

INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

January 28, 1993

I. Derivation of the term.

- A. The Greek word Γαλάται is a variant form of Κέλται or Κέλτοι, "Celts" (Latin *Galli*).
- B. When we first meet the Celts, they are resident in Central Europe, in the Danube basin.
- C. From the Danube basin they migrated in a westerly direction into Switzerland, South Germany and North Italy, and then into Gaul and Britain; they also migrated in a southeasterly direction and settled in North Central Asia Minor, giving their name to their new homeland as they also did to Gaul (Latin *Gallia*, Greek Γαλατία).
- D. A great population explosion in central Europe brought Gauls/Celts into Central Asia Minor in the 3rd century BC.
- E. Although never in the majority, the Gauls gained the upper hand and ruled over the more numerous tribes of Phrygians and Cappadocians.
- F. Ultimately, the Gauls separated into three tribes: the Trokmi settled in the east which bordered on Cappadocia and Pontus, with Tavium as capital; the Tolistobogii inhabited the west bordering on Phrygia and Bithynia, with Pessinus as their chief town; and the Tectosages settled in the central area, with Ancyra as their principal city.
- G. Conclusion: Galatia can refer to the ancient ethnic kingdom located in the north of the great inner plateau of Asia Minor, including a large portion of the Halys river.

II. The usage of the term in the New Testament.

- A. In 64BC Galatia became a client of the Romans, and after the death of Amyntas, its last king, was granted full status as a Roman province (25BC).
- B. The new province of Galatia included not only the old ethnic territory, but also parts of Pontus, Phrygia, Lycaonia, Pisidia, Paphlagonia, and Isauria.
- C. Within the provincial Galatia were the towns which the apostle Paul evangelized on his first missionary journey, namely, Pisidian Antioch (modern Yalvac), Iconium (modern Konya), Lystra (modern Zostera), and Derbe (modern Kerti Huyuk), Act.13,14.
- D. The latter two cities were Roman colonies, and the former two had been Romanized by the Emperor Claudius.
- E. Large numbers of Romans, Greeks, and Jews were attracted to these population centers because of their strategic location along main roads of commerce (Paul's policy was to concentrate on the main roads and centers of communication in the Roman provinces).
- F. The main line along which Christianity advanced in Asia Minor was the road from Syria through the Cilician Gates to Iconic and Ephesus, and so across the Aegean.
- G. There were two subsidiary lines: one following the land route by Philadelphia to Troas, and so across to Philippi and the Egnatian Way; and the other leading north from the Cilician Gates by Tyana and Cappadocian Caesarea to Amisus, on the Black Sea.
- H. In our period, then, Provincia Galatia stretched from Pontus on the Black Sea to Pamphylia on the Mediterranean.
- I. Paul's churches were not situated in the original Galatian territory ("North Galatia"), but rather were in Phrygia Galatia and Lycaonia Galatia ("South Galatia"), and are those referred to in Act.13,14.

III. Authorship and date.

- A. Except for some extreme and unrepresentative cases, Pauline authorship of Galatians is universally accepted.
- B. Galatians has traditionally been accepted as one of the four "capital epistles" of Paul (the other three being Romans and 1st and 2nd Corinthians).
- C. By comparing the book of Galatians with the record of Acts, there are compelling reasons to date this epistle/letter just before the Jerusalem Council of Act.15 (i.e., 49AD).

- D. The first doctrinal crisis that faced the early church that led to the Jerusalem Council was the same crisis that faced those churches founded during Paul's first missionary journey (Spring of 48-Fall of 49, Act.13,14).
- E. Had the Jerusalem Council taken place before the writing of Galatians, it is inexplicable why Paul does not appeal to that decision to refute the opponents of the true gospel in Galatians.
- F. The only acceptable conclusion is that the Council had not happened.
- G. The letter was written as soon as Paul got news of what was afoot, on the eve of the Jerusalem meeting described in Act.15:6ff.
- H. This would make Galatians the very first of Paul's epistles and the very first book of the NT canon.

IV. Occasion of writing.

- A. Galatians was plainly written to converts of Paul's who had allowed themselves to be influenced by false teachers.
- B. The gospel of grace and freedom proclaimed by Paul was substituted with a gospel containing elements of Jewish legalism.
- C. The "churches of Galatia" had been visited by Judaizers who cast doubt on Paul's apostolic credentials and insisted that Paul's gospel was incomplete.
- D. They promoted a gospel of faith plus works for salvation and spirituality.
- E. They introduced elements of the Jewish law, as necessary, for complete salvation, in which circumcision took a major role.
- F. They also included the observance of the Jewish calendar and possibly Jewish food laws.
- G. This defection on the part of the Galatians occurred immediately after Paul left (cf. "*so quickly*" of Gal.1:6).

V. Destination.

- A. The letter is addressed to "the churches of Galatia", 1:2.
- B. These churches were founded by Paul and Barnabas, who were sent out by the mother church at Antioch, Act.13:14.
- C. These congregations were located in the towns of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, Act.13:14; 14:1,6.
- D. All these are located in the south of the Roman province, and all were reestablished by Paul and Barnabas in the course of their first missionary journey, Act.13:14-14:23.
- E. The members belonged to various ethnic groups (Phrygian, Lycaonian, Gallic, Greeks, Jews, and Romans).
- F. The common political denominator, "Galatians", is like the modern term "British" when addressing a mixed group of English, Welsh, and Scots.

VI. Summary.

- A. As we are told in Act.15, certain Judaean visitors of the sect of the Pharisees, who were believers in Jesus as Messiah, came to Syrian Antioch and started to teach the Christians there that those who were not circumcised in accordance with the law of Moses could not be saved.
- B. At the same time, others who wished to press the same line visited the recently formed daughter churches of Antioch, not only in Syria and Cilicia, as the apostolic letter of Act.15:23-29 indicates (Act.15:23), but also in South Galatia.
- C. The letter was written as soon as Paul heard about the crisis on the eve of the Jerusalem meeting, described in Act.15:6ff.
- D. This yields the most satisfactory correlation of the data of Galatians and Acts, and the most satisfactory dating of Galatians.
- E. Paul had been a Christian for 14 years when he wrote this letter, and the main outlines of his understanding of the gospel were shaped in the period since the Damascus road experience.