

THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA (PART 1)

Jon Macon

Galatia was a large Roman province to the east of Asia Minor comprising Pisidia, Lycaonia, parts of Phrygia and Pontus, etc. This province was organized by the Romans in 25 B.C. The ancient kingdom known as Galatia was a smaller region occupying the northern portion of what became the Roman province bearing the same name. It is uncertain whether Paul preached in the northern parts of the province, or only in the southern and central areas. Although there were some Jews from in or near Galatia (i.e. Pontus and Phrygia) present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9-10), and some of them may have been among the early converts to Christ, it does not appear that any of these ventured past Phoenicia and Cyprus when they were scattered during Saul's persecution of the early church (Acts 11:19). Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were all located in the province of Galatia. Therefore, the first Galatian churches were started on Paul's first missionary journey, somewhere around 46-49 A.D. (Acts 13:14-14:24).

Antioch in Pisidia

It was Paul's typical custom to begin his work in each new place by teaching and preaching in the Jewish synagogues on the sabbath days. Paul established that pattern in Damascus immediately after his conversion to Christ (Acts 9:17-20), and followed it on his first missionary journey at Salamis on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:5), and throughout his journey through Pisidia and Lycaonia in Galatia (and on his subsequent journeys as well). When they arrived in Antioch in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue on the sabbath and Paul preached Christ (Acts 13:14-41). The Gentiles wanted to hear the same words the following sabbath, and there were "*many of the Jews and religious proselytes*" who also followed Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:42-43). The next Saturday, "*almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God*" (Acts 13:44), and this provoked the envy of the unbelieving Jews, who blasphemed and contradicted what Paul spoke (Acts 13:45). Many Gentiles believed (Acts 13:46-48). And from Antioch, "*the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region*" (Acts 13:49). On Paul's third journey, he similarly used Ephesus as a base to spread the gospel throughout Asia (Acts 19:8-10). We do not know how many churches were established in this part of Galatia at this time, but there had to be

THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA (PART 1)

(continued)

several. The persecution did not abate, and “*the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts*” (Acts 13:50; 2 Tim 3:11).

Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe

Paul and Barnabas next went to Iconium and taught in the synagogue there and “*a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed*” (Acts 14:1).

They stayed in Iconium for a long time and did signs and wonders which confirmed the word they preached (Acts 14:3). But heavy persecution came upon them as it had in Antioch (2 Tim 3:11). The “*unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren*” (Acts 14:2), and “*the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles*” (Acts 14:4). The Jews and Gentiles and their rulers planned to stone Paul and Barnabas, so they fled to Lystra (Acts 14:5-6). They preached in Lystra (Acts 14:7), which was the hometown of Timothy, and it appears Timothy was converted at this time (2 Tim 3:10-11; Acts 16:1). Paul healed a crippled man at Lystra and Paul and Barnabas scarcely restrained the people from worshiping them as gods (Acts 14:8-18). Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and “*persuaded the people*” and stoned Paul and left him for dead (Acts 14:19-20; 2 Tim 3:11). Paul recovered and the next day went to Derbe and preached (Acts 14:20-21). Paul had some infirmity of the flesh as he preached in Galatia at this time, but they did not despise him for it (Gal 4:13-15). And in addition to doing miracles, Paul also laid his hands on the Galatian brethren and gave them the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:5). Paul and Barnabas then revisited Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, the very places that they had been chased out, or been stoned or nearly stoned in (Acts 14:21). They confirmed the souls of the disciples, and exhorted them “*to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22). They also “*ordained them elders in every church*” (Acts 14:23). They “*passed throughout Pisidia*” and returned to Syrian Antioch where the journey had begun (Acts 14:24-26). Thus, the churches in Galatia had their beginning from Paul’s work on his first missionary journey. But the New Testament informs us that there was much more work accomplished in this region during the First Century.