

Introduction To Galatians

The fourth book from the pen of Paul is Galatians. Thirteen letters bear his name and constitute almost half New Testament books, and if Hebrews was his work, Paul contributed over half of the books in the New Testament! These letters are not arranged chronologically for four (1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians) and very likely five (Galatians) were written before Romans. Of Paul's letters, Galatians is unique in that it alone was addressed to several churches in a region. All others were either addressed to a single church (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and 1 and 2 Thessalonians) or to individuals (the letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon). It is an important work and shows the same general design as does Romans and Hebrews.

There has been much discussion through the centuries about the location of these "churches of Galatia." The locations of other churches Paul wrote can be clearly established, but not so with the churches of Galatia. There is a region called Galatia through which Paul passed but there is no record of churches being established there (Acts 16:6). Yet, Paul obviously had spent time preaching in Galatia and he speaks of the attachment the Galatians had for him (Gal. 4:13-15). These churches also had been instructed concerning the collection Paul raised for Jerusalem saints (1 Cor. 16:1f). It is my personal conviction that the region of Galatia to which Paul wrote were the churches he and Barnabas began when they passed from Cyprus to the mainland of Asia, preaching in Perga of Pamphylia, Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe and Iconium. This region IS sometimes identified in ancient history as Galatia and we believe there is evidence to sustain it was the region Paul preached in on his first journey. One strong evidence grows out of information gleaned from Paul's instructions to Corinth about funds intended for needy Jerusalem saints. Paul's first letter to that church was written from Ephesus and the instructions given Corinth had also been given Galatian churches (1 Cor. 16:1). According to Paul's orders, these special funds were to be raised by their first day weekly contributions. Then, Corinthians brethren were to choose out someone to carry their bounty to Jerusalem who would thereby be their messenger (1 Cor. 16:3). Since Paul's instructions to Corinth were identical with those given Galatians, these obviously had also been instructed to choose out a messenger for themselves as well.

Paul's second letter to Corinth was written somewhere in Macedonia (2 Cor. 2:13). Paul sent that letter, perhaps by Titus since he had

apparently been the bearer of the first and he had traveled back to Corinth before Paul, in the company of several other brethren. Paul wrote Corinthians *"whether any inquire about Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker to you-ward; or our brethren, they are the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ"* (2 Cor. 8:23). Paul arrived in Corinth, wrote the Roman Christians from here, and then because a plot had been laid against him, doubled back the way he had just come! Traveling with him was a company of seven men whose names are found in Acts 20:4. These men are presumed to be the same of whom Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 8:23, the messengers of the churches. Three of these were from Macedonia (Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus); two were from Asia (Tychicus and Trophimus); and two were from Derbe and Lystra (Gaius and Timothy). Since these brethren are apparently the "messengers of the churches" Gaius and Timothy were the messengers of the churches, which is strong evidence they were from "Galatia;" the Galatia to whom Paul had given order about the Jerusalem contribution; and also the Galatia to whom this letter is written.

It cannot be determined with certainty just when Paul wrote this letter. We know it was written after the "Jerusalem Conference" for Paul makes reference to that event (Acts 15; Galatians 2:1-10). How long after that time there is little way to know. There are no references to persons, places or events which might help pinpoint the time and place of its writing. It does not bear any sign that it was a "prison epistle." My judgment is that it was written during either the second or third journey of Paul for he wrote other letters during both those journeys: 1 and 2 Thessalonians on his second; 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans on his third.

Still, despite uncertainty about where these churches were located and the time the letter was written them; there can be no arguing with the truth that this letter is of immense importance touching the issues of the law and circumcision. It is a major work and to be studied and so we shall begin.

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