

## A COMPARISON BETWEEN 2 TIMOTHY AND THE BOOK OF ACTS

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In 2 Tim 4:9-21 there is a cascade of names and places, many of which occur also in the book of Acts. The writer lists persons who have left him and names places to which they have gone. He says that Luke alone is with him, that he sent Tychicus to Ephesus, that he left a cloak at Troas, that Erastus has remained at Corinth, and that Trophimus was left ill at Miletus. And Timothy is asked to come quickly before winter. The names are not given as a chronologically sequential list, but there is indication of what is past, present, and intended for the future.

This material has provided difficulties, both for those who assert that the Pastorals were written after Paul's death and for those who hold that Paul wrote them. A later writer drawing on Acts and on Paul's generally recognized letters for names and places to give verisimilitude to his account in 2 Timothy would have had no difficulty in making his references fit the situation described in Acts; but the cluster of place names and personal names in 2 Timothy does not accomplish such a purpose. The situation seems no better, however, for the person claiming that Paul wrote the Pastorals. As P. N. Harrison has pointed out:

It is now agreed by the overwhelming majority of conservative scholars that these epistles cannot by any means be fitted into the known life of Paul as recorded in Acts; and that if Paul wrote them, he must have done so during a period of release from that imprisonment in which the Lucan history leaves him.<sup>1</sup>

But, as Harrison has further indicated, "for every personal reference in the paragraphs with which we have just been dealing,

<sup>1</sup>P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 6.

there is at least one moment in Paul's life as known to us from Acts and the other Paulines, which fits it like a glove."<sup>2</sup> Harrison has suggested that Paul would have had to duplicate much of his former experience, a concept which led Harrison to the imbedded-genuine-fragments theory.<sup>3</sup>

The divergent theories as to the authorship and chronological placement of 2 Timothy are problematical because mere assumption is too often mingled indiscriminately with real evidence. In this essay I endeavor to separate the two and to see how the genuine evidence accords with different proposals.

### 1. *The Later-Writer Theory*

A casual reading of 2 Timothy gives the impression that Paul started from Corinth, leaving Erastus there (4:20); crossed to Miletus during good summer weather and left Trophimus ill there (4:20); sent Tychicus to Ephesus (4:12); went to Troas, where he left his cloak (4:13); and then continued on to the destination from which he wrote to Timothy, requesting Timothy to come before winter and to bring along Mark (4:11), the cloak, books, and parchments (4:13). Once Paul had arrived at this destination, and before he wrote his epistle, his missionary group broke up. Demas had gone to Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia (4:10), leaving only Luke with Paul (4:11). Other Christians were there, however: Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and "all the brethren" (4:21).

This reading is not one which could have been drawn from the book of Acts by a later writer. The names and places mentioned in 2 Timothy are common to Acts, but the order in which they are given is not the same. The sequence of events in 2 Timothy is, in fact, so different from the sequence in Acts that no later writer drawing on Acts for verisimilitude would have produced it.

### 2. *The Paul-as-Writer Theory*

Harrison's arguments against Paul's having written the Pastorals during a second imprisonment are cogent.<sup>4</sup> But the case for Paul as their author does not need to hinge on a second-

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>3</sup>See *ibid.*, 111-115.

<sup>4</sup>See *ibid.*

imprisonment theory. If we ask simply whether the references in 2 Timothy can in any way be reconciled with Acts 19-20, we are not bound by preconceived theories. The events casually mentioned in 2 Timothy can, in fact, be understood in such a way as to be compatible with the sequence described in Acts.

### *The Sequence in Acts*

Acts 19-20 shows Paul going from Asia to Macedonia to Achaia and then making a return trip from Achaia to Macedonia to Asia. The material in 2 Timothy would fit into this pattern if Paul wrote 2 Timothy from Corinth. Using the Acts framework, the sequence would be:

- 19:1 Paul in Asia
- 19:22 He sends Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to Macedonia
- 20:1 He goes to Macedonia, leaving Trophimus ill at Miletus (2 Tim 4:20) and leaving his own cloak at Troas (2 Tim 4:1)
- 20:2 He then goes to Greece for three months
- 20:3 There is a plot against him
- He is imprisoned
- He writes to Timothy, who is in Troas and tells him that Erastus has stayed in Corinth (2 Tim 4:20) and that he has sent Tychicus to Ephesus (2 Tim 4:12); others of his team have left him, but Luke remains (2 Tim 4:10-11); Timothy is to bring Mark, the cloak, books, and parchments
- Timothy, Trophimus, Tychicus, and others join Paul in Greece
- 20:4 Paul goes from Greece to Macedonia
- 20:5 He sends Timothy, Tychicus, and others on to Troas ahead of him
- 20:6 He leaves Philippi and goes to Troas for seven days
- 20:15 He then goes to Miletus by way of Assos (20:13), Mitylene (20:14), Chios, and Samos (20:15)
- 21 He leaves Asia

Paul's own actions are clear enough in Acts, but his friends' movements are only sketched in. When Paul went to Macedonia the first time (20:1), he must have met up with Erastus again, but missed Timothy, who had gone back to Troas. Then Timothy must have gathered together Trophimus, Tychicus, and Mark. This

would have been at a time between the details set forth in 20:2 and 20:3. The whole group then joined Paul in Greece.

Given the occasional nature of 2 Timothy and the logbook appearance of Acts, the two have an acceptable correspondence that is in accord with other elements of the Pastorals. Timothy is young (2 Tim 2:22; 1 Tim 4:12), and the journey to Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Tim 3:11; Acts 16:1-4) is not a distant memory but a recent event.

### *Were Both Onesimus and Paul in Rome?*

Thus far, the sequence in Acts fits well the allusions in 2 Timothy. But there is one statement in 2 Timothy that seems to make a correspondence impossible. In 2 Tim 1:16-18 the writer says,

May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain; when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me. . . . And you know very well how much service he rendered in Ephesus (NRSV).

This statement has been understood as indicating that the letter was written from Rome. Since it comes early in the letter, all subsequent references are usually read as being events which occurred late in Paul's life. If such were the case, 2 Timothy could not have been written on the journey referred to in Acts 19-20. But this interpretation of verses 16-20, which for centuries has been the generally accepted one, is not a necessary interpretation.

The entire case for the Pastorals having been written in Rome is based on a single phrase, *γενόμενος ἐν Ῥώμῃ*, and especially on its being translated to mean that Onesiphorus visited Paul in Rome—that is, "when he [Onesiphorus] arrived in Rome." But this phrase neither asserts nor implies that Paul is in Rome. At the most, it may permit the assumption that Paul is there, an assumption that has led to a whole labyrinth of suppositions.

The phrase simply says, "being in Rome." The usual interpretation is that Onesiphorus happened to be in Rome, where he heard about Paul's trouble and helped him there. But Paul's statement may equally well be interpreted as meaning, "Although he [Onesiphorus] was in Rome, he eagerly sought me out and found me." In other words, Onesiphorus in Rome heard of Paul's difficulties and came to where Paul was, to help him out there.

That place, according to the reconstruction I have given above, would have been Corinth. The phrase *γενόμενος ἐν* occurs also in Matt 26:6, Mark 9:33, Acts 7:38, and Acts 13:5; and in every case, it means "being in" a place.

Such a reading of 2 Tim 1:17 fits the tone and substance of the rest of the letter even better than does the Paul-in-Rome interpretation. For example, it gives new depths of significance to the warmth of Paul's blessing on the household of Onesiphorus and to Paul's praise of Onesiphorus in 1:18.<sup>5</sup>

### *Erastus, Luke, and Paul's Other Friends*

The statement that Erastus has remained in Corinth would not conflict with the statement about Luke in 2 Tim 4:11. That verse does not say that Paul is all alone except for Luke. The extensive greetings at the end of the epistle preclude that interpretation by indicating that other Christian friends known to Timothy are in touch with the writer. What 4:9-11 does do is to mention four persons and say that of those four, only Luke is with him. (It may be significant that three of the four are elsewhere referred to as Paul's co-workers.)

The reference to Erastus, like those to Trophimus and Tychicus, was intended to bring Timothy up-to-date as to the places where those persons were at that particular time.

### 3. Conclusion

In this essay I have not addressed the linguistic or theological issues involved with the Pastorals. I have concentrated on answering the question of whether or not the references common to 2 Timothy and Acts can be fitted into the sequence of events depicted in Acts. I conclude that they can.

<sup>5</sup>Another interpretation which does not place Paul in Rome is to translate the phrase as "when he had regained his strength." See M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 106. Since other NT uses of the phrase indicate a place rather than a condition, I prefer the rendition "being in Rome."