

Galatians

Introduction

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Galatians Historical Background

Galatia was a Roman Province in central Anatolia (Turkey) inhabited by Gauls – people with a Celtic language and customs whose culture originated in Celtic Europe (France). An army of 20,000 Celt mercenaries arrived in Anatolia in 278 BC to re-enforce the army of the king of Bithynia in northern Anatolia. The Celts (Gauls) arrived with their families and a caravan of 2,000 baggage wagons and re-settled the fabled city of Gordion in Central Anatolia. Gordion was home to the mythological King Midas (with the golden touch), the Phrygians who battled with Trojans against the Greeks, and where Alexander the Great used his sword to undo the impossible Gordian knot. Gordion was a fortified city along the Sakarya River overlooking a fertile plain with extensive agriculture, a rarity on the semi-arid Anatolian Plateau.

Galatia was an important region from antiquity and included a portion of the Silk Road Trade route connecting Asia to Europe. Paul does not mention the cities of the churches in northern Galatia (Galatians 1:2), but they would have been the major cities along the Silk Road; Gordion, Ancyra (present-day Ankara, the capital of Turkey), Pessinus, and Tavium. Paul, Timothy, and Silas traveled extensively throughout Galatia (Acts 16:6) but were prevented from going further north to Bithynia. They also visited the Galatian cities of Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch on a southern trade route during Paul's second missionary journey, but Luke refers to these cities as part of Lycaonia (Acts 14:6), a sub-province of Roman Galatia.

ROMAN PROVINCES of ASIA MINOR, 117 AD



The Holy Spirit was drawing large numbers of Gentiles to Christ, and false teachers called Judaizers began teaching that new believers needed to first convert to Judaism, become circumcised, obey the 613 commandments found in the Torah, live as Jews, and then place

their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This heresy prompted early church leaders (including Paul, Barnabas and Peter) to gather in Jerusalem (the Council of Jerusalem) to address the Judaizers. The leaders concluded that God made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews, giving all believers the Holy Spirit and saving all through His grace and faith in Jesus Christ. The Council asked Paul, Barnabas, Silas and Judas to deliver a letter to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, declaring God's grace and refuting the Judaizers. Notably, the churches in Galatia were not addressed in the letter.

Since Galatia did not receive the letter addressing the Judaizers, Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled to Galatia to see how the churches in Galatia were doing (Paul's second missionary journey, Acts 16:16). It is likely they confronted the same false teachings of the Judaizers, prompting Paul to write the letter to the Galatians, declaring their freedom from Jewish law and their salvation and justification through faith in Christ alone.

Paul's message to the Galatians of justification by Christ alone profoundly influenced the thinking of Martin Luther, leading to the Reformation. Luther lectured on the letter of Galatians in 1519 and 1523. He declared, "Galatians is my epistle. I am wedded to it. It is my Katherine" (his wife's name). Paul's letter to the Galatians is short. It is only nine pages in my Bible, including study notes, but Luther's commentary on Galatians fills 1,500 pages!