The outreach to the Samaritans, regardless of its immediate causes, is important because it is a significant first step in the expansion of the mission to include Gentiles. Since the Samaritans also accepted and observed the Mosaic law, Philip's preaching there would not raise all the questions concerning the observation of the law which would come later.⁵¹ "Even the strictest Pharisee did not object to eating with a Samaritan" according to Kent.⁵² Since they also shared with the Jews the hope of the coming Messiah (the Moses-like prophet of Deut. 18:15ff.),⁵³ it is not surprising that they welcomed Philip's message (8:6).

Also important for our purposes is the part Peter and John subsequently played in this Samaritan mission. Many suggestions have been put forth concerning the necessity of their coming, and the relationship between Philip's baptism and the laying on of hands

by Philip and John.⁵⁴ It is sufficient for us to note that this clearly indicates a definite working connection between the home Jerusalem church and the outreach. It seems to negate the suggestion that a strong ideological cleavage concerning the message and direction of the church had come between the Hellenists and the Hebrews. Here they are working together. Perhaps of even greater significance is that Peter and John do not merely confirm the Samaritan ministry but join in it (8:25). This was the same John, who had earlier along with his brother James, asked the Lord if they should "bid fire come down from heaven and consume them" (Luke 9:54) when they had been rejected by a Samaritan village. Whatever the earlier attitudes of the Twelve had been regarding a Samaritan mission, it is obvious that they are now in agreement with its necessity. The church is working together at this point.

Philip is also involved in the next expansion of the Church's outreach as he teaches and baptizes a eunuch, one who cannot keep the law (8:26-39). This man is described as an officer of the court of Candace (a title), the queen mother of Ethiopia. He was a eunuch, which fits in with his position, since eunuchs were commonly used in such positions in that area, even until quite recently.⁵⁵ He was obviously a God-fearer, one who respected the Jewish religion, but he could never become a proselyte because of the clear prohibitions of Deut. 23:1. ("he . . . whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly"). Bruce suggests that Isaiah 56:3ff. foreshadows the removal of the ban.⁵⁶ Whether this had already been done is not known.

Luke makes it clear that Philip approached this man by God's command. "Angel of the Lord" has already been discussed in conjunction with 5:19. Here both "angel" and "the Spirit" (v. 29,39) are synonyms for God in His acts of self-revelation.⁵⁷ This new horizon for the mission was a result of God's intervention. It moved the Church one step closer to a Gentile mission, since this eunuch would not be able to keep the law, but was still permitted to become a Christian.

Summary

In these chapters the mission of the church has been extended from Jerusalem into Samaria and to a person who cannot keep the Jewish law. It has developed from a local project to the verge of a world-wide mission. This was possible because the Christians worked together and also listened to and obeyed the will of God.

The Hebrews and Hellenists were two groups within the traditional Judaism of the day which was separated by language and culture. Converts to Christianity come from both groups. The dispute which arose between the two groups concerning the daily distribution was settled by the appointment of the Seven. Attempts to identify a significant theological split between the two groups are not based upon good Biblical evidence.

Stephen obviously spoke against the temple. He might not have emphasized the keeping of the law, seeing that the Jews themselves had made a mockery of it, but we have no evidence that he argued for its abandonment. That Stephen's polemic against the temple is

placed immediately before the beginning of the Samaritan mission is probably Luke's way of telling us that Stephen's speeches had at least a part in convincing the Christians that the temple was an artificial barrier. They also knew that Jesus had specified that the Gospel should be carried to Samaria.

The persecution gave the final incentive for the expansion of the Jerusalem ministry. The disciples remained in Jerusalem because they saw their responsibility as being to that church. When the persecution was over they confirmed Philip's ministry in Samaria, and even joined it for a time.

The next step in expansion was to a Gentile who was not physically able to be circumcised. God by revelation told Philip to minister to this eunuch. Luke is careful to tell us this, so that the reader will know that the step was not one man's arbitrary decision, but the will of God. This would seem to indicate that the mission of the church before this had been limited to Jews and Samaritans (who also kept the law).

The mission of the Church has now been extended outside of Jerusalem, and it has been carried to at least one who has not submitted to the law. The expanding church is working together and is now on the brink of a full-scale Gentile mission.

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- ²²Kent, p. 52.
- ²³Scharlemann, pp. 51, 186, 20.
- ²⁴Ibid., pp. 19-20.
- ²⁵Bruce, p. 133.
- ²⁶Scharlemann, p. 13.
- ²⁷Bruce, p. 134.
- ²⁸Filson, p. 180.
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- ³⁴Ibid., p. 53.
- ³⁵Frank Stagg, "The Purpose and Message of Acts," Review and Expositor 44 (January 1947):10.
- ³⁶Scharlemann, p. 159.
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⁴³Foakes-Jackson, 1:308.

⁴⁴Jamison, p. 33.

⁴⁵Stagg, p. 8.

⁴⁶Filson, A New Testament History, p. 187.

⁴⁷Bruce, pp. 176-77.

⁴⁸Munck, p. 73.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 73.

⁵⁰Scharlemann, p. 187.

⁵¹Filson, A New Testament History, p. 182.

⁵²Kent, p. 59.

⁵³Bruce, p. 177.

⁵⁴Foakes-Jackson, 4:93 and Bruce, p. 182.

⁵⁵Bruce, p. 187.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Williams, p. 119.

CHAPTER III

TO THE GENTILES (Acts 9:1-11:26)

Paul

Paul (Saul) is first mentioned by Luke in 8:1 in conjunction with the stoning of Stephen. His connection to the stoning probably resulted from his contact with the synagogue, where his fellow men of Tarsus (part of Cilicia) attended. We have no indication that he had a part in the organizing or actual stoning of Stephen. He later describes his role as one who held the coats of those who did the stoning (22:20). Luke here makes the point that Paul approved of what was happening. He probably had also heard Stephen speak in the synagogue. It is possible that he grasped the significance of Stephen's words even more so than many of the Christians. Stephen seemed to be saying that Christianity symbolized a complete break with Judaism. Stephen had condemned the institution of the temple. Perhaps he also minimized the importance of the law. Saul must have been significantly concerned, for after this we read that "Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" (8:3).

These efforts to seek out and arrest Christians even led him out of the country. He is on the way to Damascus to persecute Christians there when he is converted. Wilson points out that Luke describes much more vividly the furiousness of Paul's persecution

activities, than does Paul himself in the epistles. This is accounted for by the simple fact that Luke is writing a narrative, which is careful to be as complete as possible, while Paul only reaches back into his past life occasionally to illustrate a theological or homiletical point.¹

The complete contrast between the old and new Paul is brought out by Luke. Neither the people of Damascus (9:21), nor the people of Jerusalem (9:26) can immediately comprehend the fact that the same Paul who had so violently persecuted them is now preaching Jesus Christ. His call has been paralleled to many Old Testament instances in which the call had no story leading up to it, but came as a call from God that could not be refused. But this call to an unbeliever and a persecutor is completely without Biblical parallel!² In spite of his record as a persecutor, Paul was singled out by God as the one who was to be God's instrument in bringing the Gospel to many nations.³

Already Paul is told that he is to go to the Gentiles as well as to the people of Israel (9:15). Details are not given at this point. God does not say whether these Gentiles would have to submit to the law or not. It is significant that the Lord does not only command the Gentile mission through Ananias, but actually appears to Paul, "outside of Palestine". This first such appearance shows clearly that Jesus and his followers do not abide only in Palestine.⁴ It is not explained when or how the Gospel first came to Damascus. It might have been a result of the flight after Stephen's death, or the outreach of the Galilean church, or the work of some

of the Jews present at Pentecost, or perhaps it was brought there by some of the many traders and merchants who traveled between Jerusalem and Damascus.⁵ There was a significant Jewish community there and probably several synagogues.⁶

Paul begins his Christian ministry in Damascus (9:20-25). His listeners were amazed at his change of heart. His ministry was evidently successful for the Jews planned to kill him to end his preaching. Into this brief account of the Damascus ministry must be reconciled Paul's own account in Galatians 1:15-17. Here Paul is recounting the story for the purpose of demonstrating that he had not received his apostleship from anyone except the Lord, and was not in debt to any man for his authority or message. "Not conferring with flesh or blood" does not imply the absence of conversation with any human being, but means that he did not learn his theology from other Christians.⁷ His trip to Arabia might have been after a brief stint of preaching at Damascus, or it may have been before he preached at all. The latter option would require the "εὐθέως" of verse 20, to mean immediately after his period in Arabia.⁸ Arabia in that day included all of the large area occupied by the Arabs. It might have even included Damascus itself.⁹ Bruce considers the Arabia in question to refer to the Nabatean kingdom, which extended almost to Damascus.¹⁰ While some have suggested that Paul went as far as Mount Sinai (paralleling this to Gal. 4:25),¹¹ it seems most likely that Paul's retreat was to the sparsely populated area outside of Damascus. That this withdrawal was for the purpose of retreat is more likely

than for the purpose of preaching. Paul could have reached many more listeners in Damascus if preaching had been his goal.¹² A logical question asks why Luke is silent concerning the withdrawal. Wilson suggests that Paul is much more of a theologian than Luke, and would consider this time spent reflecting over his beliefs to be most significant, while Luke considers the preaching in the synagogue to be of the greatest importance.¹³ This preaching in Damascus and the withdrawal into Jerusalem took place within a period of "three years" (Gal. 1:18). Since the ancients counted parts of years as full years in reckoning time spans, "three years" would here mean anywhere from slightly over one year up to an almost full three years.¹⁴ Paul's preaching was done in the synagogues; there is no evidence that he is preaching to the Gentiles at this time.

From Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem. Here again Galatians and Acts must be synthesized. In Galatians, Paul's chief concern is to show that he was in no way indebted to the Jerusalem apostles for his commission as a missionary.¹⁵ He was not required to come to Jerusalem, but when he left Damascus, we read that he went up to Jerusalem to visit (ἰστορήσας) Cephas (Gal. 1:18). "Visit" here implies the idea of a traveler making an acquaintance.¹⁶ The visit was Paul's idea. Acts does not say how long the visit lasted, but in Galatians Paul is sure to mention that it was for 15 days (1:18), so that no one would think that he received extensive instructions from the hands of the apostles.¹⁷ Paul is also careful to mention that he only met Peter and James (Gal 1:18,19) so that

it was clear that the Twelve could not have commissioned him-- for he had not even seen them all! While in Acts, Luke writes that Paul was brought to the apostles (9:27). This does not necessarily mean that he met "all" of them.¹⁸

Acts tells us that Paul preached to the Hellenists. These were the same people who had put Stephen to death a few years earlier. We do not read that Paul has yet preached to any Gentiles. (Codex Alexandrinus substitutes *Ἑλληνας* in verse 29, which would indicate a Gentile ministry at this time. However, it could also be a scribal attempt to reconcile this verse with Paul's later work among the Gentiles.) Later in Acts (22:17ff.) Paul recounts how Jesus had appeared to him in the temple and told him to leave because he was not being listened to. He is told that he will be sent (*ἐξάποστελῶ*--future tense) to the nations (Gentiles). This would indicate either 1) a greater and more extensive Gentile ministry is coming, or 2) the Gentile ministry is still in the future for Paul at this point.

Bruce believes that Paul started his Gentile ministry at some point before he was called to Antioch to work among the Gentiles there (11:26), for he had already received the necessary commission.¹⁹ On his first missionary journey Paul consistently first preached to the Jews and only went to the Gentiles when he was rejected by them. We know that he preached in the synagogues of Damascus (9:21) and that he was fairly successful. The huge Jewish population of Damascus would certainly have provided an inexhaustible

audience. He would not have needed to go to the Gentiles there. Similarly in Jerusalem he went to the synagogues, and rather than seeking out Gentiles there when hostility arose, (upon God's direction) he left the city for his home area. If Paul did indeed begin his Gentile mission before Antioch it would probably have been at this time in the region of Tarsus, since 1) there the Jews would have been a much smaller part of the population, and 2) Paul was there for a longer time period.

Whether Paul begins his Gentile ministry in the region of Tarsus, or at Antioch, we must still ask why he takes this step. Bruce maintains that Stephen "blazes a trail" later followed by Paul, saying that "national particularism and ancestral ritual" must be left behind.²⁰ Scharlemann concludes that Stephen was not a precursor of Paul.²¹ Barnard also points out differences, saying that while Stephen uses history to indict the Jews, Paul uses history to show that David was the progenitor of Jesus, and that Christianity is the culmination and fulfillment of Judaism.²² It seems best to conclude that whatever Paul thought of his predecessors, he took the Gospel to the Gentiles primarily because he had been told to do so by his Lord via divine revelation (9:15 and 22:1).

Peter

After the narrative has related the story of the conversion and early ministry of Paul, it returns to the discussion of Peter. We have seen that in the early chapters of Acts, Peter as spokesman

for the Twelve emphasized that the mission was to the house of Israel (2:36). In chapter 8 he and John confirm the ministry of John to the Samaritans and even join in it for a time (8:25). Peter was now "on a kind of inspection tour"²³ of the outlying churches. The Jerusalem church wanted to maintain contact with these new churches. To what degree these churches were responsible to Jerusalem cannot be determined.

In Lydda, Peter healed a paralytic named Aeneas. Filson tries to show how this incident fits in with Luke's general scheme by emphasizing the Greekness of the name, and maintaining that Peter has taken another step forward.²⁴ This may be reading more into the incident than what is intended, for there are at least two difficulties with such an interpretation: 1) a Greek name does not make him a Hellenist (as shown above), and 2) Peter had undoubtedly accepted the Hellenists as Christians long before this (perhaps as early as Pentecost). As a result of the healing we read "all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord" (9:35). This probably refers to the Jews, not Gentiles. Gentiles would be described as having "turned to God" (as in 14:15, 15:19, and 26:20).²⁵

As a result of the healing of Tabitha, many from Jaffa believed (9:42). Again this would infer Jews. Luke's point in relating these incidents is probably to show the growing spread of Christianity. Haenchen describes the situation:

the whole of the country west of the Jordan, from Ashdod northward as far as Caesarea, has now become Christian. Congregations have been established in Judaea, Samaria,

and Galilee (there are no reports about the country east of the Jordan). The task in Palestine proper has been accomplished, and it is time for the Christian mission to seek goals further afield.²⁶

Before relating the Cornelius incident, that seems to be the logical next step in the expansion of the mission, Luke mentions that Peter lodged with Simon the leather-tanner (9:43). Handling hides made this man ceremonially unclean according to Jewish law. Luke might be writing of Peter's lodging with this person to indicate that his Jewish legalism is already dropping away at this point.²⁷ But that might be reading too much into Luke's purpose. He might just mention Simon the tanner at this point because he has a habit of mentioning those who act as hosts,²⁸ and calls him specifically Simon the tanner so as to distinguish him from Simon, called Peter.²⁹ Whatever the reason for Luke mentioning the man's occupation, one thing is definitely clear, that Peter resided for some time with a man whom the Jews would have considered to be unclean.

Cornelius was a Roman centurion, the commander of one hundred men. He was also a "God-fearer". God-fearers were those who were perhaps attracted by the Jewish monotheism or by the ethical standards of the Jewish life, but they had not actually become proselytes.³⁰ Insofar as we know there were no set criteria to be described as such. The name was probably given according to the merits of individual cases, much as a modern day honorary doctorate.³¹ Cornelius was not circumcised,³² whether or not he kept all the food laws is uncertain.³³ He was known for his generous giving of alms and his faithful praying (10:4).

As in the account of Paul and Ananias, a double vision is here given. Cornelius was told to send to a certain house in Joppa to fetch Simon Peter (10:5). Whether Cornelius knew that Peter was a Jew or not makes no difference since God-fearers had no objections to associating with Jews. However, even moderately orthodox Jews would not willingly enter the house of Gentiles (even God-fearers) and so God found it necessary to also prepare Peter for the meeting.³⁴ (Haenchen maintains that Jews were not sealed off from dealings with Gentiles.³⁵ The issue here may have been the desirability of entering a Gentile's own home. Peter in 10:28 states that what he was doing was forbidden for Jews.)

The vision shown to Peter consisted of a sheet in which every sort of animal was mixed together. Peter protested when told to kill and eat, for he had always been taught not to eat unclean animals, and even clean animals had to be killed with ritual propriety before they could be eaten. The complete mixture of the unclean and clean animals also would have added to his misgivings.³⁶ (Even though he had been staying with Simon the tanner, and as a result was already somewhat lax in following the Jewish ceremonial laws, what he was now commanded to do was something different than his custom and as a result he protested strongly.) When the men from Cornelius arrived, he was still puzzling over the vision. Whether he was simply trying to determine the basic meaning of the vision at this time, or whether he was puzzling over the implications it would have in the mission of the church is uncertain.

Having been given direction by the Lord, Peter went with the men to the house of Cornelius. Filson speculates that Peter was probably risking his position as leader of the Twelve, and perhaps expected some criticism for his actions, but he went anyway because of the divine prompting.³⁷ The later account of his reporting to the Jerusalem church would seem to indicate that this was true. His actions were only accepted because they were divinely commanded. Stagg tries to draw a comparison between the reactions of Philip and Peter, when each is commanded to go to a Gentile. While Philip ran to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, "Peter in contrast, hesitated, stalled, apologized, and clearly demonstrated all the way through his reluctance to meet a Gentile on terms of equality".³⁸ This comparison is simply not borne out by the text. Peter did protest in reaction to the vision, and he was in a daze when the men arrived, but after the Lord told him to go with these men, there is no record of any protest or hesitation. Peter even states that he made no objection to coming (10:29). Stagg also draws a contrast between the eagerness of Cornelius to hear the Gospel, and the reluctance of Peter to preach it to a Gentile.³⁹ Yes, Cornelius was eager to hear, but Peter was also most eager to preach.

While the vision was specifically concerned with food laws, by the time Peter reached Cornelius' house he had grasped its wider implications. The barriers between Jew and Gentile were to be broken down.⁴⁰ That the Lord directed him to go to the house of a Gentile probably helped Peter realize the wider implications of his vision for Jewish-Gentile relationships.

Peter still was not sure for what reason the Lord had directed him to Cornelius. He had only to hear of Cornelius' vision in order to realize that his task was to preach the Gospel to these people. What happened is referred to by Bruce as the "Pentecost of the Gentile World".⁴¹ But this "Pentecost" was certainly quite different than the first. There the hearers were exhorted to repent and be baptized. Then they would receive the forgiveness of sins and finally the gift of the Spirit. There is no mention of faith on the part of Cornelius and his household, but it is implied in Paul's later report (11:17). If God had not sent his Spirit in the way in which he did, it is doubtful whether Peter would have baptized them. He would almost certainly have required that they be circumcised first. But this clear revelation of God showed beyond a doubt that he was accepting Gentiles and Jews equally in his kingdom. Since God had already accepted these Gentiles as they were, how could Peter expect to place additional requirements upon them for baptism. Peter had come a long way in his attitude concerning the necessity of the Jewish law in the last two days. It was only by the direct revelation of God that he now realized that 1)circumcision was not required for Gentiles, and 2)the old food laws were no longer mandatory.

Reaction in Jerusalem

News of Peter's ministry to the Gentiles reached Jerusalem before Peter even returned himself. (According to Codex D, Peter did considerable preaching and teaching before he returned to

Jerusalem.) The text does now say how the apostles reacted to Peter's actions, only that they heard what had happened. Perhaps they were troubled, but wanted to hear Peter out, before making any judgment. It is those of the circumcision (οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς) who objected. In 10:45 this phrase refers to all of Jewish birth, but here it seems to set off a specific group.⁴² It might refer to those who were particularly concerned about the keeping of the law.⁴³ Peter is not criticized for preaching to the Gentiles, or even for baptizing them, but he is condemned for eating with uncircumcised people.

In his reply Peter simply told them what had happened. The six men who had accompanied him to Caesarea were now with Peter and served as witnesses to the account. Peter compares the giving of the Holy Spirit to the reception of It by the disciples on Pentecost. Our text, if read in a vacuum, would indicate that all accepted and were happy with the new development: "When they heard this they were silenced. And they glorified God saying, 'Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life'" (11:18). Upon hearing that God himself had directed Peter in his actions, there was no way that they could criticize him.

The narrative that follows seems to indicate that this "approval" meant one of two things for the various people assembled: 1) it was alright for the Gospel to be taken to the Gentiles, but this did not mean that it was necessary for them to direct their own efforts in that direction, or 2) Peter's action was approved as an exception to the general policy. Filson praises the Jerusalem

church for their ability to accept Peter's actions, since it was obviously a new development for them. But he also points out that this was a sort of passive acceptance. They did not follow up on this new mission field, but left that work to others.⁴⁴ This could be explained by saying that the Twelve regarded their work to be in Jerusalem. Even as they had stayed in the city during the persecution after Stephen's death, they were now to continue their pastorate as before. They interpreted Jesus' command concerning bringing the Gospel to Judea, Samaria and all nations (1:8) to be directed to the church as a whole. They had no illusions of being able to carry on the entire mission by themselves.

Even if the disciples saw their own pastorates to be in Jerusalem, it still seems that they considered it their responsibility to generally guide the new breakthroughs. They had sent Peter and John to confirm Philip's Samaritan ministry. When Peter encountered Cornelius he was in the midst of what might be called an inspection trip. When the Gospel was later brought to the Gentiles in Antioch, Barnabas was dispatched to that city to see that all was in order (11:19-26). The apostles confirmed and even occasionally participated in the outlying missions, but realized their own calling to be basically to the church in Jerusalem. The importance of the apostles hearing of Peter's experience, lay not in the new direction it gave to their own ministry, but in the influence it must have had upon their reactions when they later heard that other Gentiles were accepting Christ.

Apparently at least some among the church in Jerusalem did not share the general acceptance outlined above. For some, the case of Cornelius was seen to be an exception, which they could not speak against because it was granted by God.⁴⁵ These are probably the same people who resist the Gentile mission later, who insist that converts must be first circumcised, and that Jews and Gentiles can not eat together. This group might be the very same members of the circumcision party who initiated the criticism of Peter.⁴⁶ They could not have continued protesting at the time of Peter's story, unless they were prepared to say that the leading apostle was a liar. It is possible that a type of conservative backlash influenced the Jerusalem church after this time, and that James the Just was increasingly viewed as the leader of the local church because his views were more conservative regarding the direction of the mission.⁴⁷ However, Peter and the apostles were increasingly out of town visiting other churches, and James may have been recognized as the leader in Jerusalem for his administrative abilities.⁴⁸

Even though God had specifically showed Peter that the food laws were no longer necessary, and that the mission included the uncircumcised as equals, Peter is portrayed in Acts as the apostle to the Jewish people. Paul uses this as a distinction between the work of the two apostles (Gal. 2:7). One can speculate that God chose to reveal these things to Peter, not because he was setting a specific new direction before Peter, but because he wanted Peter to understand and encourage the new ministry which would actually be undertaken by others. If Peter had not received this vision from God himself,

he would probably have protested violently when he heard that Paul and others were not requiring their converts to follow the Jewish law. (His reaction would probably have been much like his initial reaction to his vision.)

Foakes-Jackson sees the new Peter in a slightly different way. He says that "Peter was entirely converted in Caesarea to the recognition of Gentile converts, and returned to Jerusalem as their advocate." He goes on to explain that that is why Herod Agrippa imprisoned him, and James assumed the leadership of the Jerusalem Church. All this pointed to Peter having accepted the more advanced views of the Seven and the Hellenists.⁴⁹ There are several problems with this viewpoint: 1) Peter's complete conversion and advocacy of Gentiles would be brought into question by his backing down to the Judaizers at Antioch (Gal. 2) and by the fact that his own ministry basically continued among Jews. 2) The Twelve had been imprisoned before. Immediately before this imprisonment of Peter, James the brother of John was beheaded (12:2). While Peter was in prison, the church prayed for him unremittingly (12:5). There are no indications of a split. 3) As mentioned before, James may have been recognized as the leader because the Twelve were increasingly out of town. It is obvious that the Twelve are being strongly persecuted, a situation certainly not helped by Peter's escape. 4) Finally, it is not certain that either the Seven or the local Hellenists were already advocating a mission to the Gentiles.

The First Gentile Church

The narrative now picks up with the adventures of other men who left Jerusalem during the persecution following Stephen's death (8:4). The common assumption that these were only Hellenists who left Jerusalem cannot be dogmatic, for the text says that "they were all scattered . . . except the apostles" (8:1). Antioch was the third largest city of the Roman Empire and had a large Jewish population.⁵⁰ The Jews to whom the mission was first directed were probably Greek-speaking and thus Hellenists. It is likely then that the escapees who were able to converse in Greek would have been the ones to come to this Greek speaking city. The men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who first began the Gentile mission, were probably also among those who had escaped from Jerusalem as a result of the persecution. (An interesting alternative would suggest that these men might have been new converts, fruits of the labor of the men who escaped from Jerusalem. Cyprus is mentioned in verse one as one of the specific spots where the mission was carried. Such an explanation might account for their readiness to approach Gentiles, even if their teachers would not have.)

There is definitely a time lag between verse 19 and verse 20. Stagg would suggest that it is seven years later, for Paul is already a Christian and back in Tarsus.⁵¹ Such a date would imply that Paul has already been commissioned as the apostle to the Gentiles, and that Peter has already baptized the Gentile Cornelius. In favor of such a dating would be 1) the relative order used by Luke. He could have inserted this development in chapter eight,

or at least before Paul or Peter's visions if that would have been chronologically correct. 2) The text also seems to suggest that Barnabas, and hence Paul, were called upon soon after the development began. This would indicate that the mission had been undertaken only after it had been commanded by God in principle to both Peter and Paul.

A variant reading for Greeks (*Ἑλληνας*) in verse 20 is Hellenists (*Ἑλληνοίτις*). (The textual reading is supported by χ^c , A, D*, while B and D² have the variant.) While the textual evidence is not conclusive, the context seems to require that Greeks (or Gentiles) are here referred to. Otherwise this would not have represented a new development. The variant would make sense if it simply referred to "Greek-speaking" apart from the Jewish religion.⁵²

While it cannot be determined that these were the first Gentile converts, Filson maintains that they were the first "real Gentile Christians" we read about, since Cornelius had been closely connected with the synagogue.⁵³ However, it cannot be ruled out that these first converts might have had some connections to the synagogue.⁵⁴

The text does not say what relationship these new Christians had to the Jewish law. Haenchen contends that they were apparently not circumcised or under the law, or this would simply be the story of proselytes accepting Christ.⁵⁵ If such were the case there would have been no reason for Luke to write specifically of this event, or for the church in Jerusalem to have regarded it as unusual. If they accepted the law and were circumcised, they would be called Jews, not Gentiles.

The Jerusalem Church, in keeping with their policy of guiding and helping the mission churches, sent Barnabas to investigate this development. Barnabas had already helped out Paul and knew that he had been appointed apostle to the Gentiles, and also knew that God had directed Peter to the Gentile Cornelius. It is not then surprising that Barnabas is not described as surprised, shocked, or concerned about this full scale Gentile ministry, but that "he was glad" (11:23). His thoughts turn to Paul, whom God had especially called to minister to such people, and so Barnabas brings Paul to Antioch.

Scriptures are silent concerning Paul's ministry in Tarsus. That he would have first ministered to the Jews would be consistent with his general practice. Whether he had also gone to the Gentiles in Tarsus, or if Antioch was his first Gentile ministry is not known. It is clear that Antioch is the first wide scale Gentile ministry which our text relates. It is significant that Luke does not mention any strained relationships between these new Gentile Christians and the earlier Jewish Christians of Antioch.⁵⁶

Summary

These chapters have shown how the groundwork was laid and the beginnings were made in the Gentile ministry. Paul received his divine commission to preach to the Gentiles when he was converted, but these first years are formative ones for his ministry, and his Gentile mission is just beginning as this period ends. Paul had probably not preached extensively among Gentiles in Tarsus, if at all, for Luke says nothing of it. Those years served to prepare him for his greater ministry to come.

In the early years of the church's mission, Peter had advocated that the kingdom was for the children of Israel. During this period Peter's views are changed completely. He sees that Gentile and Jew are equal before God, that food laws and circumcision are no longer required. Peter did not come to these conclusions on his own. It was only by the revelation of God that his beliefs were changed. Peter is not directed to go personally to the Gentiles, only to recognize the ministry of others who are given that task.

This first Gentile convert was a "God-fearer", which probably made it a little easier for the Jerusalem Church to accept what had happened. While approval was given, there were probably some who, although they could not protest in light of God's intervention, probably regarded this happening as a sort of strange exception to the general policy.

During this time churches were being established in many places by those who had left Jerusalem during the persecution. Significant is the beginning of the first full-scale Gentile ministry in Antioch. By this time the apostles knew that such a development would be coming, and that it already had God's approval, but they were still somewhat surprised when it actually happened. Barnabas was sent to inspect. He approved and brought Paul to Antioch to look after their development. This is the church, that will now play a significant role in the next years.

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- ⁴Munck, p. 83.
- ⁵Wilson, p. 169.
- ⁶Bruce, p. 194.
- ⁷Donald Guthrie, Galatians (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1969), p. 69.
- ⁸Ibid., pp. 71-72.
- ⁹Ibid., p. 70.
- ¹⁰Bruce, p. 202.
- ¹¹Guthrie, p. 70.
- ¹²Ibid., p. 71.
- ¹³Wilson, p. 170.
- ¹⁴Robert G. Hoerber, "Galatians 2:1-10 and the Acts of the Apostles," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (August 1960):489.
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- ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 72-73.
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- ³¹Kirsopp Lake, "The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem," The Beginnings of Christianity, 5:207-08.
- ³²Bruce, p. 216.
- ³³George Ladd, The Young Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 27, and Bruce, p. 216.
- ³⁴Bruce, p. 217.
- ³⁵Haenchen, p. 350.
- ³⁶Bruce, p. 218.
- ³⁷Filson, p. 189.
- ³⁸Frank Stagg, "The Purpose and Message of Acts," Review and Expositor 44 (January 1947):13.
- ³⁹Ibid.
- ⁴⁰Bruce, pp. 218-19.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 229.
- ⁴²Floyd Filson, Three Crucial Decades (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 63.
- ⁴³Bruce, p. 234.

⁴⁴Filson, A New Testament History, p. 190.

⁴⁵Stagg, p. 13.

⁴⁶Ladd, p. 60.

⁴⁷Bruce, p. 236.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 253.

⁴⁹Foakes-Jackson, 1:309.

⁵⁰Munck, p. 105.

⁵¹Stagg, p. 14.

⁵²Bruce, p. 237.

⁵³Filson, A New Testament History, p. 191.

⁵⁴Bruce, p. 239.

⁵⁵Haenchen, pp. 365-66.

⁵⁶Bruce, p. 241.

CHAPTER IV

GENTILES AND THE LAW (Acts 11:27-15:35)

Acts and Galatians

Once the Gentile ministry was begun, it expanded rapidly. Even those who were avid followers of the law had to admit that since the Jews were not turning to Christianity in sufficient numbers, the Gentile ministry was a necessity. ¹ Afraid that these Gentiles would take over the church, they argued that Gentiles should be admitted on the same terms as proselytes. Even though the church had agreed after Peter's experience with Cornelius that the door was open to Gentiles, many saw the fact that Cornelius was not circumcised to be only an isolated exception. The question of the relationship of the new Gentile Christians to the Jewish law thus forms the central question of these chapters. (We will not study Paul's first missionary journey which also is recorded in this section.)

To get a full understanding of the issues involved one must study the accounts in both Acts and Galatians. The first step then must be to relate the events of the two books into a satisfactory chronological order. This is necessary because there has been and still is much disagreement concerning the matching of the visits recorded in Acts and Galatians, the date of Galatians, and even the identification of the recipients of that letter.

While Acts describes three visits of Paul to Jerusalem during this period, and Galatians describes two, it cannot be agreed upon which

of the visits are corresponding. The visits are recorded in the following chapters:

<u>Acts</u>	<u>Galatians</u>
9:26-29 Paul meets disciples	1:18-24 Paul sees Peter and James
11:27-30, 12:25 famine relief visit	2:1-10 private conference with the pillars
15:1-29 Council of Jerusalem	

It is generally agreed that the visits mentioned first in each book describe the same occasion.² Beyond that the possibilities include 1)equating Acts 11:27-30, 12:25 to Galatians 2:1-10, 2)equating Acts 15:1-29 and Galatians 2:1-10, 3)saying that all three speak of the same event, or 4)the slim possibility that none of them correspond.

For many years most commentators assumed that Galatians 2:1-10 was equivalent with Acts 15:1-29.³ The prime motivation for such a matching consists of the many similarities, including 1)the trip from Antioch to Jerusalem and back to Antioch, 2)the false brothers are from Jerusalem but make trouble in Antioch, 3)the timing can be equated, 4)Paul and Barnabas represent the Gentile churches, 5)Peter and James are leaders of the circumcision, 6)the agitators are similarly described, 7)Titus may be among the "certain others" of the church, 8)the subject concerns circumcision of Gentiles, 9)in each the conference is prolonged and hard-fought, 10)each recognize the exemption of Gentiles from the Law, and the ministry of Paul and Barnabas.⁴

The list of similarities is impressive, but it is also necessary to examine a list prepared by Hoerber which mentions several difficulties which are created by such a match-up. He also lists possible replies, which are here shown in parentheses: 1) Paul is purposely mentioning each Jerusalem visit in writing to the Galatians, and would not risk his credibility by an omission (he saw only the elders, not the apostles on this trip), 2) Paul fails to mention the decree of the Council which could destroy his opponents' arguments (he had nothing to do with its composition), 3) there are several inconsistencies among details such as the contrast between a private and public meeting (there may have been two meetings on the same visit), 4) the provision to abstain from certain food as opposed to Paul's claim that no obligations were placed on him, 5) the strangeness of Peter's actions in Antioch if this incident is after the council, and 6) also the seeming failure of Paul to remind Peter of the recent decree.⁵

Additional answers to these objections would be: 1) The four food laws are nothing new to Paul and thus not considered to be restrictions.⁶ 2) Peter was not demanding that the Gentiles keep the law since the council had ruled it was not necessary. He merely decided to keep the Jewish law himself by his own free choice.⁷ 3) Paul could not reprimand Peter for such an action for it was not specifically condemned by the council.⁸ Since these "answers" can correspond to the last three objections of Hoerber, we see that it is possible for all of the objections to be overcome. Yet possibility does not here indicate probability. The likelihood that all

of these difficulties are only apparent is slim. The equation of Acts 15 with Galatians 2 in the face of so many clear difficulties with only hypothetical answers would lead one to speculate along with W. L. Knox that:

the discrepancy between the two accounts is so wide that Luke's credit as a historian is gone. Acts must be the work, not of the companion of Paul, who writes in the first person, but of an ignorant compiler, who knew little of Paul and had never read his Epistles. We cannot rely on anything in Acts unless it can be corroborated by the Pauline letters, or unless it appears in the sections, which may still represent the travel diary of a companion of Paul which somehow came into the hands of the compiler.⁹

It is obvious that the equation of Acts 15 with Galatians 2 is not likely if we maintain that Acts is reliable. Rather than to accept a pairing with so many difficulties, which we try to patch up with plausible answers, it is better to see if there is not a better way to harmonize the accounts. Some have attempted to solve the difficulties by identifying all three visits.¹⁰ The main difficulty here is implicit in the solution; that Luke used sources and got them mixed up.¹¹ This might help to clear up some of the problems, but it does so at the expense of Luke's credibility.

A better solution would be to equate Galatians 2 to the famine relief visit described in Acts 11:27-30, 12:25. Such a match would answer many questions. 1) In Gal. 2:2 Paul has stated that his visit was prompted by revelation; such a revelation could be that of Agabus in Acts 11:27. 2) A private conference would explain why Luke does not speak of it, especially since he planned to relate the Council of Jerusalem decisions. 3) Peter's defection is placed

before the public council and so would be less surprising. 4)The one condition which was referred to by Galatians would be to continue to remember the poor, which ties in nicely to the purpose Acts gives for the visit. 5)There are no restrictions concerning the Jewish law in Acts 11,12 which is in keeping with the claim of Galatians. 6)This would place the writing of Galatians closer to their conversion, and make the trouble with Judaizers seem to be "so soon", as mentioned in Galatians.¹² 7)This would also indicate that Paul accounted for all of his visits to Jerusalem in writing to the Galatians.

The main objection to this view is that the Council of Jerusalem seems to argue the problem as if it had not been discussed before.¹³ An answer would be that the matter had only been discussed in private and so was by no means official, and that now the entire question had much more serious consequences in light of the sudden growth of the Gentile mission. While some of the parties were involved in both discussions, most were not, and the only proper thing to do would be to start anew.

If we assume that Galatians 2 is equivalent to Acts 11,12, the writing of Galatians would be placed immediately before the Council of Jerusalem. Judaizers had been disturbed by the hearing of Paul's work among the Gentiles and simultaneously made trouble in Antioch and Galatia. Paul might have liked to return to Galatia, but probably felt it more important to go with Barnabas to Jerusalem to have the church make a public pronouncement upon the matter. A quick letter to the Galatians had to do, perhaps written just before he left Antioch or maybe even while on the journey.¹⁴

Such a reconstruction would give Galatians an early date (about 49 A.D.) making it one of the earliest epistles. Such a date would not have seemed possible a few years ago when "Galatia" necessarily meant the traditional region of Galatia in north central Asia Minor. Paul was not known to have visited that area before the Council of Jerusalem, so a later date was almost definite. William Ramsey then discovered that Galatia could also refer to the Roman province of Galatia which included the traditional area as well as the cities Paul visited on his first missionary journey.¹⁵ If we accept the "South Galatia" theory, the early date which the above reconstruction necessitates is very possible. There is good evidence for both the "North" and "South" theories.¹⁶ In the lack of conclusiveness of the arguments it is perfectly acceptable to say that an early date is possible, and even to argue that because the pairing of Gal. 2 and Acts 11,12 seems to be the best reconstruction, that the "South Galatian theory" is the most likely because it allows for such an early date.

There are advantages to aligning the account of Galatians 2 with either Acts 11,12 or Acts 15. There are many details in the second Galatians visit which fit in well with either the second or the third visit described by Acts. The final conclusion then must be based upon which pairing will allow the events of Acts to fall together in the most logical order, with the fewest questions left unanswered. The answer seems to lie in equating the visit of Galatians 2 with the famine relief visit of Acts 11,12.

Famine Relief Visit

It is now time to look at implications of pairing the famine relief visit and the Galatians account. According to Acts (11:27) the mission was initiated because Agabus had predicted that a famine was coming over the entire empire. That the church in Antioch decides to send relief to the Jerusalem church may indicate that they were better off financially. It seems natural that Barnabas was sent to Jerusalem since he probably had close ties there, but Paul had only been there once before as a Christian, and then for only fifteen days. The reason for Paul's going may very well be that he thought it necessary to compare notes with the Jerusalem apostles (Gal. 2:2), even though the official reason for the trip was the response to the revelation (Gal. 2:1).

In keeping with Paul's purpose in relating this incident in Galatians, it seems safe to say that in laying his Gospel before those of repute he was not doing so because he needed their approval, but because he thought that it was necessary for all to be going in the same direction.¹⁷ Two priorities are evident during Paul's entire ministry, 1) the need to prevent the forcing of the Jewish law, and 2) the unity of the Christian movement.¹⁸

Luke does not mention that Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas, but this is not surprising since for some unknown reason Titus is never mentioned in Acts.¹⁹ That Titus "was not compelled to be circumcised" can be taken in two ways, either 1) that he was not circumcised, or 2) that Titus's circumcision was voluntary, not by compulsion.²⁰ The first alternative seems best in the light of the

point Paul is making. Burton maintains that "not compelled" (οὐδὲ ἰναγκάσθη) is a resultative aorist, implying that the attempt to compel was probably there on the part of the false brethren, but that the attempt was not successful.²¹ This implies that the apostles did not yield to the demands of the false brothers, and at least indirectly indicated that circumcision was not required for Gentiles. A direct, general, and official decree concerning circumcision was probably not given at this time, or Paul would certainly have mentioned it to the Galatians. Such a decree will come later at the Council of Jerusalem.

Paul uses strong words in calling his opponents "false brethren" (ψευδοδέλφους). In Paul's opinion they were not really members of the Christian church, but trying to get in secretly. Such a reference could indicate that there was a clear contrast between these false brothers and the church leaders.²²

In referring to those of repute (v. 6) Paul states that what they were makes no difference to him. The use of the imperfect, were (ἦσαν), indicates that Paul is referring to their past status of having known Jesus in the flesh, as opposed to their current status as leaders.²³ The words are probably meant for those who had criticized his apostleship on that ground. These men of repute added nothing to him. His message and ministry were the same before and after the meeting, but now he knew that all were working together and understood each other.

Certain things can be implied regarding the various apostles mentioned. Peter is best known as the apostle to the Jews. Perhaps he has done more traveling and evangelizing than the others.

His work among the Jews serves as a parallel to Paul's Gentile ministry.²⁴ James is listed first when the three names are mentioned. He is probably already the leader of the local Jerusalem church and was prominent in this decision to recognize Paul's mission.²⁵ That Peter and John are mentioned in the same sentence would seem to dispel speculation that James has risen to power because the Twelve have become too liberal. John was apparently still influential even though not a great deal is written concerning his activities.²⁶ These leaders gave to Paul and Barnabas the "right hand of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9). This implies "more than a reciprocal agreement or testimony of friendship: it suggests a covenant,"²⁷ in which the two parties are regarded as equals. The field of labor has been divided by mutual agreement, and neither is responsible to the other.

Part of the agreement in dividing the ministry was that Paul and Barnabas would continue to remember the poor. "Remember" (*μνημονεύετε*) here denotes continued action. It is likely that it indicates that the practice which has already begun should be continued.²⁸ This is consistent with the occasion of the visit related in Acts. Of course, Paul was eager to remember the poor; he was already doing it!

As a result of this visit the leaders of the Jerusalem church formally recognized Paul's mission to the Gentiles. In an indirect way they gave approval to Paul's practice of not requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised. We are not told whether they discussed food laws, or the regulations concerning the relationships between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Paul and Peter at Antioch

In order to provide as complete of a background as possible for the study of the Council of Jerusalem, it is necessary to first examine the encounter between Paul and Peter at Antioch. This incident is only recorded in the second chapter of Galatians. Luke has chosen not to include the incident in Acts. Perhaps he does not want anyone to get the wrong impression, and to think that Peter and Paul had different theologies.

Galatians places this incident immediately after the famine relief visit. This does not imply that it followed immediately. The introductory particle (ὅτι) is used to draw attention to the inconsistency of Peter's actions on these two occasions.²⁹ Some have claimed that the order of the two encounters is here reversed, which would lessen the impact of Peter's inconsistency, but such an order would violate Luke's general rules of grammar.³⁰ It would still be necessary to regard Peter's actions as inconsistent since he had earlier eaten with the Gentile Cornelius and his family. Some have tried to identify this Peter as one of the Seventy, instead of Simon Peter (so Clemens Alexandrius and others), but such an identification comes only from the desire to protect the name and reputation of Peter, rather than from textual evidence.³¹ The best solution is to assume that this is Simon Peter, that the occurrence takes place at some point after the famine relief visit, and that Peter's actions are simply inconsistent with his earlier behavior. It is better to seek to understand Peter's inconsistency, rather than to attempt to deny it.

Before the arrival of the men from James, Peter was eating with the Gentiles (the imperfect *συνήσθιεν* indicates that the eating had been going on, this was not an isolated instance³²).

There is no record of the question concerning food laws, and the resulting fellowship questions ever having been brought up in the private interview. This may have been something new for Peter at this time.³³ He decided to join in since this fellowship was consistent with the vision he had received in which he was told that there was no longer unclean food. It is not clear whether Peter was actually eating the prohibited foods, or if he continued to abstain because of his own free choice, and was merely eating along with others who ate the prohibited foods. Whichever was the case, Peter was guilty in the eyes of the men from James, since Jews were both prohibited from eating unclean foods themselves, and also from eating along side anyone who did.³⁴

The arrival of the men who came from James caused the change in Peter's behavior. He perhaps perceived (correctly) that they would not understand what he was doing. The motivations for his withdrawal could be either 1) fear of reprisal from these men,³⁵ or 2) an attempt not to offend them.³⁶ The first seems to be the best option, for the text gives "fearing the circumcision party" as his motivation. This is a throwback to the old Peter, the Peter who had denied his Lord three times before the crucifixion. It does not seem like the post-Pentecost Peter who was not afraid to stand up to the Sanhedrin. Peter's fear here would seem to indicate that he was not as completely positive of his actions, as he had been when

he stood before the Sanhedrin. This eating with Gentiles was probably a new thing for him (except for the isolated case of Cornelius, which was directed by God). What had seemed right to him earlier in Antioch, he may now have questioned with the sudden appearance of these men who would certainly disapprove of his actions. Such a view assumes that food laws had not been discussed in the private conference during the famine relief visit. If Peter knew that the issue had been decided earlier, he certainly would not have backed down.

What do these "men from James" tell us about James' own thinking at this point? If it is assumed that this question had not been discussed during the conference of the famine relief visit, it is not difficult to speculate that these men were indeed sent by James to investigate this new development. James had recognized Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, but he might be hearing of this strange fellowship for the first time.³⁷ James had not necessarily sent the men to condemn, but to investigate. Another possibility would be that these men were not sent by James for this specific purpose. They might simply have been followers of James who came on their own initiative,³⁸ or they might have been sent out by James for some other purpose and accidentally stumbled across this fellowship.³⁹

Paul was quick to grasp and to point out the implications of Peter's actions. The action would have a disastrous effect on Christian unity.⁴⁰ For while Peter's actions did not imply that the Gentiles must keep the Jewish food laws in order to be saved, it did indicate that they would have to keep those laws if they wanted

to have any kind of fellowship with the Jewish Christians.⁴¹ Peter's actions, if carried out consistently, would thus either split the church into distinct Jewish and Gentile branches, or else force the Gentiles to give up their Christian liberty. The former choice was anathema to Paul's idea of unity and the latter option seemed ridiculous since even Peter, a Jew, was not keeping the Jewish law.

Paul describes Peter and the others as acting "insincerely" (*συνυπεκρίθσαν*), or playing the hypocrite. This term was originally used to describe actors who were hiding their true selves behind the role they were playing.⁴² Paul is very upset at this point, not because he thinks Peter and the other Jewish Christians do not know any better, or have a different belief than his own, but because they seem to be afraid to stand up for what they believe. There is no hint that the incident left bitter feelings between Peter and Paul. In fact, soon after this Peter defends Paul and his views at the Council of Jerusalem.

Council of Jerusalem

Paul has been appointed the "apostle to the Gentiles", Peter was shown by God that there were no longer rules concerning clean and unclean animals to separate Jews and Gentiles, the Jerusalem church approved of Peter's actions in baptizing Cornelius' household, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem concurred in Paul's work, the same leaders had not compelled the Gentile Titus to be circumcised, Peter had reverted to his old ways in one instance.

but was set straight by Paul, and now Paul and Barnabas return from their first missionary journey and hear that visitors are saying that Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved (15:1)!

The question concerning the Gentile relationship to the Jewish laws apparently had not been finally settled. The circumcision party had strong grounds for their case and would not give up easily. In Genesis 17:9-14 God had spoken the command of circumcision to Abraham. Circumcision was a sign of one's willingness to accept the law. The covenant was to be everlasting. Many could not accept the fact that Christ was the end of the law (Rom. 10:4).⁴³ Some of these Christians had earlier been Pharisees. For some, conversion meant recognizing Christ as Messiah, but not relinquishing their legalistic attitudes (as their fellow-Pharisee Paul had done).⁴⁴

Another factor prompting this renewed push for the Gentiles to observe the law was the fear that while the Gentile mission was necessary, their numbers would soon dwarf the Jewish Christian community. Unless these Gentiles were forced to undergo circumcision and also submit to the rest of the Jewish law, the moral standards of the entire movement would be weakened.⁴⁵ When news of Paul's success in converting great numbers in Galatia reached these legalists, their concern was renewed. They perhaps dispatched some of their number to Galatia "to undo the damage of this rash self-proclaimed apostle" and others were sent to Antioch to confront Paul personally at his home base. Many have attempted to identify these Judaizers with James and the leaders in Jerusalem, but it later comes out that they have no official authority (15:24)

When neither side would give in in the debate that followed, it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and others would go to Jerusalem to discuss the problem with the apostles and elders. A quick letter would have to suffice for the Galatians. This visit may at first seem inconsistent with Paul's contention in that same letter that he was not subject to the Twelve, but neither Paul nor Barnabas wanted the church to split.⁴⁶ Even as Paul had not been afraid to consult with the apostles during his famine relief visit, he now sees the necessity of having this problem settled officially. Since those arguing with him are from Judea, it would be most effective to defeat them in their own country.

Paul does not seem to be overly concerned about losing the decision, for he did not hesitate to share the news of the recent Galatian trip with those in Phoenicia, Samaria, and in Jerusalem upon his arrival. As might be expected, Paul's antagonists had also returned to Jerusalem and they (or their friends) began to make trouble for Paul as soon as he got to the city. Their protests are twofold, that 1) the pagans were not being forced to undergo circumcision, and 2) as a natural result they did not find it necessary to keep the laws which circumcision symbolized.

A public assembly having been called, a prolonged discussion ensued. Luke tells us of Peter standing up to speak (15:7-11). This was Peter who had been convinced that the kingdom was only for Israel and who strongly protested when told to eat unclean meat in his vision. But Peter had been shown by God that the food laws were over, and that circumcision was not required for salvation.

This was also the Peter who backed down when the men from Judea had earlier arrived in Antioch. Peter had apparently been convinced by Paul's arguments concerning the full implications of God's revelation. He argues clearly that the placing of the burden of the law upon these Gentiles would only provoke God's wrath. Before Antioch, Peter had probably been content to generally continue in his former habits of keeping the law. His attitude has apparently changed, for he now regards the law as a yoke on their necks, which none of them were able to keep. Peter is saying that the law is not necessary for Gentiles, but also implies that it is not necessary for Jewish Christians.

The details of Paul and Barnabas's speeches are not given. It seems that their testimony consisted mainly in relating the blessings God had showered upon their work. This argument would parallel Peter's account of God's showing his will by bringing the Gentile Cornelius to Christ.⁴⁷

James was the last to speak. As the leader of the Jerusalem church his decision served as the verdict, which probably did not require ratification.⁴⁸ He naturally gives the reasons for his decisions. He first cites the testimony of Peter that the Gentile mission was God's will. (That he does not cite the testimony of Paul or Barnabas may be due to the fact that their work had already raised much apprehension among the Jerusalem rank and file.⁴⁹) James then cites Scripture to show that it is God's will that first Jews should join the church, and then Gentiles would be won.⁵⁰ It is interesting that James quotes the Amos passage from the Septuagint,

a reading which is much less flattering to the Jewish nation.

(The Hebrew text states that the Jews will possess the remnant of Edom . . . while the Septuagint depicts Israel in ruins.)⁵¹

This would seem to indicate either that James is more "broad-minded" than he is often portrayed, or that the entire council, including Scripture reading, was in Aramaic, and that Luke when writing of it in Greek then cited the reference from the normal Greek text.⁵²

On this basis, James rules that the mission to the Gentiles is valid and that circumcision is not necessary for the new converts. This is nothing more than what he had agreed to during the famine relief visit. However, it is now public and official.

In addition to not being subject to circumcision, the new converts are not subject to the rest of the law. He only asks that they abstain from 1)the pollution of idols, 2)fornication, 3)the meat of strangled animals, and 4)blood. A question arises whether these four items compromise complete freedom from the law, and whether Paul would have agreed to such a compromise.

One explanation would be that these four items were in the category of courtesy considerations such as the "precepts of Noah". One list included: 1)prohibition of the worship of other gods, 2)blaspheming the name of God, 3)cursing judges, 4)murder, 5)incest and adultery, 6)robbery, and 7)the prohibition of flesh with the blood of life in it.⁵³ A Jew could associate with a Gentile who kept these regulations, but the Gentile would not consider these regulations to be a part of the Mosaic law.

Paul might also have agreed to such regulations if the Gentiles were already observing such customs, simply in an effort not to give offense. This would explain James' statement about Moses having his preachers in every town. Since the Gentile Christians were sure to come into contact with Jewish Christians in all parts of the world, Paul had perhaps advised them of a few simple items which they might practice out of courtesy for their Hebrew brothers.⁵⁴ (These food laws were observed in some areas as late as 177 A.D.⁵⁵) If Paul had already been following these provisions, he certainly would have had no trouble agreeing to continue the practice. It may be compared to his being eager to remember the poor (Gal. 2), for he was already doing it.

Another explanation would be to say that Luke has mistakenly applied an answer dealing with social regulations to a question concerning circumcision. This answer was possibly fitting for the problem between Peter and Paul at Antioch where table fellowship was under discussion.⁵⁶ Such a proposal leaves two serious problems. First it destroys Luke's credit as an historian, and secondly it fails to appreciate how the circumcision issue and the matter of food laws were completely intertwined. The rite of circumcision symbolized the agreement to subject oneself to the other Jewish laws, including food and fellowship guidelines. Even if these four regulations are not considered to be a part of the Jewish law, they were certainly relevant to the issues being discussed at the Council since they dealt with the proper relationships between Gentile and Jewish Christians.

It is also possible to say that this was a compromise in regard to keeping the law. It was designed to appease the Pharisees as a small concession. Further promulgation of the law could be undertaken through the Pharisees in the individual towns.⁵⁷ It is doubtful if Paul would have accepted such a compromise. It is totally inconsistent with his ideas of freedom in Galatians and Romans.⁵⁸ He probably would have stood up to the council just as he had previously done to Peter in Antioch.

It seems best to conclude that Paul not only accepted the decision but was happy with it. No compromise of principle was involved. What was asked was what he already encouraged, because of Christian love for one's brother. In his epistles he urged that those who were strong in faith should voluntarily restrict their liberty in such matters as food when an action might offend a weaker brother (Rom. 14:1ff.) (1 Cor. 8:1ff.)⁵⁹ The four stipulations were not a compromise concerning the law, but just good common sense items which would promote the cause of unity.

Even though James ruled that Gentiles need not keep the law, he did not imply that anyone could say that the keeping of it by free choice was wrong. James himself was described as having led an ascetic life and regularly interceding for the people at the temple services of prayer.⁶⁰ In fact, James was later disturbed when he heard rumors that Paul was teaching "Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses" (21:21). That that was not the case was shown by Paul's agreement to demonstrate to the people that he still kept the law.

This was the final decision of the Council of Jerusalem, which was agreed to by Paul, Peter, and James. Circumcision was not to be required of the Gentiles, and neither were other provisions of the law; however, one should be considerate of one's brother. While the law could not be required, it was not said that it was wrong to keep it, if it was done by free choice.

Summary

These chapters see the rapid development of the Gentile mission and the discussion and resolution of the proper relationship of the Gentile Christian to the Jewish law.

Paul had been called to Antioch to assist Barnabas in ministering to the Gentile church there. When Agabas predicted that a famine was coming, Barnabas, Paul and others were selected to bring the relief funds to the needy mother church in Jerusalem. Paul also saw this as an opportunity to meet with the disciples, whom he had conferred with only one other time, more than a decade earlier. He did not all of a sudden decide that he needed to have their guidance or approval, but he wanted to make sure that they were all working in the same direction. Paul was concerned that the church maintain a unified mission.

During this visit, Paul met in private with the leaders of the church. An agreement was reached whereby Paul was recognized as the missionary to the Gentiles, while the others would continue their work among the Jews. That Titus was not forced to be circumcised indicates that the Twelve did not consider it necessary for Gentile Christians.

At some point later Peter visited Antioch. This was in keeping with his custom of visiting the outlying churches. He discovered upon arrival that the Jewish and Gentile Christians were freely eating together (or he might have heard rumors to that effect and come to investigate). Peter was perhaps surprised at first, but then considered his own vision erasing the barriers between clean and unclean foods. He saw the fellowship as a fine example of Christian unity and heartily joined in.

Word of this fellowship probably reached Jerusalem. During the private conference with Paul, they had agreed that circumcision was not necessary, but the question of table fellowship had perhaps not come up. James wanted to find out more about this strange development, and so sent some representatives to investigate.

When the representatives arrived, Peter was suddenly afraid of what these Jewish Christians would think of his flagrant violation of the law. He quickly separated himself, influencing the other Jewish Christians to do the same. Paul recognized that such actions would be setting up a barrier between Jewish and Gentile Christians. For the unity to continue the Gentile Christians would have to compromise their Christian freedom and also submit to the Jewish law. Peter in his rashness probably did not realize the implications of his actions. Peter apparently sees Paul's point and the problem is solved.

Paul and Barnabas leave on their first missionary journey. Naturally they do not require their Gentile converts to be circumcised,

nor to keep other aspects of the Jewish law. There were some Jewish Christians to whom the keeping of the entire law was very important. They were disturbed upon hearing of Paul's extensive work. Soon these Gentile Christians would form the large majority of the church, and the law would be all but forgotten. They sent some of their numbers to teach what they considered to be the truth about the law to both the converts in Galatia, and also to the church in Antioch.

Paul was very displeased at their actions. He argued with these Judaizers who had come to Antioch and when nothing was decided, he agreed to take the debate to Jerusalem to be settled. What the apostles there believed did not influence the truth of his teachings, but a favorable decision might help to silence the men of the circumcision. A hasty letter to the Galatians was written in an effort to temporarily solve the problem there.

At the Council of Jerusalem, Peter related how God had revealed to him that there was no longer a distinction between clean and unclean, and that the Lord had sent his Holy Spirit to Cornelius and his family in spite of the fact that they had not been circumcised. Paul and Barnabas related how God had similarly indicated his approval upon their mission by richly blessing their efforts.

James, who was respected by the rank and file of the church as one who led a very righteous life, first cited God's revelation to Peter, and then pointed out that what was happening was scriptural. After the Jews would be restored, the Gentiles would also be invited into the kingdom of God. It was not proper to demand that the Gentiles

should be forced to submit to the Jewish law since God himself had not required it.

The Gentiles were only asked to follow a few regulations out of respect for their Jewish Christian brothers. This was fine with Paul since he believed strongly in not offending the brother in matters where principle was not involved. He had probably even made a habit of suggesting the same type of thing as a matter of simple courtesy.

At the close of the council, the leaders are agreed upon the necessity of a Gentile mission. These new Gentile converts need not be circumcised or keep other provisions of the Jewish law. However, they have not ruled that the following of the law by free choice is wrong, for either Jew or Gentile. Of course there were some who would continue to insist upon circumcision, but the bulk of the church stands united in their idea of the church's message and mission. Such agreement between men from such diverse backgrounds was made possible only because God had been the guiding force in the development of the mission.

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- ¹F. F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts: The English Text (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 301.
- ²Robert Hoerber, "Galatians 2:1-10 and the Acts of the Apostles," Concordia Theological Monthly 31 (August 1960):483.
- ³Kirsopp Lake, "The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem," The Beginnings of Christianity, 5 vols., eds., F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake (London: MacMillan and Co., 1920-33), 5:199.
- ⁴Ibid.
- ⁵Hoerber, p. 482.
- ⁶Floyd Filson, A New Testament History (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), p. 221.
- ⁷Hermann Ridderbos, The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 34.
- ⁸Ibid.
- ⁹Wilfred L. Knox, The Acts of the Apostles (Cambridge: University Press, 1948), p. 40.
- ¹⁰Werner Kummel, Introduction to the New Testament, 14th edition, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 128, and Lake 5:201-02.
- ¹¹Lake, p. 201.
- ¹²Hoerber, p. 483-84.
- ¹³Lake, 5:201.
- ¹⁴Donald Guthrie, Galatians (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1969), p. 34.
- ¹⁵Hoerber, p. 485.
- ¹⁶Guthrie, pp. 16-27, Hoerber, pp. 485-88, and Ridderbos, pp. 22-31.
- ¹⁷Ridderbos, pp. 80-81.
- ¹⁸Ernest Burton, The Epistle to the Galatians (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1921), pp. 72-73.
- ¹⁹Guthrie, pp. 34-35.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 77.

- 21 Burton, p. 76.
- 22 Guthrie, p. 78.
- 23 Burton, p. 87.
- 24 Guthrie, p. 81.
- 25 Burton, p. 95.
- 26 Guthrie, p. 82.
- 27 Ridderbos, p. 90.
- 28 Burton, p. 99.
- 29 Guthrie, p. 84.
- 30 Ibid., p. 32.
- 31 Ridderbos, p. 94.
- 32 Ibid., p. 96.
- 33 Martin Scharlemann, Stephen: A Singular Saint (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1968), p. 159.
- 34 Guthrie, p. 85.
- 35 Ridderbos, p. 95.
- 36 Bruce, p. 305.
- 37 Scharlemann, p. 159.
- 38 Ridderbos, p. 96.
- 39 Guthrie, p. 84.
- 40 Bruce, p. 303.
- 41 Guthrie, p. 86.
- 42 Ibid., p. 85.
- 43 Filson, pp. 214-15.
- 44 Bruce, p. 305.
- 45 Ibid., p. 301.
- 46 Filson, pp. 216-17.

⁴⁷Bruce, p. 309.

⁴⁸Foakes-Jackson, 4:177.

⁴⁹Bruce, p. 309.

⁵⁰Scharlemann, pp. 157-58.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 157.

⁵²Filson, p. 217.

⁵³Ibid., p. 206.

⁵⁴George Ladd, The Young Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), p. 61.

⁵⁵Bruce, p.315.

⁵⁶Lake, 5:210.

⁵⁷Bruce, p. 312.

⁵⁸Lake, 5:214.

⁵⁹Bruce, pp. 313-14.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 253.

	Peter	Paul	Steph- en	Phil- ip	Apos- tles	Barn- abas	John	Others
I. FORM OF THE MISSION								
-a witness to what one has experienced	1:22 2:32 3:15 4:20 8:25 10:41	14:27			5:32	15:12	4:20	Jesus-1:8 Church-4:29
-preaching	2:22- 25 3:26 4:2 4:12 8:25 10:42	9:20 9:22 9:27 13:5 14:1, 7,9, 21 15:35 13:46	7:51	8:5, 12	1:11 5:21, 30, 42 8:4	13:5, 46 14:1, 3,7	4:2, 12 8:25, 40	Judas and Silas-15:32
-teaching		11:26 15:35		8:35		11:26 15:35		
-comforting and encouraging		14:32 13:43				13:43		Judas and Silas-15:32
-laying on hands	8:15						8:15	
-signs and wonders	3:6, 15	14:3, 10	6:8	8:6, 13	2:43 5:12	14:3		
-establish churches		14:23			6:2- 4			
-leave when rejected	13:46 13:51 14:6, 20					13:46 13:51 14:6, 20		

	Peter	Paul	Steph en	Phil- ip	Apos- tles	Barn- abas	John	Others
-to baptize	10:48			8:13, 38				
-prophesy								Agabas-11:27
-doing good (alms)								Cornelius-10:2 Disciples-11:29
II. CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE								
-Jesus died and rose (general)	2:22- 25 3:26 4:2, 12 8:25 10:42	9:20, 22, 27 13:5 14:1, 3,7, 9,21 15:35, 46		8:5, 15	1:11 5:21 5:42 8:4		4:2, 12 8:25, 40	Judas and Silas-15:32
-repent!	2:23, 24, 38 3:20 5:30 8:22		7:51		5:30			
-scripture is fulfilled	1:16, 30 3:23							
-all credit to God	10:27	14:15				14:15		
-no vengeance			7:60					

	Peter	Paul	Steph- en	Phil- ip	Apos- tles	Barn- abas	John	Others
-relationship to law?	5:29 10:28 15:10	15:2	6:11, 13, 14					James-15:19-20 Some Men-15:1 Former Pharisees- 15:5
III. DIRECTION OF THE MISSION								
-to Israel only	2:36							
-to Israel first		13:5, 14, 46 14:1				13:46 14:1		James-15:14-18
-to the Gentiles also	10:28, 34, 35, 47 11:17 15:8, 11	14:27			11:20			

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