

ARTICLE II.

✓ THE NEW CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S LIFE.

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ON the relative chronology of Paul's life we have a good many data in the book of Acts and in Paul's epistles. Certain periods are definitely marked off, as that from his conversion to his first and second visits in Jerusalem (Gal. i. 18; ii. 1); other periods are of unknown length, as the missionary tours from Antioch. A single period of indefinite duration of course renders it impossible to compute the exact length of his Christian career.

On the absolute chronology of Paul's life there is even greater uncertainty than on its relative chronology. We do not know the year of his birth, his conversion, his death, or indeed of any individual event in his life, with a single exception. The year which he spent in Antioch with Barnabas (Acts xi. 26) synchronizes wholly or in part with the year 44, for Luke indicates that Herod died in Cæsarea while Paul was in Antioch, and Herod's death fell in the year 44, not long after the Passover (Acts xii. 3).¹ But this year in Antioch was preceded and followed by a period of uncertain length, for it was preceded by the work in Syria and Cilicia, and followed by the first missionary tour from Antioch.

Professor Ramsay attempts to derive a fixed point for the chronology of Paul's life from Acts xx. 6-11.² His argument is as follows: Paul and his companions left Troas on Monday after a seven days' visit. Hence they arrived

¹ Antiquities, xix. 2.² Expositor, 1896, p. 336.

in Troas on the preceding Tuesday. But they had been five days on the trip from Philippi to Troas, and therefore must have left Philippi on the preceding Friday. Now Luke says that they started from Philippi "after the days of unleavened bread." Ramsay assumes that they left on the very next day after the feast, and therefore that the Passover was slain on Thursday. This was true in the year 57, but not in any year immediately before or after that; and consequently Ramsay holds that this was the year of Paul's last journey to Jerusalem. From this he reckons forward and backward.

But it will be seen that this theory absolutely requires us to suppose that Paul left Philippi on Friday. Luke, however, neither says this nor does his narrative necessarily imply it. He simply says that they sailed away from Philippi "after the days of unleavened bread"; and while his narrative speaks of *hastening* in order to be in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts xx. 16), this evidently means only that they were unwilling to make long stops on the way. They tarried a week in Troas, several days in Miletus, a week in Tyre, a day in Ptolemais, and an indefinite number of days in Cæsarea (Acts xx. 6, 17; xxi. 4, 7, 10). Therefore we must say that it is quite uncertain whether Paul left Philippi on the day immediately following the feast. We need a firmer basis than this if we are to arrive at satisfactory chronological results.

Many writers have thought that they had a safe point of departure for reckoning the chronology of Paul's life in the date of the removal of Felix and the appointment of Festus. Paul was arrested two years before the removal of Felix and was sent to Rome soon after the appointment of Festus (Acts xxiv. 27; xxv. 6; xxvii. 1). But here again it is difficult to establish a point of departure. Harnack, following Eusebius, puts the removal of Felix and the appointment of Festus in the second year of Nero, Oct. 55-

Oct. 56.¹ Holtzmann² and McGiffert³ adopt the same year for the appointment of Festus, but do so on the basis of Tacitus and Josephus. The common view has been that Festus was not appointed until about 60.⁴

It is necessary, therefore, to consider the evidence for these two dates. Harnack accepts the testimony of Eusebius, who says that Festus succeeded Felix in the second year of Nero (Oct. 55–Oct. 56). Harnack admits that Eusebius is not always right in his chronological statements, but he thinks that it could not have been difficult, at the beginning of the third century, to learn, in Palestine, the exact time of the accession of Felix and Festus. He holds that the date of Eusebius is confirmed by Josephus and Tacitus, for Josephus says that Felix, when accused in Rome by certain of the principal Jews of Cæsarea, was defended and saved by his brother Pallas, who had great power at court,⁵ and Tacitus records that Pallas was removed from office in 55.⁶ Accordingly, unless Pallas was afterward restored, Felix must have been removed from office not later than 55. Finally, Harnack thinks that the chronology of Paul's life prior to his imprisonment under Felix is favorable to the date of Eusebius.

We will consider these points one by one, beginning with the last.

Harnack thinks that the recorded history of Paul before his arrest in Jerusalem can be compressed into the years before 53, but in order to do this he carries back the conversion of Paul to the year 30. Bousset points out that the existence of Christian churches as far as Damascus at

¹Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur, Erster Band, 1897, pp. 233–239.

²Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte, 1895, pp. 129–130.

³A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age, 1897, pp. 356–357.

⁴Schürer, Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes, 1890, Erster Band, pp. 477–484.

⁵Antiq. xx. 8. 9. ⁶Annals, xiii. 14–15.

the time of Paul's conversion is a grave objection to this view.¹ It is not probable that the year of the crucifixion saw the gospel so widely extended as this. Moreover, it appears impossible to bring within a single year the events of Acts i.-viii., especially the extension of the gospel among the priests (vi. 7), the events which led to the appointment of the deacons (vi. 1-6), and *after* these things the persecutions of Paul, which involved many trials by the sanhedrin (Acts xxvi. 10) and various journeys to points at a distance from Jerusalem (xxvi. 11). All this history cannot reasonably be compressed into a single year, and thus one of the outposts of Harnack's position must be abandoned.

Again, Harnack, as also Holtzmann and McGiffert, lays much stress on the argument formed by coupling together a statement of Josephus and one of Tacitus. Josephus says that Felix when accused of misgovernment was saved through the intervention of Pallas, and Tacitus says that Pallas fell into disfavor with the emperor in 55. The inference is drawn that Felix must have been removed from office as early as 55. Schürer's supposition that Pallas must have been restored to favor is regarded by Harnack as precarious, and we will not build upon it. Still the inference which is drawn from the happy conjunction of Josephus and Tacitus is anything but necessary. Suppose that Pallas had been dismissed by Nero, in order to humble Agrippina, he was not thereby stripped of power and influence. Tacitus says he had amassed a fortune of some fifteen millions of dollars, and that he had received extravagant honors from the senate for his service in proposing a law to prevent the intermarriage of free women with slaves.² Now this man, though no longer in Nero's employ, was doubtless one of the most powerful men in

¹Theol. Rundschau, Erstes Heft, 1897.

²Annals, xii. 53.

Rome; and there is nothing improbable in the statement of Josephus, that his solicitations saved the life of Felix.¹ Josephus may be in error in saying that Pallas was at that time had in the greatest honor by Nero, but he is right in the essential point that Pallas saved Felix. The "important solicitations" of a man with the immense wealth of Pallas could hardly fail to have weight with the unprincipled Nero, even though he had removed Pallas from office. And it is to be remembered that, according to Tacitus, Nero removed Pallas in order to humble Agrippina, and not primarily out of personal animosity toward Pallas. It appears, therefore, that we may with good grounds reject the inference which Harnack and others draw from the combined testimony of Tacitus and Josephus.

There remains then the bare statement of Eusebius that Festus succeeded Felix in the second year of Nero, that is, between Oct. 55 and Oct. 56. Now Schürer says that the statements of the *Chronicle* are often arbitrary,² and even Harnack admits that they must be tested.³ For example, Eusebius says that Paul was put to death in the fourteenth year of Nero, and Harnack thinks it demonstrable that Eusebius was four years out of the way. The opinion of Harnack that it could not have been difficult, at the beginning of the third century, to learn, in Palestine, the exact time of the accession of Felix and Festus will probably not be shared by many of his readers. For if the Roman historians failed to preserve the exact dates of the accession of Roman officials in Palestine, it is not likely that the Jews of that land preserved these dates two and a half centuries. But there are other objections to this statement of Eusebius. First, Felix was sent to Judea in 52,⁴ but Paul said to him, two years before he was removed from office and succeeded by Festus, "Forasmuch as I know

¹ Antiq. xx. 8. 9. ² Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes, i. 484.

³ Chronologie, 235. ⁴ Antiq. xx. 7. 1.

that thou hast been of *many years* a judge unto this nation, I do cheerfully make my defense" (Acts xxiv. 10). Could he have used that language if Felix had been in office but a year or even two years? Harnack says that Felix had been in office from three to four years when Paul stood before him. In order to get so long a period he accepts the year 51 as the year when Felix was appointed (p. 236), and the year 54 as that in which Paul stood before him. But against the year 51 is (1) the fact that the Armenian manuscript of the *Chronicle* puts the appointment of Felix in the eleventh year of Claudius, that is the year 52; and (2) the fact that Josephus seems to put it in the twelfth year of Claudius.¹

Moreover, if Festus succeeded Felix in the summer of 56, as Harnack believes, and if Luke's statement be true that Paul was a prisoner under Felix two full years (Acts xxiv. 27), then we are brought back to the summer of 54, and from the summer of 54 back to the year 52 is not a space of three or four years. At the outside, it is only two years and a half, and it is not likely that Paul would have spoken of this period as one of *many years*. Harnack says that three or four years are not few *for a procurator*, and so seems to take Luke's language as though it had read, "Since thy procuratorship has been *an unusually long one*." But that is plainly impossible. The expression *for many years* is a simple statement of time, and not a judgment on the length of Felix's procuratorship. Holtzmann and McGiffert try to justify the language of Luke by the use of a remark of Tacitus, that Felix was over a part of Palestine contemporaneously with Cumanus.² But Josephus knows nothing of this division of the land. He thinks of Felix as the successor of Cumanus, and not a contemporary ruler in Palestine.³ This testimony of Jo-

¹ *Antiq.* xx. 7. 1. ² *Zeitgeschichte*, p. 129; *Apostolic Age*, p. 338.

³ *Antiq.* xx. 6. 1-3; 7. 1.

sephus is set aside by Holtzmann and McGiffert, and that of Tacitus is adopted. Harnack makes no appeal to the testimony of Tacitus, and therefore probably does not regard it as preferable to that of Josephus. Schürer¹ prefers the report of Josephus, as it is more definite than that of Tacitus. Here then we face a contradiction between Josephus and Tacitus. We cannot, with McGiffert, discredit the account of Josephus on the ground that this part of his narrative contains many palpable inaccuracies, for the narrative of Tacitus also is not without its improbable features. For example, he says that Claudius sent a commission to pronounce judgment on the two provincial ministers, Cumanus and Felix, who were charged with fostering strife between the Galileans and Samaritans; and then adds the remarkable statement that Quadratus, governor of Syria, placed Felix, one of the accused parties, on the tribunal with the judges! And he continues that Cumanus was found guilty of the crimes committed by both! The narrative of Tacitus, therefore, can hardly be said to be worthy of the utmost confidence, and so preferred to that of Josephus.

One thing is plain: the testimony of Tacitus, which is contrary to that of Josephus, and on whose worth scholars hold opposite views, cannot be brought into court and held to settle an important question in controversy. A chronological result which rests even in part upon such evidence as this cannot be regarded as a final result. We must say that the language of Luke in Acts xxiv. 10 is still a grave objection to the acceptance of the second year of Nero as that of the appointment of Festus.

But while the evidence is against this year as the date of the appointment of Festus, no year can be definitely substituted for it. There is, however, a convergence of testimony upon the period between 58 and 60. Schürer

¹ *Geschichte*, i. 477.

states somewhat as follows the argument for the year 60 as the latest possible date for the removal of Felix.¹ It appears from Acts xxvii. 9 that Felix was removed in the summer. Now since Albinus became procurator in the summer of 62 at latest, we cannot put the removal of Felix in the summer of 61, since that would leave too little time for the procuratorship of Festus, who preceded Albinus.² On the other hand, the chronology of Paul's Christian career seems to require a date as late as 58. If we allow three years for the events of Acts i.-viii., and, with McGiffert and others, allow seven or eight years for the interval between the conference in Jerusalem and the arrest of Paul, these periods with the three years and fourteen years of Gal. i.-ii. bring us to 57 or 58. In like manner we reach the year 57 if we start from the year 44, in which Agrippa I. died. We assume that the year 44 was spent in Antioch (Acts xi. 26). Then if we allow three years for the first missionary tour, and one year for the events of Acts xv. 1-35, and eight years for the interval between the council and the arrest of Paul in Jerusalem, we come to the year 57.

We therefore hold that the internal and external evidence point to the latter third of the sixth decade as the period in which Felix was succeeded by Festus, and we regard the year 58 as more probable than the year 60. Assuming the summer of 58 as the time when Festus came to Palestine, we have the following approximate dates:

Arrest of Paul in Jerusalem, summer of 56 (Acts xxiv. 27);

Visit in Achaia, winter of 55-56 (Acts xx. 3);

Tour through Macedonia, autumn of 55 (Acts xx. 2);

Work in Ephesus, 52-55 (Acts xx. 31);

From Antioch through the "upper country," 52 (Acts xviii. 23-xix. 1);

¹ *Geschichte d. jüdischen Volkes*, i. 484. ² *Antiq.* xx. 8. 9-11.

Second tour from Antioch, 49-51 (Acts xv. 36-xviii. 18);
Conference in Jerusalem and work in Antioch, 48 (Acts xv. 1-35);

First tour from Antioch, 45-47 (Acts xiii. 4-xiv. 28);

Paul in Syria and Cilicia, 35-44 (Gal. i. 21; ii. 1);

Paul in Arabia, 32-35 (Gal. i. 17-18);

Paul's conversion, 32.

Again, assuming 58 as the year of the appointment of Festus, it follows that Paul was sent to Rome in the autumn of that year (Acts xxvii. 9). He reached Rome in the early part of 59, some four months having been spent on the way (Acts xxvii. 27; xxviii. 11). The two years of mild imprisonment of which Luke speaks carry us forward to the spring of 61 (Acts xxviii. 30).

The date which is assigned for Paul's death depends not only upon the date which is adopted for his arrival in Rome, but also upon the view which is held regarding a second Roman imprisonment. Harnack holds a second imprisonment, terminating in the death of the apostle.¹ McGiffert thinks that Paul was put to death at the end of the imprisonment mentioned in Acts xxviii. 30, and this he assigns to the year 58.² Holtzmann and Jülicher put the death of Paul in 64, though Holtzmann thinks that the imprisonment of Acts xxviii. 30 terminated in 58, and Jülicher that it terminated in 64.³ Ramsay thinks there can hardly be any doubt that Paul's martyrdom took place about 67.⁴ Zahn holds to a release from the imprisonment of Acts xxviii. 30, a period of activity and a second imprisonment, and he puts the death of Paul in 66 or 67.⁵ Spitta also holds a second Roman imprison-

¹ *Chronologie*, p. 239. ² *Apostolic Age*, p. 419.

³ *Zeitgeschichte*, p. 128; *Einleitung*, p. 26.

⁴ *Expositor*, 1896, p. 343.

⁵ *Einleitung in das Neue Testament, Erster Band*, 1897, p. 443.

ment, and puts the death of Paul late in Nero's reign, though not assigning a year.¹

The chief evidence which seems to me to justify the view that Paul was released from the imprisonment of Acts xxviii. 30 is the following: (1) The book of Acts leads us to expect a release. Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa all declared that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds (Acts xxiii. 29; xxiv. 22, 26; xxv. 26; xxvi. 31-32). These previous hearings would not be reversed by the supreme court without good evidence against Paul, and what evidence could the Jews bring which they had not already brought? I will draw no inference from the way in which Acts closes. Inferences contrary to each other are confidently affirmed by different authors. McGiffert holds it inconceivable that Luke would not have recorded Paul's acquittal, if he had indeed been acquitted;² while Zahn says that the only inference which we can draw with any probability from the conclusion of the narrative in Acts xxviii. 30 is this, that a considerable period in the life and missionary labor of Paul followed those two years, for which Luke did not find room in his second book, if it was to be of about the same size as the first. He thinks that there could have been no worthier conclusion of the book or of the work of Paul than his death as a witness for the gospel.³ Harnack does not connect the death of Paul with the close of the first Roman imprisonment.⁴ Jülicher says that the remarkable conclusion of Acts allows us to think that Paul was released, though for various reasons he holds that he was *not* released.⁵ But this use of the last verses of Acts is manifestly unwarrantable. We cannot yet read the mind of Luke so as to say

¹ Zur Geschichte und Litteratur des Urchristenthums, Erster Band, 1893, p. 107.

² Apostolic Age, p. 418. ³ Einleitung, p. 438.

⁴ Geschichte, p. 239. ⁵ Einleitung, p. 27.

that he could or could not have finished his book as he did, if Paul had still been living.

(2) A second reason for believing that Paul was released is the fact that he felt sure that he should be released, and he had this conviction toward the close of the two years (Phil. i. 25; ii. 24; Philemon 22). He says he *knows* that he shall abide in the flesh, and he asks Philemon to prepare for him a lodging. Now it is but reasonable to suppose that Paul had good grounds for this conviction that his trial would result in acquittal.

(3) The Pastoral Epistles presuppose a release; and even if these letters are not from Paul's hand, they bear witness to the fact that there was a tradition of his release in the earliest church.¹ If the church had known that Paul was executed at the close of the imprisonment of Acts xxviii. 30, no disciple of Paul writing in his name at the beginning of the second century would have ventured to assume that Paul was released at that time. So the Pastoral Epistles, whether genuine or not, must be reckoned with in the settlement of this question.

(4) There is a tradition, reaching back to the first century, that Paul went to Spain, and this requires his release from the Roman imprisonment. Clement of Rome, who speaks of the apostles as belonging to his own generation,² says that Paul preached in the East and the West, and that he came to the limit of the West (*τέρμα τῆς δύσεως*). Harnack regards that expression as referring to Spain.³ Spitta remarks that no Roman writer ever said that he lived on the boundary of the West,⁴ and that we cannot take the language as from Paul's point of view, because the Roman church knew well that in Paul's thought the limit of the West was not Rome but Spain (Rom. xv. 24, 28). Zahn also holds that the expression refers to Spain.⁵

¹ Zahn, *Einleitung*, p. 437. ² First Epistle to the Corinthians, v.

³ *Geschichte*, p. 239. ⁴ *Urchristenthum*, p. 53. ⁵ *Einleitung*, p. 435.

Thus the ancient tradition has illustrious supporters among recent writers. McGiffert, however, dismisses the tradition as scarcely worthy of consideration, and yet he fails to adduce any proof that Clement's words are as easily referable to Rome as to Spain, and that most of the writers of the second century and of the third tacitly assume that Paul met his death in Rome at the close of his two years' imprisonment there. It seems also that he goes too far when he denies any weight to the Muratorian Fragment, which dates from the close of the second century, but which must be regarded as the crystallization of beliefs much older than the close of the second century.¹ Spitta argues with force, that this canon presupposes a tradition which cannot have sprung out of Rom. xv. 24, 28.² And surely we cannot argue that Paul never worked in Spain, because there are no traces of such work.³ What traces of his work are there in Beroëa and Athens, and Lystra and Derbe, and in the regions of Syria and Cilicia, outside of Tarsus and Antioch? We cannot deny to a missionary the honor of having worked in a certain country because, after nearly two thousand years, there are no traces of his work discoverable.

On the above grounds, therefore, the release of Paul from the imprisonment of Acts xxviii. 30 seems to rest securely. But this result takes us only a step toward the determination of the date of his death.

The geographical and chronological references of the Pastoral Epistles imply an eastern journey which, on a conservative estimate, requires a year (see 1 Tim. i. 3, 20; iii. 14-15; iv. 13; 2 Tim. iv. 13, 20; Tit. i. 5; iii. 12-13). Assuming that Paul was released in the spring of 61, we thus come to the spring of 62 without taking account of the traditional journey to Spain. It is certain that Paul's

¹ Apostolic Age, p. 416. ² Urchristenthum, pp. 60-64.

³ Apostolic Age, p. 416.

death occurred before June 68, for it is the unanimous tradition of the early church that he suffered martyrdom under Nero, and Nero died June 8, 68. Thus the period within which Paul's death occurred is narrowed to five or six years in the middle of the seventh decade.

We have already said that Harnack, Holtzmann, and Jülicher put the death of the apostle in the year 64. Holtzmann does not argue the point, but simply says that the two years' imprisonment of Paul *cannot* have continued beyond the Neronian persecution of 64 (p. 128). Jülicher says, that, "according to the unanimous tradition of the early church, Paul was beheaded in Rome, and indeed in the Neronian persecution, therefore in the summer of 64" (p. 26). Harnack speaks of Paul's death in the summer of 64 as certain (pp. 239-240), and seems to put it there for the reason that, according to Tacitus, the persecution by Nero began in the summer of 64, and Eusebius in his *Chronicle* puts the death of Paul in the first year of the persecution (p. 241). One must, however, challenge the statement of Jülicher, that the unanimous tradition of the early church puts Paul's death "in the Neronian persecution, therefore in the summer of 64." Clement of Rome does not mention Nero's name at all in connection with Paul's death. Eusebius quotes from Dionysius of Corinth to the effect that Paul and Peter suffered martyrdom in Rome,¹ and he himself puts it under Nero,² but he does not connect it with the particular persecution of 64. Zahn, whose minute acquaintance with the early Christian literature is well known, declares that there is not in the entire early tradition any certain support for the view that Paul was executed together with many Roman Christians in the year 64.³ Harnack appeals to Eusebius, but he must correct the statement of the early historian before it can be

¹ *History*, ii. 25. 8.

² *iii.* i. 2; ii. 25. 5.

³ *Einleitung*, p. 437.

used. For Eusebius says that Paul was put to death in the fourteenth or thirteenth year of Nero, that is, in the year 68 or 67, but he also says it was in the year in which the persecution began.¹ Harnack sets aside the first statement, but holds the second. It seems, however, impossible to suppose that Eusebius, who surely knew the Roman historians, could have made a mistake of four years in the date of the persecution of the year 64. If his *Chronicle* actually said that Paul was put to death in the fourteenth or thirteenth year of Nero, and that this was the first year of Nero's persecution, then we have here palpable reason why we should not build upon this statement of Eusebius at all.

But aside from the silence of early tradition there is other evidence against connecting the death of Paul with the persecution of the summer of 64. Thus Tacitus tells us that Nero put the Christians to death with refined cruelty. Some were burnt, some crucified, some given to wild beasts, some covered with inflammable material and burnt as torches in the gardens of Nero.² But early tradition says that Paul was *beheaded*, and this suggests a legal execution rather than Nero's tortures.

Again, the Pastoral Epistles do not allow us to think that Paul perished simply because he was a Christian, for it surely would not have been difficult to prove this charge against the venerable apostle, but it *was* difficult to convict him on the charges which were brought. There was a first defense, and then at least one more hearing (2 Tim. iv. 16). Now whether this writing is from the hand of Paul or of one of his disciples, it presupposes a tradition two hundred years older than the time of Eusebius.

We conclude, therefore, that the evidence is against connecting the death of Paul with the persecution by Nero in the summer of 64. Paul died a martyr, for he had done

¹ *Chronologie*, p. 241. ² *Annals*, xv. 44.

nothing worthy of death or bonds, but he did not fall, as those who perished in the summer of 64, a sacrifice to the rage and cruelty of Nero. The exact year of his death cannot be determined, but we may, with a high degree of probability, assign it to the last three or four years of Nero's reign, that is to the period between 65 or 66 and 68.