

A Survey of the Book of Galatians

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Author:

Paul, the apostle (**Galatians 1:1-3**), formerly Saul of Tarsus (**Acts 8-9**) identifies himself as the author of this letter. It is often lumped with Romans, I Corinthians, and II Corinthians as one of the major letters of the apostle.

Date:

This particular book is difficult to date. The reason for this dilemma can be summarized by saying that there are two schools of thought. Some scholars believe Paul wrote the book to the churches he and Barnabas started during the first missionary journey in the Southern parts of Galatia and others believe it was written much later during his third missionary journey and is written to a general audience.

The term Galatia in the New Testament designates both a territory in north-central Turkey and a Roman province in the south. In 25 BC this Celtic territory was converted into a Roman province called Galatia. This province included parts of Phrygia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia (all referenced in the NT). Therefore, the term Galatia can geographically describe the territory inhabited by the Celtic tribes from Gaul, or politically describe the entire Roman province. This adds to the dating dilemma.

Around 200 AD the Roman province was reduced to include only the ethnic Galatians (Celtics) and the double use of the term disappeared. Therefore, the traditional view (now called the "North-Galatian theory") became that Paul, on the second missionary journey, established churches in northern Galatia (**Acts 16:6**) and wrote the letter to the Galatians from Ephesus on the third missionary journey about AD 56.

By the 19th century there were critics of this "traditional" view. Sir Williams Ramsey popularized a new "South-Galatian theory." Ironically, the tables turned and this view is almost universally accepted today. This theory maintains that while Luke uses ethnic-geographic designations (**Acts 16:6, 18:23**), Paul's general practice was to use political designations (**Romans 16, Galatians 1:1, I Corinthians 16:1**). Therefore, the letter to the Galatians was probably addressed to Christians in southern Galatia, or churches established on the first missionary journey (**Acts 13-14**). This means he probably wrote it around 49 AD from Antioch in Syria. The arguments for this date also include the confrontation of Paul and Peter described in **Galatians 2** and the events of the Jerusalem counsel in **Acts 15** that must have taken place around the same time.

Theme:

The theme of the book seems to be the doctrine of justification by faith. This was one of the topics close to Paul's heart (see Romans). Some people have referred to Galatians as "little Romans." Many of Paul's themes and thoughts overlap in an abbreviated form.

Audience:

The intended audience is the churches of Galatia. The brethren in this region are mentioned by Paul in **I Corinthians 16:1**. There is little doubt that Paul was influential in the establishment of many of these congregations (**Galatians 1:2, 8-9, 4:11-14, 19**). They were converted out of paganism (**Galatians 2:3-4**).

It is interesting to note that Galatians is the only letter that Paul addressed to a group of congregations. Each of these congregations were affected by the same disturbance (**Galatians 1:6, 9, 5:7-9**) which was prejudice. Basically Jews verses Gentiles. Jewish teachers were trying to convince Gentile converts that they had to become Jews before they could become Christians (**Galatians 1-4**). This would have been a difficult topic to address, but due to Paul's great relationship with these congregations he is able to skillfully describe arguments for universal membership into the body of Christ.

The book of Acts tells us about some of these congregations. One of the most important congregations in Galatia was the church in Antioch of Pisidia. If you follow their journeys (**Acts 16-18**), Paul and Barnabas reach the mainland from Cyprus. They first land at Perga on the coast and then travel straight north about 100 miles to the city. The synagogue in Antioch was made up of many proselytes (**Acts 13-14**). They were very faithful.

When the missionaries were forced out in **Acts 13**, they went to Iconium. This is 60 miles southeast of Antioch and bigger than Lystra or Derbe. Paul and Barnabas got a similar reception as they did in Antioch of Pisidia. Eventually a church is established before they are nearly stoned to death and have to leave quickly.

The missionaries went on to Lystra (Lycaonia). This was the boyhood home of an important convert named Timothy (**Acts 16:1-2**). Roman and Jewish colonies established it around the third century BC. The people were hospitable. A lame man is healed here and there are a handful of Paul's sermons recorded from here (**Acts 14, Acts 17**). Paul encounters people, like those described in **Galatians 1**, who confuse the men with gods. Paul is stoned, but a group of Christians continue to meet after he leaves (**Acts 14:19-20**).

Derbe is probably the last city Paul and Barnabas visited before retracing their steps home. Luke doesn't tell us of any opposition in this city on the first trip. Timothy is watching and learning from them and will be useful on the next trip. They may have established a church in Perga and in other Galatian cities as well.

Key Verses:

Galatians 1:6-9, 2:16, 2:20, 3:7, 3:13-14, 3:26-29, 4:6-7, 5:4, 5:22-23, 6:1-2, 6:7-9

Outline:

The Gospel & Grace (chapter 1)

The Gospel & Authority (chapter 2)

The Gospel & Faith (chapter 3)

The Gospel & Blessings (chapter 4)

The Gospel & Freedom (chapter 5)

The Gospel & Daily Living (chapter 6)