



## Introduction

Throughout the history of the world, there have been great charters of freedom and liberty. Think of the *Magna Carta*, which was adopted in England in 1215, in which King John granted certain liberties to the English nobility, or the *Declaration of Independence*, in which the colonists declared liberty against the British in 1776 and formed the United States of America. The letter of Galatians is the Bible's great Magna Carta; it is God's Declaration of Liberty to every Christian man and woman. In Galatians, the Apostle Paul explains the glorious doctrine of justification (which I prefer to call 'free justification'), received by grace alone, based solely upon the grace of God. Galatians remains a very important book for the church to consider, because the issues connected to the letter are always with it in every age. We may divide the book into four sections: 1. Introduction with salutation and warning (1:1-9); 2. The defence of Paul's apostolic authority (1:10-2:21); 3. The explanation of justification by faith (3:1-5:1); and 4. Some practical exhortations that grow out of that and the relationship of justification to obedience in Christian living (5:1-6:18).

### **The Recipients**

Paul addresses the letter to the churches of Galatia (1:2). There are two views concerning the recipients of this letter: the Northern Galatian Theory and the Southern Galatian Theory. The name Galatia was derived from the inhabitants of Northern Galatia; namely, the Celts that settled in the northern parts of the region. These Celts immigrated there in about 278 B.C. from Greece, Macedonia, and Thrace into what is now Northern Turkey. They were divided into three tribes:

Trochmis, Tectosages, and Tolisbogii. They established three cities: Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessinus. They were called Galli (Gauls, warriors) and Galatae (Galatians, nobility).

The Galatians established dominion over the Phrygians and were constantly making war with those who lived on their boundaries. Eventually, the Romans forced them to live within established borders. By 52 B.C. they were allied with Rome and were considered to be a kingdom. Their last king Amyntas extended the kingdom southward. When he died in 25 B.C., Rome took over and made the whole region a province, including parts of Phrygia, Lycaonia, Pisidia, and Isauria. The northern region which was known as Galatia gave its name to the entire province. By time of the New Testament the name Galatia had two-fold designation: the geographical region, Galatia proper; and the Roman province of Galatia.

If Paul was addressing those people living in the geographical region, he was writing to people living in the cities of Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessinus. If he was writing to people living in the province, he was writing to the churches he established in Acts 13 and 14. Internal evidence shows that he could not be addressing both groups. He speaks of details of his visit and makes allusion to his reception by them (4:12-16).

According to the Northern Galatian theory, on his second missionary journey Paul travelled from the southern area of the Galatian province (Acts 16:1-5) through the geographical region of Phrygia into the northern geographical region of Galatia (Acts 16:6). He would have established churches in the northern cities of Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessinus. This visit would have been his first trip to this area. In Acts 18:22, 23 Paul returned to this area on the beginning of his third missionary journey. What then are the arguments for the North Galatian theory? There are four in number.

First, Galatia is the proper name of the tribes that lived in the north. As Luke describes other geographical regions within the Galatian Province (Phrygia), it makes sense that when he refers to Galatia he is referring to the geographical region. Luke does not use the provincial name to describe the churches in Antioch of Pisidia, Derbe, and Lystra.

Second, Luke describes Paul's second missionary journey as passing through the Phrygian and the Galatian region

(Acts 16:6). Advocates of the northern theory interpret this to mean that when Paul left the southern area of the Galatian province (Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium) he went north through the region of Phrygia into the geographical region of Galatia before turning westward to Mysia. In Acts 18:23, Luke says that Paul left Antioch and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Since Phrygia is a geographical area, Galatia must be as well.

Third, in Galatians 4:13, Paul refers to a physical infirmity he had while ministering to them. Luke gives no record of any physical infirmity in Acts 13 and 14. Therefore, Paul must be describing another group of churches.

Fourth, the tradition of the early church fathers was that the Galatian letter was written to the churches in the northern Galatian region.

The Southern Galatian theory maintains that Paul was writing to the churches he established in the Galatian province (Acts 13 and 14); namely, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe. There are at least six arguments in favour of this theory.

The first argument is that Luke gives a lengthy detailed record of the establishment of these churches and Paul's second visit to them. He gives no record of any churches being established in northern Galatia. In fact, there is no record in Acts that Paul ever established churches in the northern province, though we figure that when he was in Ephesus the gospel surely spread into that territory. But it is clear from the evidence of Galatians itself that Paul had personally established the churches to whom he was writing.

Second, when Paul refers to churches in his letters, he uses provincial names (1 Cor. 16:5, 15; 2 Cor. 1:16). Note his use of Galatia in 1 Corinthians 16:1. It is true that in Galatians 1:22 he refers to the churches in Judea, which really was a part of the province of Syria. He does so to emphasize that he did not minister in the early Jewish churches. The other references though in this letter are to provinces: Syria and Cilicia (1:21) and Arabia (4:25).

Third, he mentions Barnabas three times, assuming they would have been familiar with him. Barnabas did not accompany Paul on his second and third missionary journeys; there-

fore, if Paul were writing to churches in the north, they would not have had any great familiarity with Barnabas.

Fourth, Paul assumes that there would be some in the congregation with knowledge of Judaism and of the Old Testament. We know that there were some Jewish Christians in the churches of south Galatia, but it is not likely that Jews were living in the northern geographical region.

Fifth, the provincial term Galatians was the only way to refer to cities in culturally diverse areas of the southern area of the Galatian province. They were from a diverse racial and linguistic background, and belonging to the Province of Galatia was the only cultural unifying factor.

Sixth, it would be remarkable that in a letter dealing with Gentiles and circumcision that Paul would have omitted reference to the decree of the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) if the council had already occurred. The council took place after Paul's first missionary journey and before his second missionary journey. The failure to refer to the decree in his letter would suggest that it was written before the council of Jerusalem had met.

Moreover, the answers to the arguments of the North Galatian theory are consistent with the South Galatian theory. When one looks at Acts 16:6, one sees that Paul would have had to go far to the northeast to visit the cities of Tavium, Ancyra, and Pessinus. His route, however, was to Mysia from where he attempted to go north into Bithynia. Thus the more logical way to understand Luke's description in Acts 16:6 is that Paul left Antioch of Pisidia, went north through Phrygia and the Galatian province, and turned west. Since Luke mentions Mysia, where Paul was not allowed by the Spirit to minister, it would be all the more remarkable that he would not mention Pessinus, the southwestern city of the geographical region, if Paul had ministered there. A similar explanation holds true for the third missionary journey. Since Paul is travelling to Ephesus, the reference to the Galatian region and Phrygia (in that order, Acts 8:23) makes most sense to be the churches in the south; south Galatia and Phrygia are on a direct route to Ephesus.

With respect to Paul's reference to physical infirmity, if he were ill, he would not likely have gone to the northern region.

It was a fairly destitute and harsh area. Moreover, Luke in Acts does not cover all of Paul's physical difficulties, as we see from 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 and 11:23-27. In fact the malady he mentions could have been a result of the stoning he received in Lystra (Acts 14:19, 20).

With respect to the tradition of the early church, they were unaware that the churches in the south were in the Galatian Province when Paul ministered there. Thus they would not have considered the Southern Galatian theory.

The weight of evidence, therefore, is for the south Galatian theory.

### The Date

If one holds to the Northern Galatian theory, then Paul would have written the letter on his third missionary journey in around A.D. 60.

There are two possible dates for the Southern Galatian theory. First, some maintain that Paul wrote the letter after the Jerusalem council. They believe that the visit to Jerusalem mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:1-10 was the Jerusalem council. Moreover, the second visit implied in Galatians 4:13 describes the journey from Acts 16:1-5. Therefore, he would have written the letter after his second visit from Corinth about A.D. 51/52. They say that the account in Galatians 2:1-10 does not really fit the famine relief visit and Paul makes reference to a second visit to the Galatian churches: 'but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time' (Gal. 4:13).

The second possible date is that Paul wrote the letter after his first missionary journey and before the Jerusalem council met. The evidences for this view are fourfold: First, Paul does not mention the Jerusalem council, and if the church had settled the issue of the Judaizers, surely he would have made reference to that decree. Second, Paul unquestionably would have mentioned their native son, Timothy, if he had already joined Paul, which he did during the second missionary journey. Third, the second visit implied in Galatians 4:13 is the return trip described in Acts 14:19-25. Fourth, Peter would not have broken table fellowship after the Jerusalem council. Thus the preferable date is about A.D. 46, making this Paul's first epistle.

**The occasion**

Paul established these congregations during his first missionary journey (Acts 13 and 14). They would have consisted primarily of Gentiles, with a few Jewish members; therefore they would have been typical of subsequent congregations established by Paul. Of course the question would have been, what is the standard of membership in the church? Paul's answer was those who professed faith in Christ and were baptized, along with their children.

This answer created difficulties for some Jewish Christians. They were convinced that Paul was undermining the Old Covenant and that Gentiles needed to receive circumcision and keep the Jewish law if they were to be in the church. A group of these Jewish professing Christians began to follow Paul's footsteps and sought to undermine his work. They were called Judaizers. They attacked Paul's authority and his message. Apparently many in the Galatian congregations were tempted to submit to the teaching of the Judaizers. Paul wrote this letter to defend the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. In order to do so he also had to defend his apostleship.

The letter is foundational for understanding Paul's theology. He introduces here the majority of the themes of his ministry. In particular, he addresses the issues of how a person may be right with God and what is the Christian's relationship to the law.

**The outline:**

- I. Introduction and Salutation with Warning, 1:1-9.
  - A. Salutation, 1:1-5.
  - B. Occasion, 1:6-9.
  
- II. Biographical Argument, 1:10-2:21 (Defence of Apostleship).
  - A. Independent of human teachers, 1:10-17.
  - B. Independent of Jerusalem church, 1:18-2:10.
  - C. Independent of Apostolic pressure, 2:11-21 (includes transition to theological argument).
  
- III. Theological Argument, 3:1-5:1.
  - A. The reality of conversion, 3:1-5.
  - B. The Old Testament argument, 3:6-14.

- C. The relation of the covenants, 3:15-22.
  - D. The role of faith, 3:23-4:7.
  - E. The danger of apostasy, 4:8-11.
  - F. The contrast of motives, 4:12-20.
  - G. The contrast of bondage with liberty, 4:21-5:1.
- IV. The Practical Results, 5:2-6:18.
- A. The danger of legalism, 5:2-12.
  - B. The consequence of liberty, 5:13-15.
  - C. The practice of liberty, 5:16-6:10.
  - D. The motive of liberty, 6:11-16.
  - E. The conclusion of the letter, 6:17, 18.