

WINTER OF A.D. 25 AS THE TIME OF PAUL'S CONVERSION

©

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As we have pointed out in previous lectures during this series, events in the life of Jesus ought to mesh reasonably well with events in the life of Paul since they were living in the same approximate period of time. Apparently, shortly after the death of Jesus, when Christianity made great impact on Judaism due to its powerful message, Paul set forth to extirpate the new cult which he considered pure heresy and falsehood. He was converted on the Damascus Road, about the time he was drawing close to Damascus itself (Acts 9:3). We suggest that the most likely year for Paul's conversion was A.D. 25 (see our Chronological Chart).

We have seen that in the life of Jesus that he was born about 12 B.C. Josephus places events in the time of Jesus' ministry around A.D. 15-19. Josephus places events in the life of Pontius Pilate in the same time frame. Even if, as many argue, the testimonies of Josephus to Jesus are not authentic and we ought to strike them from his record, the problem is not that simple. Josephus just as definitely places Pilate in the same historical context of the period A.D. 15-19 as he does Pilate. And, furthermore, Josephus is our primary source for the record of Pontius Pilate. This chronology of Josephus for Pilate fits well with N.T. chronology, properly understood.

We argued in our last lecture that Pilate was dismissed about A.D. 25, late in that year. We argued that way on the basis that the Greek word μεταστάς (Ant. 18.89) in connection with the life of Tiberius, does not always mean "died." It is used just as frequently in both Josephus and the N.T. to mean "moved." That is, Pilate was dismissed about the time that Tiberius moved to Capri. We know from clear sources that Tiberius moved to Capri about the spring of the year A.D. 26, so Pilate was dismissed likely in the winter previous to this. Pilate could not arrive in Rome, due to the bad weather on the Mediterranean in the winter before the transfer of Tiberius to Capri. This interpretation makes more sense with what Josephus says than previous interpretations based on Whiston's incorrect translation of the passage in this place.

We now need to see a few more places in the New Testament, connected with the ministry of Jesus, which tend to confirm our argument here for the death of Jesus around A.D. 21, and the dismissal of Pilate around A.D. 25. This chronology fits beautifully with the correct understanding of Paul's conversion around A.D. 25, that is, shortly after the dismissal of Pilate in the winter of A.D. 25. In this connection we treat briefly the year of the census when Jesus died, the time of Annas' High Priesthood, the correct chronology of Jn. 2:20, and examine briefly also the time of Flaccus' service as governor of Syria. We will see hopefully, that the date of A.D. 25 fits well, with all of the above data, as well as the rest of the data of Pauline chronology, as we examine more fully the cycle of sabbatical years, in particular, which Paul, and other early Christians observed.

The Year of Jesus' Death as a Census Year

Matt 22:17 and Mark 12:14 both state that when Jesus' enemies sought to trap him in the incident of the tribute money, they asked Jesus if it was right to render the "census tax" (Κῆνσος) to Caesar. This event seems to signify that the year of Jesus' death was related to a census year.

Evidence shows that while Germanicus (father of the later Emperor, Caligula) was in the east between A.D. 17 and 19, he changed Roman fiscal policies. He forced subject nations to pay taxes in Roman money, and not in local coinage of the individual cities or states.¹ The reason for this is that coinages of other nations were greatly debased at this time, and Germanicus was probably trying to protect Roman currency from being debased as well. Cf. The modern Asian currency crisis!

But to the Jews this action was drastic. It meant that they had to handle Roman money when paying their census dues or any other payment to their overlords. This regulation was new, and was now to be applied in the forthcoming census of A.D. 20/21, which would have caused anger and much discussion among the Jews, who tried to use coins without images or pictures of temples or emperors.² The strong impression one receives in reading this account in the Gospels and knowing of Germanicus' new tax measures, is that this problem was a burning, current issue in front of the Jewish people at this time. This clue would seem to indicate that Jesus died around A.D. 21, at the beginning of Passover. The census that year would not have closed until May/June, but Jesus died several weeks before that, on Nisan 14, which fell on April 14 or April 16, depending on the calendar (Julian/Gregorian) used.³

¹ See the famous document known as the Palmyra Tariff (especially lines 153-58), published in *Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae* (ed. W. Dittenberger; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1903-5) 336 (no. 629). For an alternate edition see G.A. Cooke, *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903) 313-40 (no. 147).

² However, Jews did use Tyrian shekels to pay annual temple dues each year to redeem Israelite males, and such coins did have images of pagan nature on them. This is why Jesus scorned their hypocrisy in this matter. These Tyrian shekels were used since, up to their end around the time of Jerusalem's fall, they were made of pure silver (90%+). Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 2: *Herod the Great through Bar Cochba* (Dix Hills, NY: Amphora, 1982) 7-9, is wrong to assign these coins to Jerusalem after 20 B.C.

³ See F. Wünschmann, review of *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist*, by R. Eisler, *Astronomische Nachrichten* 1930-33: 405-6.

Luke's Mention of the High Priest Annas, and His Period of Service (3:2)

The priestly tenure of Annas is dated by Jeremias between A.D. 6 and 15¹. Biblical scholars have assumed for years that we should date, generally, Jesus' ministry as falling between the late 20s and early 30s of the first century A.D. A correct view of the tenure of Annas could persuade one otherwise.

All New Testament references to Annas as "high priest" are understood by most New Testament scholars loosely. That is, it is often explained that Annas was an ex-high priest in Jesus' day. Since Annas served so influentially *behind the scenes* during the time of Jesus' ministry, advising his relatives who served in the office he formerly occupied, he is referred to by Luke in 3:2 as serving as high priest only loosely, not actually, in Jesus' time.

The contention here is that this explanation should be critically reexamined. We are not certain that *all* such references to Annas should be so understood. My position is that the verse in Luke 3:2 ("in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas," RSV) is to be taken more officially and seriously, just as the other personalities whom Luke lists in the same historical context (Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip, Lysanias) are mentioned as *serving still in office*. If this view is correct, John the Baptist was already serving while Annas was still high priest; at the end of Annas's tenure as high priest (A.D. 15 as I interpret it) he was replaced several months later (A.D. 18) by Caiaphas. Such a critical piece of historical information, as I understand it, is a chronological key. Luke's important notice, correctly understood, makes it possible to be quite precise as to the latest time that John the Baptist and Jesus began their work - A.D. 15². According to Slavonic sources, of course, John was already preaching under Archelaus³. If Jesus indeed cleansed the Temple in A.D. 15 (under Annas), readers can understand more easily Annas intense hatred towards Jesus.

¹ *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period*, trans. F.H. Cave and C.H. Cave (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969; pbk. 1979) 377.

² Daniel Schwartz, "Pontius Pilate," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992)5:395-401, esp. 397, interprets Josephus's historical evidence for Pilate's tenure as beginning ca. A.D. 19. My argument for an earlier date for Pilate is outlined in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos* (I), esp. 72-82. Readers of Schwartz profit thereby, but such readers will frequently disagree with his conclusions, similar to the reaction one encounters in reading Eisler.

³ Josephus, War, "Slavonic 'Additions,'" Loeb Classical Library (1928ff.) III:645; see also Robert Eisler, *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (1931)223-31; cf. also the references to "Archelaus" in Eisler's index (635). Cf. Eusebius, *Church History* 1.10: "...The whole time of [Jesus'] ministry is shown to have been not quite 4 full years, 4 high priests, from Annas to ... Caiaphas,... held office a year each...." Eusebius obviously dated Jesus' ministry here to cover the period A.D. 15 - A.D. 18 primarily.

John 2:20

This verse informs us that during the first cleansing of the Temple by Jesus, that his opponents objected to his statement that he would raise up the Temple in 3 days, whereas work on it had already proceeded for 46 years. Most commentators of John's Gospel interpret the verse to mean that since Herod's construction on the Temple in Jerusalem had started in 20/19 B.C. that the time his critics voiced their protest was therefore, A.D. 26. Many problems reside in such an interpretation. The main problem is that it conflicts strongly with verses like 3:1, that in the 15th year of Tiberius John the Baptist came preaching (=A.D. 28). If we correct the verse to mean A.D. 15, it conflicts even more.

We think it is more reasonable to date the "46 years" of Jn. 2:20, to A.D. 15 and to relate the response of Jesus' critics to an earthquake which shook the Jordan Valley region and Judea in 31 B.C. See Josephus Ant. 15. 121-147; Wars 1.370 ff.). Josephus tells us that this devastation killed 30,000 people.¹ Josephus also informs us that the army of Herod was in the open (in tents?) and thus suffered little or no damage. The Nabatean army used the occasion to attack the forces of Herod, thinking that the moment was advantageous, and that Herod's defenses were destroyed or at least powerless to help against their invasion. Herod's army was discouraged, thinking of the earthquake as a sign of God's disfavor. But Herod bolstered their nerve, reasoning that it was only those who had been killed that God did not favor, and since the survivors were alive, God must be on their side!

Let us look at the chronology of this event and connect it with Jn. 2:20.

¹ For this earthquake, see esp. D.H.K. Amiran and E. Arieh, "Earthquakes in Israel and Adjacent Areas: Macroseismic Observations since 100 B.C.E.", Israel Exploration Journal 44 (1994), pp. 260-305, esp. p.265 (dated Sept. 2, 31 B.C.E; various buildings in Jerusalem destroyed); see also D.H.K. Amiran, "Location Index for Earthquakes in Israel since 100 B.C.E;" I.E.J. 46(1996), pp.120-130 (p.125-see Jericho, Jerusalem; p.126 Masada; p.128-Qumran.) Cf. Roland de Vaux, *Archaeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Schweich Lectures 1959 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973) 20-21 and plate XVI. Besides the evidence of Qumran for the earthquake of 31 B.C., one should consider recent evidence discovered elsewhere. See Magen Broshi, "Excavations on Mt. Zion, 1971-1972: Preliminary Report," Israel Exploration Journal 26 (1976): 81-86 and plate 18,19; see esp. 83 and plate 18:c. Around 50 B.C. structures were built in Jerusalem, or already existed, which came to a sudden violent end by an earthquake shortly after this time. Broshi identified this catastrophe with the earthquake Josephus described, showing that the disaster struck hard in Jerusalem as well. *B. Baba Bathra*, contemporaneous with this period, describes cracked, gaping walls left damaged in the Jerusalem temple about this time.

The following abbreviated chart will help one to see the proper chronology.

Spring 31 B.C. = Year 1	Spring 11 A.D. = Year 42
Spring 21 B.C. = Year 11	Spring 12 A.D. = Year 43
Spring 11 B.C. = Year 21	Spring 13 A.D. = Year 44
Spring 1 B.C. = Year 31	Spring 14 A.D. = Year 45
Spring 1 A.D. = Year 32	Spring 15 A.D. = Year 46

George Ogg has shown the difficulties of reconciling John 2:20 with the time of construction of Herod's temple.¹ Yet if one relates the reference in John 2:20 with damage to the temple in Jerusalem which had to be repaired in some way, then John's reference fits perfectly into the scheme of chronology for which we have argued in this study. This chronology argues that the point at which John places the event is also historical and could bolster the position of those who would reason that Jesus cleansed the temple more than once, not just at the end of his ministry, as one might reason simply on the basis of the Synoptic evidence alone.²

Only step by step are modern students of John able to appreciate more fully the careful insights of this author of the Fourth Gospel (whom I accept as John, son of Zebebee) and his thorough grasp of the historical, Jewish, and Palestinian scenes in the life of Jesus. To be sure, his presentation of Jesus is different from the Synoptic writers, but Xenophon does not depict Socrates exactly as described by Plato. We can nevertheless learn both from Xenophon and Plato as we fill out our knowledge of Athen's great intellect, Socrates.

John knows what Jesus' brothers think of Jesus, since he is Jesus' cousin (7:5). He is intimately acquainted with Galilean geography, knowing that one descends on a journey from Cana to Capernaum (4:51 - cf. Greek, "while going down"). Students ignorant of John's careful knowledge of dozens of such historical details are careless on such matters and therefore sloppy interpreters of this well-informed relative of Jesus, whom we identify as the "beloved disciple."

¹ *Chronology of the Public Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940) 151-67.

² C.H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* Cambridge: University Press, 1968, p. 448, commenting on Jn. 2:13-22, designates such a view "puerile"; I have genuine respect for Dodd's vast learning but I have more profound respect for John's chronological accuracy. Note a glaring weakness in Dodd's approach to John's Gospel: he ignores almost totally the use of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the study of John's Gospel. Finegan, *H.B.C.*², p. 351 also raises the possibility that John's temple cleansing might only have some symbolic significance.

When Did Flaccus Serve as Governor of Syria?

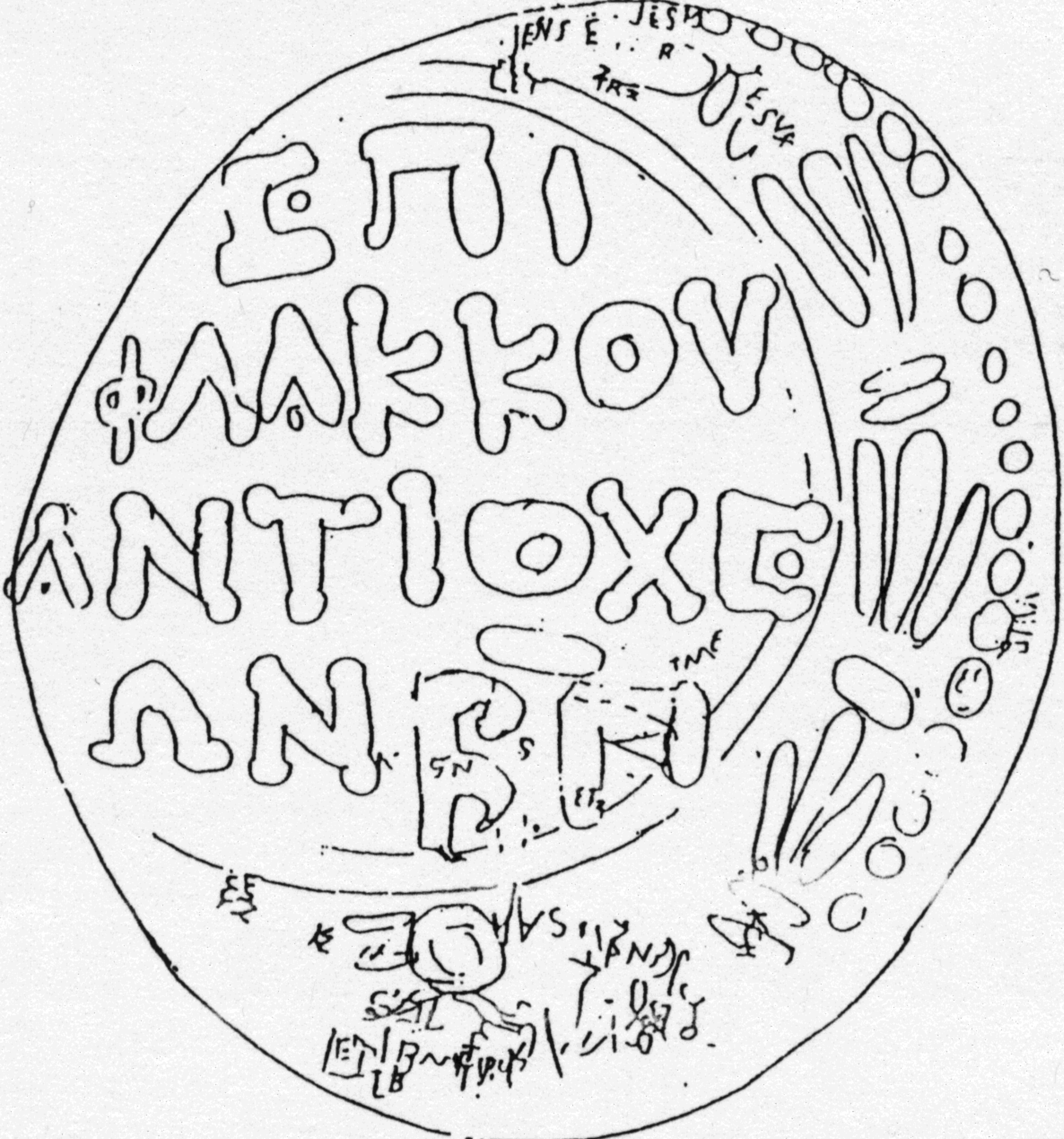
It is quite common for students of N.T. history in the Roman period to date L. Pomponius Flaccus' rule over Syria to the period A.D. 32-35¹. Scholars who date Flaccus in this period usually date Paul's conversion to the same approximate period and the removal of Pilate as procurator of Judea about the same time as well; it is argued that Vitellius followed Flaccus, and Vitellius was the Roman governor who dismissed Pilate, in either A.D. 36, or, as late as A.D. 37; thus far, modern opinion.

The following illustration should be considered in connection with this question (see W. Wroth, Catalogue of Greek Coins of Galatia, Cappadocia, and Syria. London: British Museum, 1899, 170, no. 161-162; the author made the drawing from a photograph of the coin in the British Museum):



We translate the Greek: "Under Flaccus, belonging to the People of Antioch, (Year) 82"; yet note that originally, before the recutting of the die, the coin read "QN" = "Year 56", and not "82". This information is of the utmost importance for the correct dating of Flaccus and shows that the original date of the coin was A.D. 25 (56 years after the Actian era of 31 B.C.), and not A.D. 33/34 (=82 years after the Caesarean era of Antioch = 49 B.C.). Since Tacitus reports Flaccus' death as happening in A.D. 33, we take this coin to be a memorial coin, reissued in A.D. 33 but originally issued in A.D. 25, while Flaccus served as governor. The coin is quite rare.

¹ Schürer, I, p.262 and references there.



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THE VISITS OF PAUL TO JERUSALEM AND THE SABBATICAL YEARS:

Our accompanying chart will show that for the most part whenever Paul visited Jerusalem, that it was in connection with a sabbatical year. This was not always the case, for we note in Acts 18:22 that when Paul left Corinth and went to Caesarea and on to Jerusalem (about A.D. 50, or early 51?), thus concluding his second missionary journey, that that particular visit can not be associated with a sabbatical year. We would see that visit in connection with the next sabbatical year, however. Paul visited Jerusalem at the close of his second journey to determine the level of need that existed there. For example, it was only when Queen Helena of Adiabene visited Jerusalem about A.D. 46, slightly earlier than Paul, that she could see the need of extending help to the starving people of Jerusalem. Thus she learned of the need and sent to Cyprus and Egypt for grain and dried fruit so that the masses could be fed. See Josephus Ant. 20. 50-53; her son Izates became likewise generous to help when he learned the need, and that many were dying. Paul was thus able to speak carefully and urgently to the churches about the need of the "saints" in Jerusalem, and this prompted him to conceive of the great collection to assist in the critical food shortages people in Jerusalem had to endure, esp. those of the household of the Christian faith. Paul had not been in Jerusalem since A.D. 48, and needed to be reformed about critical food shortages so that his appeals for help would be accurately presented.

It was during sabbatical years in particular that the poor were endangered the most, and in the year immediately following sabbaticals, since the poor often were not able to store up enough food to carry them through the privations one faced during such times of shortages. Sabbaticals must have been especially severe on Christians besides, since many strict Jews could well have discriminated against extending any help to Christians in critical times due to the fact that they believed differently from typical Jews?

Let us see now how the recognition that A.D. 40/41 was a sabbatical year, and that that was the year Paul and Barnabas were sent to the assistance of the poor saints in Jerusalem, helps us to determine critical segments of Pauline chronology and assists us in fitting together other dates in the great apostle's life.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF PAUL'S POST-CONVERSION VISITS TO JERUSALEM AND OF HIS VISIONS, REVELATIONS, AND/OR OUTPOURINGS OF SPIRIT OF GOD

1. **Conversion** - late A.D.25 (sees Christ on Damascus Road; Gal. 1:15, 16)
2. **First Post-Conversion Visit to Jerusalem** - A.D.27 (A.D. 26/27 = Sabbatical year; = 3 years after conversion, Gal.1.18; cf. Acts 9:26-30; cf. Acts 22:17 - Paul falls into a trance).
3. **Paul Does Not Go to Jerusalem in the Sabbatical Year; A.D. 33/34.** The period, A.D. 34/35 = a census year. He is in areas around Tarsus, Cilicia, Acts 11:25, 26.
4. **Second Post-Conversion Visit to Jerusalem** - A.D. 40 (Goes up by revelation - Gal. 2:1 = 14 yr. after his First Post-conversion Visit; cf. 11 Cor. 12:2 - Was it 14 years before A.D. 54? A.D. 40/41 = Sabbatical Year; cf. Acts 11:28-30; Agabus' separate revelation; and, church at Antioch helps poor, though Antioch had recently suffered its own disaster = an earthquake).
5. **Jerusalem Conference Visit** - Late A.D. 48 (Finegan, p.394, prefers A.D. 49; A.D. 47/48 = Sabbatical Year - Acts 15:2-29)?; A.D. 48/49 also a census year, affording good time to meet since between mid-A.D. 48 and Fall, A.D. 48 many had to return to file local census reports, and Sabbath Year still in force.
6. **Even the visit Paul made in Acts 18:22** was apparently for the purpose of determining the level of need of Judean poor so as to encourage churches in gentile areas to help them during the approaching Sabbatical Year of A.D. 54/55; Paul offers Nazarite vow(Acts 18:18).
7. **Great Collection Visit** - A.D. 54 (Paul is captive to Spirit, Who testifies everywhere that bonds and afflictions await Paul - Acts 20:22,23; A.D. 54/55 = Sabbatical Year). At Pentecost delivers collection to Jerusalem, Acts 20:16; 21:17ff.

The thrust of this brief chronological outline shows that A.D. 40/41, when Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem (Acts 11:28-30), was quite obviously a sabbatical year. Like other visits of Paul during these periods, visions and revelations accompany most of these visits on Paul's part. And, in Acts 11:28-30, such spiritual outpourings also manifest themselves in Agabus, who prophesies that a long famine period will be experienced during the time of Claudius as Emperor. To help their Judean brethren survive in sabbatical years was of paramount importance to N.T. Jewish Christians, led of God's Spirit.

Isaiah 61:1-2 associated the outpouring of the Spirit with a sabbatical / jubilee period, and the New Testament also strongly connects unusual demonstrations of the Spirit's activities with known sabbatical years, and jubilee years (A.D. 4/5; 54/55 or A.D. 12/13; 62/63, etc. by various systems of jubilee?). It required special grace, and character, to live up to the strict demands of sabbath year/jubilee observances (release slaves, restore property, be generous to poor, etc.). Power to live by these Scriptural requirements came only by God's Spirit. Unfortunately, some modern Christians want all of the fruits of the Spirit, without any of these roots of the Spirit. W. Ward Gasque, "A Fruitful Field: Recent Study of the Acts of the Apostles," Interpretation 42(1988), pp.117-131, esp.120-121,123,126-128, observes that the new birth of the church as detailed in Acts witnesses the revival of the gift of prophecy and the coming of the Spirit so that Acts attests to Israel's history being continued where it left off, and that Luke was likely conscious that he was writing Scripture anew.

It is hard to escape the lesson that God's Spirit moved upon the church in unusual power during the sabbatical years to avert starvation of the poor in Judea, who were particularly vulnerable during these times. If Christian help had been withheld from these poor during the sabbatical years, they would have perished; and, if Judean Christians had not observed the sabbatical years they would have had little or no influence with strict Jewish neighbors. For Paul's help to poor Judeans at such times, see Gal. 2:10; I Cor. 16:1-4; Acts 20:35; Rom. 15:25-31; II Cor. 8:1-9:15; Gal. 6:7-10; Acts 24:17,26,etc. In I Cor. 16:1, Paul calls these poor, "Saints", therefore, precious to Christ!

At all events, Acts 11 fits perfectly into the historical context of a sabbatical year (A.D.40/41) and does not need to be placed around chapter 15, or after it, to be in a correct historical context. Barnabas and Paul are still associated together following Acts 11 (see chap 13/14); they separate after chap. 15! A.D. 40, as the correct date for Paul's Second Post-Conversion Visit (Point 4, above) is confirmed definitely by Gal. 2:1; is the "revelation" he speaks of there, the same experience he speaks of in II Cor⁹ 12:2? On Paul's First Post-Conversion Return to Jerusalem, Christ appeared to him and ordered him to leave Jerusalem; (Acts 22:17); Paul needed Divine instruction to determine the wisdom of returning, or not to return, in A.D. 40 (see II Cor. 12:2).

With considerable caution all serious scholars must seek to understand the chronology of the Book of Acts. Typical of modern scholars who fail to place much reliance on the accuracy of Acts's history is the very able historian Daniel R. Schwartz.¹

We assume that such well-ordered and gradual development [of the Christianas presented in Acts] belongs more to the realms of theology and literature than to that of history.²

... many events in Acts 1-15 are not reported in their historical order.³

... it is difficult to depend on the order of Acts 8-12. ... it seems that the events of chapters 10-11 in fact occurred after Agrippa died.⁴

Let those who are persuaded by the arguments of Schwartz follow his theories. There is certainly much in his book that is intellectually brilliant and quite helpful to historians and biblical students alike. I have, however, neither seen fit to follow his radical methods of rewriting Josephus⁵ nor to accept his low opinion concerning Luke's historical reliability in writing Acts. Some of the theories of Schwartz concerning Agrippa himself impress me as inaccurate. See my cautionary comment in the note below.⁶

The Cycle of Sabbatical Years and Acts

The basic cycle of sabbatical years (observed in circles of normative Jews?) in the time of Jesus and Paul was as follows (following Zuckermann, not Wacholder):

B.C. 17/16	A.D. 40/41
B.C. 3-2	A.D. 47/48
A.D. 5/6	A.D. 54/55
A.D. 12/13	A.D. 61/62
A.D. 19/20	A.D. 68/69
A.D. 26/27	A.D. 75/76
A.D. 33/34	

I have argued⁷ that Jesus died in A.D. 21. I established Jesus' death year date independently of Eisler, who earlier arrived at the same year in his conclusions.⁸ I begin with the Book of Acts and the information it provides for the date of Paul's conversion before trying to establish the dates of Jesus' birth and death.

¹See his *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judea* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1990). Schwartz's negative view of Luke's order in Acts is quite representative of modern scholarship.

²Ibid., 213.

³Ibid., 213; and cf. esp. 213-16.

⁴Ibid., 122.

⁵See *ibid.*, 2.

⁶For example, his preferred date that Agrippa died in October A.D. 43 (see *ibid.*, 145 and 107-11, esp. 111) seems contradicted by the ostrakon mentioning Marcus Julius Alexander, Agrippa's son-in-law, who is mentioned as still alive himself, according to Josephus (see *Ant* 19.276-77). For this document, see V. A. Tcherikover and A. Fuks, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1957, 1960, 1964): cf. 2:197-200, document 419d, dated to "Pauni" (as close examination reveals) of A.D. 44 (see 199-200). For Claudius, Jan. A.D. 41-42 = year 1; Jan. A.D. 42-43 = year 2; Jan. A.D. 43-44 = year 3; Jan. A.D. 44-45 = "year 4" (see document 419d).

⁷In *Chronos, Kairos, Christos* (I), 55-82; hereafter CKC I.

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⁷In *Chronos, Kairos, Christos* (I), 55-82; hereafter CKC I.

⁸See his *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (1931) 19. Strangely, he dated John's death to A.D. 35/36: cf. 290-95, 311, etc. His chronology for John's death is basically that of T. Keim: see 293.

Paul's Visits

Taken at face value, Acts 11:27-30 describes Paul's *second* visit to Jerusalem, following his conversion (Acts 9:1-19), and the account of his first postconversion visit (Acts 9:26-30). In the Book of Galatians, Paul sets forth the chronology of his postconversion visits to Jerusalem:

First visit (Gal. 1:18) took place "three years" after his conversion.

Second visit (Gal. 2:1) took place "fourteen years" after his first visit. (Others would argue for fourteen years *after his conversion*.)

If Acts 11 is in chronological order (as I believe, and as Luke implies in Luke 1:3), then the death of Agrippa I took place *after* Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, following his conversion. This would yield the following information:

Agrippa's death took place approximately A.D. 44/45.

Paul's conversion took place approximately seventeen years prior to this, or slightly earlier, A.D. 27/28 (or, to me, somewhat earlier - A.D. 25).

The Book of Acts does not inform us concerning the number of months or years that elapsed between the time Paul returned to Jerusalem and the exact time that Agrippa I died (Acts 11:30-12:23); I argued earlier that A.D. 26 was the approximate date.¹ Due to later research I would now move the date to late A.D. 25.² This simple chronology, as a starting point, takes seriously Luke's chronology as well as Paul's historical information in Galatians, and prefers to use such primary sources and not to follow other attempts to explain away the accuracy of the biblical statements. In other words, Luke and Paul do not need John Knox³ to reconcile supposed differences in Lukan/Pauline chronology. The assumption of Knox that students are to ignore the chronology of Acts, and follow only data in Paul's epistles, does not commend itself to this reviewer.⁴

Starting with the New Testament evidence as found in Acts and Paul's writings (particularly Galatians 1 and 2), one sees at once a chronological (and probably textual) problem in the Lukan chronology in Luke 3:1 ("fifteenth year of . . . Tiberius") Luke 3:23 ("Jesus, . . . was about thirty years of age") without again trying to lay out all the

¹ CKC I, 73n. 18

² See Finegan, *Archaeology of the New Testament*, xxiv-xxvi

³ In his *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, rev. ed. (Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1987

⁴ Chapters in a Life of Paul, Nashville: Abingdon, 1950; cf. rev. ed.; Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987

reasoning.¹ It is furthermore interesting that Eusebius (*Church History* 1.9) dates the beginning of Pilate's career to the "twelfth" year of Tiberius (and not the "fifteenth"). In Greek this could be read as *EĪB*. Assuming that a scribe could have mistakenly changed an original *ETB* (= "year 2") in Greek to *EĪB*, then my argument for dating the beginning of Jesus' ministry to approximately 14/15 A.D. is further clarified.² At this point, let me refer again to the researches of Daniel R. Schwartz as another modern scholar who dates the beginning of Pilate's career early.³

Greek Numerals Easily Confused

Before we pursue chronological clues in the Book of Acts which possibly relate to the sabbatical-year cycle observed by Jews and early Christians alike, at that time, one other observation must be made about my suggestion that "year 2" and "year 15" could easily have been confused in Greek at the time of the early church. A contemporaneous study of Greek epigraphy and palaeography reveals that a "square beta" (= EI) was sometimes written instead of a rounded beta (= B).⁴ This again could be at least another explanation of how *ET* (= *ETB*?) became confused with *ETEI* and at the same time could explain the Greek reading in Luke 3:1 (πεντεκαίδεκα = "five and ten"), which is not the way Luke elsewhere spelled this numeral (δεκαπέντε as in Acts 27:28; cf. Acts 27:5); and other New Testament writers spell "fifteen" likewise (that is, δεκαπέντε: John 11:18; Galatians 1:18). On the other hand, while Josephus uses δεκαπέντε only five or six times, he uses πεντεκαίδεκα, πεντεκαιδέκατος more than thirty times. There could be real significance in Paul's statement in Galatians 2:1 that fourteen years after his first postconversion trip to Jerusalem he made his second such trip. The sum of fourteen years equals two sabbatical-year cycles. Let us see if this possibility makes sense.

Various students have identified the famine of Acts 11:29-30 with a famine associated with Queen Helena mentioned in Josephus (*Ant* 20.51; cf. *Ant* 3:320-21).⁵ Queen Helena of Adiabene no doubt helped to relieve distress caused by such a famine to which Josephus refers. Apparently, the famine occurred in A.D. 46 or 47. Strong reasons point to the famine in Acts as taking place approximately one sabbatical-year cycle earlier than the cycle of A.D. 47/48, that is, around the time of the cycle of A.D. 40/41. By my reckoning, the famine mentioned in Acts 11 and 12 shows how long and protracted it ran its course.

¹As, e.g., in CKC I, esp. 55-61.

²Cf. CKC I, 59-60.

³Schwartz, "Pontius Pilate," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 5:305-401. Schwartz sees clearly the difficulty in placing Pilate's appointment as prefect of Judea as late as A.D. 26/27 (p. 396), but accepts March A.D. 37 as the approximate time of his dismissal and trip to Rome. Based on his understanding of Josephus's historical information regarding the prefect's appointment, Schwartz places Pilate's appointment around A.D. 19 (p. 397).

⁴Cf., for examples, the form of the Greek beta on Parthian coins.

⁵Cf. the literature cited in the Loeb edition of Josephus, 9:416-17, note a.

Priority of Acts 11 to Acts 12

Acts 11 quite obviously predates Acts 12, in spite of the protests of numerous scholars like Daniel Schwartz. Acts 12 mentions the death of Agrippa I in A.D. 44 (?) or certainly no later than the earliest days of A.D. 45 or late 44. Schwartz argued that Agrippa I died between September/October A.D. 43 and January/February 44,¹ but the date of Schwartz is almost certainly at least a year too early (see above). The priority of Acts 11 seems clear: the famine mentioned by Agabus (= time of Caligula in Acts 11 as futuristic) is fulfilled in Acts 12 with the people of Tyre and Sidon begging Agrippa I for food at the time of his death (12:20-23—the time of Claudius).

Caligula's Statue

In any event, Josephus described the Jewish people's reaction to Caligula's attempt to place his statue in the temple at Jerusalem: "they neglected their fields . . . though it was time to sow the seed."² I would date Caligula's order no later, therefore, than mid-year A.D. 40. (Wheat was harvested, in accord with Philo's information, already by April/May.) Tension and strife continued, apparently, until Caligula's death in January A.D. 41. Clearly, food shortages in Judea, and especially in adjacent regions, existed before the deaths of Caligula or Agrippa I, and help to explain why the delegation from Tyre and Sidon flattered Agrippa in order to gain concessions from him to sell grain to them *before his death* (Acts 12:20). This partial availability of foodstuffs by Agrippa was likely in connection with customary preparations by Jews in expectancy of the approach of sabbatical cycles. Keen observers like Agabus saw that the food supply would, at best, be short, and this would make it difficult for poor people, especially the Jewish Christians, to survive without outside financial help, which the church at Antioch provided (Acts 11:27-29), knowing the added distress that would befall the Jerusalem community due to the sabbatical year food shortages which would arise there and throughout the entire Levant.

Food shortages in the Levant at this time could be expected, due to a planned visit of Caligula to Egypt, through Syria and Judea.³ This planned visit would drain heavily on available supplies since "a numerous multitude" would accompany the emperor. Moreover, half of the Roman army on the Euphrates boundary had been pulled from there westward, into Syria and the Levant, to make certain that Caligula's statue, under construction at Sidon, would be safely enshrined in the Jerusalem temple.⁴

Roman authorities were tapping heavily into available food resources in the Levant at this time. In Judea itself food shortages resulted also due to the existing unsettled religious situation. The Jewish populace was disturbed by the impending threat of Caligula's plan to erect his statue at Jerusalem. Josephus (*War* 2.187-202) describes the prevailing uncertainty and turmoil of the Jewish people (not just those in Judea) concerning Caligula's plan to erect his likeness in the Herodian temple, and of the fact that the disturbance caused the planting of crops to be neglected. The disturbance started about the time crops of the previous season were to be gathered, according to Philo: "it was just at that moment the very height of the wheat harvest, and of all the other cereal crops,"⁵ but people neglected the gathering of the harvests and preferred to gather in "gossip groups" here and there to protest the erection of Caligula's image in the temple. The main chronology outlined here should be compared

¹ *Agrippa I: The Last King of Judea*, 111, 207.

² Josephus *Ant* 18.272, cf. 18.274; Philo (*Legatio ad Gaium* 249) says the event took place at harvest time.

³ See Philo *Legatio ad Gaium* 33.25-53.

⁴ Philo *Legatio ad Gaium* 31.207, 256, etc.

⁵ Philo *Legatio ad Gaium* 23.118.

with Schürer¹ who dates these events to A.D. 40. Schürer and his editors who follow that chronology may be correct. The difficulty with their date is that it presupposes exceptions with the way Jewish people in Judea observed the sabbatical cycle at that time. On the other hand, Josephus could be describing Jews on the fringes of Judea, and in that case they would not have had need to stick so strictly to sabbath-year regulations, so Schürer's could be accurate. Wacholder² thought that A.D. 40-41 was only the sixth year in a *shemittah* cycle; thus he dated the *shemittah* year at this time in A.D. 41/42.³

Paul's Second Visit and Time of Conversion

If Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem (A.D. 40/41) from Antioch in Syria, therefore, before the death of James the brother of John (ca. 42), and before the death of Agrippa I (later than June 44), then other chronological information can be established, both before and later than this time.

Since Acts 11:30 describes Paul's second postconversion trip to Jerusalem (certainly as far as Acts is concerned; cf. Gal. 2:1), then we have a clue in dating his first trip fourteen years earlier:

Paul's second postconversion trip to Jerusalem before A.D. 41 minus 14 years = A.D. 28/27 or slightly earlier.

To date Paul's approximate time of conversion, one must subtract approximately an additional three years (see Gal. 1:18), that is, A.D. 28/27-26/25. Thus we arrive at a time for Paul's conversion (late A.D. 25 or early A.D. 26) earlier than most New Testament scholars date the death of Jesus (after A.D. 30). My suspicion is that even Paul's first visit to Jerusalem was likely in anticipation of or in association with the sabbatical cycle of that period (A.D. 26/27), just as his second postconversion journey was (A.D. 40/41). One should also compare Galatians 2:10 ("remember the poor"): thus we conclude that Paul's attendance at the Jerusalem conference was also in connection with a sabbatical year (A.D. 47/48; see Acts 15).

Furthermore, Paul's arrival in Jerusalem to bring the "Great Collection," as it is called, fits into a time frame of A.D. 54/55 (Acts 21:17; cf. 20:35 NRSV: "we must support the weak"; cf. 24:27 NRSV: "I came to bring alms to my nation"). This, again, was a sabbatical year.

Thus it is not just in Jesus' life that we see the importance of sabbatical-year regulations in understanding Jesus' message: Paul imitated his master in observing the practices of the sabbatical year, and this fact affords us one of the most important clues in dating events in Paul's life.

¹*The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* 1:386-98; see esp. 1:397.

²*Essays on Jewish Chronology and Chronography*, 15-77.

³*Ibid.*, 15, 17, 38.

Conclusion

A British writer of a former generation once said that chronology was like a bad dog which has bitten many a finger. It does not have to be like that. Chronology can be like a faithful guide dog to a blind person. A proper understanding of chronology can make us alert to all kinds of dangers which we encounter in the study of the Bible. We can become more aware of certain textual mistakes which have crept in during the long transmission of the Bible. We learn also that finding the truth of the Bible is not always an easy thing. Men devote their long lives to the pursuit of its chronological information and still the final answers to the subject prove to be elusive to them.

It is common in N.T. study today for scholars to avoid chronological problems like they would avoid the plague. This approach believes that since such confusion currently prevails in the area of N.T. chronology and because there is no way to be confident of any approach which one takes, then a scholar is to stay away from all such investigations as one would detour around a swamp full of quicksand sinkholes. We submit that due to the numerous problems encountered in this area of research that this is exactly the reason that dedicated scholars should give full attention to solutions to these vital questions.

But progress does come - however slowly. Edison was asked after 500 experiments in his search for a suitable material to use as a filament in manufacturing light bulbs, "What have you learned?" He said, "We have learned 500 things which do not work!" We have learned that some chronologies are worthless and need to be avoided.

There is still much to learn and the probability is great that when more progress is made it will be the result of continuing archaeological research. The British pastor, John Robinson, stood on the docks of Delft harbor in Holland when his departing congregation was leaving for America and he urged them to keep their minds open at all time for new light from the Bible. His plea was: "God hath yet more light to break forth for our understanding concerning the meaning of His Word." We see progress being made all the time as we study continuing research done on the Bible year by year. While the curtain is still being raised on the unfolding scenes of the First Century drama portraying the story of God's redemptive activity, and while background arrangements are still being put in place, we feel like Howard Carter when he peeped into the tomb of King Tut full of its archaeological treasures, and said, "I see wonderful things."