

SILAS, TRADITION AND ESCHATOLOGY.

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The letters to the Thessalonians profess to be from Paul and Silvanus and Timothy; did Silas have a real hand in them? What is the tradition they insist upon? Is their eschatology that of Paul or that of Jerusalem?

Silas was chosen after the conference at Jerusalem, as a chief man there, to return with Barnabas and Paul and tell the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia what burdens the apostles and the elder brethren saw fit to lay on them as a condition of inter-communion. The church at Jerusalem even apart from the apostles, always imagined itself bound to superintend everywhere. The apostles started the idea, sending Peter and John to Samaria; the church improved on it, calling Peter to account for his doings at Caesarea, sending Barnabas to investigate the preaching to Gentiles at Antioch, accepting relief from Antioch. Less officially, there went thither first prophets, then the men who taught the necessity of circumcision. In consequence of the remonstrance from Antioch, these were expressly disavowed, but Judas and Silas were sent with the letter drafted by James, whose terms were singularly autocratic. Trouble soon broke out on another line, and when Barnabas insisted on taking Mark, another man of Jerusalem, Paul had to seek a new companion. In view of the past troubles from men of Jerusalem, official and unofficial, it was clearly wise to have a man of Jerusalem, and Silas was chosen. But Silas, a Roman citizen, was not likely to think of himself as anything less than an equal partner; quite possibly he thought of himself as the senior. The letter he had brought spoke of "our beloved Barnabas and Paul".

At Lystra they added Timothy, and he was thereupon circumcised. Paul objected forcibly to circumcising Titus, and the only reason given by Luke in the case of

Timothy are that he was son of a Jewess, and that the Jews there knew his father was a Greek. The logic is remarkable; as the Jews knew, they would hardly expect him to be circumcised. Is not another reason that Silas could urge it because his mother was a Jewess? And could Paul afford to resist Silas with such an evenly balanced case?

They delivered to the four Galatian cities the decrees. Now the original letter was addressed expressly only to Antioch and Syria and Cilicia; but the speech of James suggesting it dealt with all Gentiles turning to God, and as the situation in Galatia was essentially the same, it was obvious to give a copy of the letter to each church here also. Paul would welcome the evidence that circumcision was needless for Gentiles. Silas would be glad to have the authority of his church extended with the assent of Paul.

They were presently joined by Luke, another man too often regarded merely as a lieutenant of Paul, but really the most cultured man of the party, perhaps the most cultured Christian of the apostolic age. He afterwards criticised adversely the documents in circulation, and edited most freely the jottings of his young friend Mark, showing both in his editing, his research, his original writing, remarkable independence, even of Paul.

It is therefore only fair to note that he spoke of Paul sending a "commandment" to Silas and Timothy to rejoin him. The only other time that Luke himself speaks of commanding, is when the Lord commanded the apostles. So in Luke's view, Silas was not Paul's equal. When he wrote the story, he himself had seen the church at Jerusalem, and any glamour had vanished. But would an Englishman ever be inclined to defer to the pretensions of a man from Mecca?

Silas and Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth, and stayed some time, though they fade out of Luke's story. It was during this stay that the two letters were written

to the Thessalonians; Luke was no longer with the party, having stayed to guide the Philippians, among whom he was not suspect as a Jew. And as he had not gone on with them to Thessalonica, his story does not throw much light on our first question, to which we must seek an answer from the letters themselves. Is Silas a real joint-author?

For the idea of a letter of guidance, there was a Christian precedent, the letter Silas had been sent to deliver at Antioch, which in fact he had delivered more widely. And James may already have written his General Epistle. But these cases were really carrying on a Jewish custom, for the Jerusalem Sanhedrin had issued letters to their member Saul, his credentials to the synagogues at Damascus. Therefore to both Paul and Silas the idea of an official letter was familiar; the only novelty would be in their writing it themselves, rather than sending to Jerusalem for one. And this novelty may doubtless be attributed to Paul. Dr. Rendel Harris has shown that it was prompted by a letter from Thessalonica, phrases of which are embedded in the first reply. If the quotations are exact, except for converting first person into second, and second into first, they wrote to Paul and Silas, not to Paul only. "We know what manner of men you showed yourselves toward us for our sake . . . (All that believe in Macedonia and Achaia) report concerning you what manner of entering in you had unto us . . . And we ourselves know your entering in unto us, that it hath not been found vain . . . Neither at any time were you found using words of flattery . . . We remember your labour and travail. . . . You dealt with each one of us, as a father with his own children. . . . You are appointed unto affliction." These passages are all in the plural, and bear out the plain statement that the reply is joint.

The reply, the first epistle, contains a single I (Greek Ἐγὼ) and the sentence is instructive. "We, brethren, being bereaved of you for a short season, in presence, not

in heart, endeavored the more exceedingly to see you, (I Paul once and again); and Satan hindered us." The contrast of I and We is unmistakable. Nowhere else in the two epistles is there such an I, and here it needs to be defined, I Paul, not I Silas. This is not Paul's habit in other letters; every other epistle uses the singular pronoun repeatedly. On the other hand the separate pronoun We is used fourteen times in these two letters, in nearly every case not rhetorically, but bearing the natural meaning, Paul and Silas. No such usage is to be found in the rest of Paul's correspondence, even when he associated Sosthenes or Timothy in the greeting.

Silas did not accompany Paul again, but is once found taking a letter from Peter to Asia Minor. This return to a previous association is quite natural. His commission to accompany Paul would seem to have expired at latest when Paul went up and saluted the church at Jerusalem after his work at Corinth. His influence had perhaps availed to make Paul shear his head at Cenchreae, but their outlook was different. Silas could not but notice that the presence of Paul was everywhere a cause of trouble: Jerusalem, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroea, Corinth; almost every place Paul preached at, had a riot raised by Paul's methods, and the riot was generally raised by Jews. Other missionaries did not fare so, and even when bad blood had been stirred, others like Luke and Apollos could carry on work quietly. Silas might well feel that he would prefer a more tactful colleague.

Moreover there were real differences of outlook and of preaching. Peter and Paul got on best by keeping apart; the church at Jerusalem had agreed to tolerate Paul's way of putting things, but it was not theirs. Silas would of course reproduce the Jerusalem type, and the people at Corinth who appreciated this were quite ready to call themselves the followers of Cephas. He might well feel that whereas Paul had solemnly agreed at Jerusalem

to leave the Jews to James and Cephas and John, himself going to the Gentiles, yet when Silas went with him so that the pair might be ready for both sides, Paul would perpetually go into the synagogue and enrage the Jews by a single address. Silas might well feel that the partnership had better not be extended, and that he could do better work in a quieter way with other colleagues. Meantime he could assert the orthodox Jerusalem doctrine, both in letters, and in oral teaching at Corinth.

So then, in the letters to Thessalonica we note that the brethren there are commended for imitating the churches of God in Judaea. Four crimes are alleged against the unbelieving Jews: "they killed the Lord Jesus", exactly what Peter charged in Solomon's porch; "they killed the prophets", something that Paul himself had done, a sin that elsewhere he confesses, not charges on other people; "they drove out us", again what Paul had done in the first instance; "they forbade us to speak to the Gentiles", and here only do we get a Pauline ring.

There is a very great deal of "commandment" in these letters, six times as against two to the Corinthians and six to Timothy and none else from Paul. Jerusalem was prone to command, Paul more usually exhorted. What are these commands? First, directions as to morals, not to fornicate; this is one of the four abstinences laid down at Jerusalem. Second, to work with their own hands; this like the former had been commanded orally, but it needed to be reiterated thrice in writing. Now it is natural enough to connect this with Paul's own handicraft. But it has escaped notice that Silas had good reason to insist on it. His church was becoming pauperised; it had very early begun to live on its capital, had accepted gifts from others, had gone on to ask them. He knew how his own church was sinking lower in degradation from begging; he had seen the quarrels among the beneficiaries, the demoralization of Ananias and Sapphira. Were there no other reason, this were enough for

the stringent command, if any will not work, neither let him eat.

There are one or two un-Pauline thoughts. The Thesalonians are to put on the breast-plate of faith and love; Paul preferred the breast-plate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the girdle of love. They are to put on as a helmet, the hope of salvation; hope is quite Petrine. That God appointed not unto wrath, but unto obtaining salvation, is exactly Peter's contrast in his epistle. "Despise not prophesying" rings like Jerusalem, where the prophets were held in very high esteem, not to be despised; whereas Paul flatly disobeyed prophets who forbade him to go to Jerusalem. The benediction in the first letter is of the same type as Jude's; it is to be contrasted with the express Pauline autograph at the end of the second. And this in itself may suggest that Silas was the actual penman for both.

Now there are two topics treated in a way quite unlike Paul's later method. Take tradition first. "Hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours . . . Withdraw from every brother that walketh not after the tradition which they received of us." This note was struck at Corinth also and the Corinthians plumed themselves to Paul on their faithful acceptance: "We remember you in all things, and hold fast the traditions, even as you delivered them to us." To which Paul hardly agrees, and after describing what they actually do when they meet, he contrasts: "I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, etc." And with relation to a doctrinal doubt, "I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, etc." Except for this repudiation of their claim, Paul has nothing good to say of tradition. The word to him expressed the Pharisaic tradition, and he apologized to the Galatians that he had kept it: he had adopted the standpoint of the Lord, that tradition too often nullified plain command. And to

the Colossians he blamed a new tradition growing up, mere precepts and ordinances of men.

How then comes the praise of tradition to the Thessalonians? It was an inheritance from Jerusalem. The church there valued it trebly. As the church at the capital it was extremely conscious of its continuity with Israel, its treasure in the Scriptures. It contained a great company of the priests, who were attached to the ecclesiastical life, the temple, the laws of purification, of vows, of ritual and ceremonial: they were important enough to be conciliated with a prohibition to the Gentile Christians from eating things strangled and blood, and again with Paul sharing a vow on his last visit. It contained Pharisees like Nicodemus, who would not easily break away from their oral tradition, and were adepts at splitting hairs, so that after their legalistic claims were repudiated in the letter Silas had delivered, some of them could raise almost the same points at Corinth and Colossae. From the circle which held the faith once for all delivered to the saints, came to Thessalonica through Silas a respect for tradition.

Now take Eschatology. The Thessalonians were engrossed with this. "We are waiting for His Son from heaven, who delivers us from the wrath to come." They were to be the crown of Paul and Silas at the coming of the Lord Jesus; the apostles prayed for their unblamableness then. They were perturbed as to the fate of some who had died before that coming, and so were reassured with a description of what would happen then. They were so excited that they needed calming and being urged to settle down to work. "We know that the day of the Lord is coming as a thief in the night."

The first letter simply poured oil on the flames. And a second had to be written, with a fuller and even more lurid sketch of the sequence of events, and a new stress on former teaching that there was yet one hindrance.

Did Paul teach like this anywhere else? He might per-

haps have opened out in this strain at Athens, had he not been cut short. But he decided directly afterwards to concentrate on the crucifixion of Christ, not on His return, at least for elementary purposes. And when he did deal with similar topics to the Corinthians, his teaching is decidedly different from that to the Thessalonians.

Now this line of thought was familiar at Jerusalem. The discourse on the Mount of Olives was perhaps one of the first committed to writing. Peter's first address was based on an apocalyptic passage from Joel, and it closed on another from a psalm. His second spoke of the return of Jesus as ushering in the restitution of all things. To Cornelius he presented Jesus as ordained to be judge of living and dead. Paul's address at Pisidian Antioch dwelt on other points, and in Luke's summary of his reasoning at Thessalonica on three sabbaths, no mention is found of eschatology. As then they were so full of it, they must have had it from Silas.

Even the sober James taught that the coming of the Lord was at hand, while his brother Jude wrote his tract entirely from the standpoint of the Judgment of the great day. And II Peter, quite conscious of a different emphasis by Paul, deals chiefly with the coming, and the puzzle of its delay. The very letter written by Peter at Rome and entrusted to Silas, shows considerable interest in the last things.

It appears therefore that these two letters express quite as much the mind of Silas as the mind of Paul. He was not such a nonentity as might appear from Luke's account, but had his own clear convictions as to the imminence of the end, and the value of communion with the church at Jerusalem, whose accredited representative he was. He taught these plainly, and reiterated them twice in writing, even inducing Paul to add an autograph which would make it appear that he at least countenanced such teaching. But Silas spoke with authority, and laid down

commands. It was the temper of Hegesippus going on his round of inspection in the next century.

There is one corollary to this view. If these letters are really joint, and certain features are due to Silas, then Paul's views on those topics are not expressed here. Those who have felt doubts as to the authenticity of the letters may reconsider the case. A closer examination should deal not only with the three obvious topics here touched, but with others. And a microscopic examination of vocabulary may be profitable, to compare with Paul's language to the Corinthians, Galatians and Romans.