

Introduction to Galatians

Background of Galatians

1. The area is not exactly known. Was it north, Or was it in the South? The South included Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and so forth. The north area is also proposed with differing Possible dates. IT is postulated that if Galatia Was in the south, then the letter might be earlier. If in the north, then possibly it was written within a year or two of the Epistle to Rome. This would be in the years 56-58 or so.



The northern Galatia theory, and the later date would associate the writing with the time period around Acts 16:6 and 18:3, notably, AFTER the Council in Jerusalem described in Acts 15. It would also closely relate the Roman letter thematically with the Galatian letter. This has been the historically predominant view, held by Lightfoot, and others until the 1900s or so. The other, more recent view is that Galatians is associated with Acts 11, not Acts 15, and therefore Paul is (possibly) writing BEFORE the council of Acts. One note in support of this view is that the commentators have difficulty with the idea that Paul would have circumcised Timothy after writing Galatians 5:2. This view assumes that Paul dramatically changed his understanding of being Jewish for believers, and had an about face as he grew up.

Introduction to Galatians Continued

Working assumptions that will guide us in our trek through Galatia

- The location is not so important, nor is the timing.
 - It was designed to be a “circular” letter. (Galatians 1:2) Plural congregations.
- Paul is consistent in his message throughout his career. His circumcision of Timothy was not a mistake, and his participation in Temple worship while in Jerusalem was not just an affectation, in order to enhance his image with Jews. Nor did he pretend to be a pagan in order to better communicate with pagans.
- The central issue of Galatians is closely tied with his central message of the Roman letter.
 - The issue in Galatia is one of **identity**, not of daily practice.
 - Paul is disappointed that the non-Jewish believers have not taken the message of Acts 15 (whether before its explication or after is not entirely relevant if Paul had a prior understanding of it) to heart.
 - As in romans, the issue of having to become a Jew in order to have a relationship with Hashem is at the forefront, except here it is the other side of the Roman coin. Rather than non-Jews acting arrogantly towards Jews, Galatians is about non-Jews being compelled to adopt Jewish **identity** in order to have a relationship with Hashem.
 - The message from people very similar to those described in Acts 15 is being taught, and Paul is opposing it. They must be circumcised, and adopt a completely Jewish lifestyle (Torah observant in all ways) to know Hashem.

The Situation and the Groups Involved In Galatia

Paul: Apparently there is an issue of his authority. He establishes it with his autobiography

Non-Jewish believers: They are being told they must become Jews, become circumcised to have a relationship with Hashem.

- They are being told that Jewish identity, and its accompanying observance is the requirement for “salvation”
- The Messiah in this view is simply not relevant.
 - As in Romans, the way of being made right with Hashem is a focus. They are told that only Jews can have salvation. The road then, is Conversion, and adoption of Jewish identity and practice. A necessary condition for membership. In this view, Yeshua is simply not needed.
 - This is essentially identical with the opposing viewpoint expressed in Acts 15. One must become Jewish to be a part of the Kingdom. No non-Jews allowed!

False Teachers from the Circumcision (Paul's name for them)

- Possibly related (at least in outlook) to the Jewish Pharisees in Acts 15
 - Possibly related to those in Antioch Pisidia who chased Paul and opposed him as teaching “contrary to Moses” (See Acts 15:1, 15:5, Acts 13:45, 14:19)
 - They were not necessarily “sent from James” (Gal 2:12), nor can we assume that James was “too Jewish” and mixed up, unlike Paul.