

## DESTINATION AND DATE OF GALATIANS

Virgil Warren, PhD

The main introductory problems associated with Galatians are its destination and date. Determining the destination affects the time frame for the date. Since the readers are called “Galatians” (3:1; cp. 1:2), the question is whether Paul uses the term to mean (1) the ethnic group of Gauls, who gave their name to the ancient Hellenistic kingdom, or (2) the citizens of the Roman province of Galatia. The “northern Galatia” theory refers to the first option; the “southern Galatia” theory indicates the second. By that time the Roman province extended farther south to include Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium, cities Paul and Barnabas evangelized on the first missionary tour. Northern Galatia was a less extensive territory in the mountainous inland area around Pessinus and Ancyra.

### I. Destination: Southern Galatia

A. Acts records the evangelization of cities only in south Galatia. We would assume that Luke’s choice of materials would provide a background for literary activity during that period because he had the vantage point of time by which to assess what turned out to be important. As Paul’s personal physician, Luke may have been with him more than some in the Pauline circle. So he is a candidate for compiling the Pauline corpus, an idea that reinforces the importance of the events he chose to include in Acts. Acts otherwise serves as a framework for Paul’s life up to the end of the first Roman imprisonment. Except for Colossae, Acts recounts the establishment of all the churches Paul wrote to. So, presumption favors Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium as among the churches Paul reprimands in this letter. Acts says nothing about Paul’s traveling to more northern reaches. In fact, it is hard to find a place to insert such an endeavor unless it occurred during the Ephesian ministry. Even there it seems doubtful since he (probably) had not personally founded the Colossian church, which would have been on his way to north Galatia from Ephesus.

B. No clear record of early Christianity exists for the more northern territory.

C. Paul mentions Barnabas in 2:13 presumably because the readers knew him. He was with Paul when he established the southern Galatian churches. It is of note that Paul mentions Barnabas in Colossians 4:10 also even though we have no reason to believe that he directly took part in founding that church.

D. Even the few significant cities in the north—Pessinus, Tavium, Ancyra—do not match the criteria Paul used in founding churches: Roman cities on trade routes where Greek culture and Jewish influence existed. These northern Galatian cities were off the beaten track of east-west commerce.

E. In his account of Paul’s movement, Luke customarily uses the Roman provincial terms instead of the Hellenistic kingdom terminology (20:4; 27:2); he may reflect Paul’s custom in that regard.

F. Acts 20:4 mentions two representatives from south Galatia who accompanied their churches’ gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem (cp. 1 Corinthians 16:3), but none are listed from north Galatia.

G. Paul says “we” in Galatians 1:8-9 when he speaks of first preaching to the Galatians, which could include Barnabas; later in 4:12, where he refers to the division between himself and the Galatians, he says “I,” which would then put Barnabas on their side because his dissimulation in Antioch typified the Galatian heresy.

H. Paul views the Galatians as fickle. Acts illustrates such a thing in the people of Lystra, who enthusiastically welcomed Paul and even attempted to offer sacrifice to him only to turn on him later and stone him.

I. Incidental notices occur between the Acts account and the Galatian epistle. The people of Lystra received Paul and Barnabas as gods that had come down in the likeness of humans (Acts 14:11). Galatians says that they received him like an angel of God (4:4). Paul’s references to the temptations in the flesh and the marks of the Lord Jesus branded in his body (Galatians 4:14; 6:17) find illustration in the persecutions and sufferings that came to him in Antioch, Lystra, and Iconium (2 Timothy 3:11), especially the stoning at Lystra (Acts 14:19). The progress of Judaizing tendencies among the Galatians corresponds with the presence of a large Jewish element such as Luke’s history describes in the churches of Lycaonia and Pisidia (Acts 13:14, 43, 45; 14:1; 16:3). Paul’s impatient epistle becomes natural since he had not preached to them a legalistic gospel. (This last point might fit as well if the letter from Jerusalem had already been distributed among them on the second missionary tour: Acts 16:4.)

## II. Date

The date and destination correlate. Evidence favoring an early date requires a southern destination, because Paul could not have evangelized in northern Galatia prior to the Ephesian mission on the third tour. A northern Galatian destination requires a late date; a southern destination could be early or late.

Three approximate dates have been proposed for the date of Galatians:

1. After the first journey and before the Jerusalem conference (from Antioch;  
*cir.* 49)
2. After the Jerusalem conference but before the second tour (from Antioch;  
*cir.* 49)
3. After the conference during the second tour (from Corinth;  
*cir.* 52-54)
4. After the conference during the third tour (from Ephesus or Macedonia;  
*cir.* 54-57)

### A. Arguments favoring an early date

1. The Judaizing heresy began early on. Romans in the mid-50s deals with the same issue and so does Ephesians even later during the first Roman imprisonment. The Conference on Circumcision (Acts 15:1-35; 16:4) may have had a staying effect on the Judaizing mission.

2. In 1:6 Paul is amazed that his readers are so “soon” or “quickly” (ταχέως) removed to another gospel. The uncertainty is whether he means soon from the time of their

original conversion (hence, early date) or soon from the time of their exposure to the Judaizers' message.

3. We know about the southern Galatian mission from the Book of Acts.

4. Paul would have mentioned the Jerusalem decree if the conference on circumcision had occurred before the writing of Galatians (hence, before the conference). It is conceivable, though that he may not have wanted to compromise his own primary apostolic authority, which he is clearly concerned to maintain in Galatians. He may have thought also that by not referring to it he was eventually giving the Galatians two independent sources against the Judaizing message—one from him and another from the conference decree that they would receive later.

5. Peter and Barnabas' dissimulation would have been incredible after the conference (hence, before the conference). But that may have been the reason Paul was so "straight" with Peter when it happened. We should not underestimate the power of social pressure on lifelong prejudices.

6. Paul would not have needed to write a letter if copies of the Jerusalem decree had already been distributed (hence, before the second tour or at least before the "Galatians" had received such letters—northern Galatians would not have received them).

7. If Galatians 2:1-10 equals the conference of Acts 15, then Galatians would be after the conference and Peter's dissimulation but perhaps before the second tour since he does not mention the decrees.

#### B. Arguments favoring a late date

1. Galatians 1:18 and 2:1 mention three years after Paul's conversion and then fourteen years. Adding three and fourteen—rather than including the three in the fourteen—seems more natural to an English reader. A date prior to the second tour would require too early a date for the death of Stephen and the conversion of Paul (A.D. 49 minus 17 equals A.D. 32). Including the three within the fourteen would yield a date around A.D. 35 for Stephen's death.

2. "*The first time*" (πρότερον, former time; 4:13) is said to imply at least two times when Paul had preached to the Galatians (hence, after the southern Galatian segment of the second tour). That inference probably pushes the precision in the wording too far (cp. Acts 1:1). Galatians itself could be the second "preaching of the gospel" to the readers.

3. More resemblances of thought exist between Galatians and 2 Corinthians than between any other two epistles of Paul except Ephesians and Colossians, which were written at nearly the same time. If Galatians is placed between the time of writing 2 Corinthians and Romans, Galatians would be like Romans in the rough. The Galatians-2 Corinthians parallels include the following:

(a) The incestuous person at Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:7?) could be lingering in the back of Paul's mind in Galatians 6:1.

(b) Placing Galatians after 2 Corinthians accounts for Paul's attitude toward suffering manifested in the respective epistles. In 2 Corinthians 11 he is conscious of sufferings, but he finds relief that they are past. In Galatians, little he mentions little about sufferings (1:10; 5:11; 6:17) as he looks back on them.

(c) Similar doctrinal expressions, illustrations, and statements exist in the 2 Corinthians-Galatians-Romans set of letters: Christ became sin for us (Galatians 3:13; 2

Corinthians 5:21); “sow sparingly” and “reap sparingly” (Galatians 6:7; 2 Corinthians 9:6); the “gospel” to Abraham (Galatians 6:3ff.; Romans 4:3; “dead to the law” through Christ’s body (Galatians 2:19-20; Romans 7:4); and similarities in the vice lists (2 Corinthians 12:20-21; Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 1:29-30; 13:13).

4. “*And all the brethren with me*” (Galatians 1:2) fits well with the company that gradually accumulated in collecting the gifts for the saints in Jerusalem (hence, after 2 Corinthians).

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