

THE CHURCHES OF GALATIA (PART 2)

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Antioch in Syria is the place where the Apostle Paul began his second missionary journey in about 50 A.D. (Acts 15:35ff). Paul took Silas and “*went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches*” (Acts 15:40-41). After this, they entered Galatia and went through Derbe and Lystra and Timothy joined them in Lystra (Acts 16:1-3). “*And as they went through the cities,*” places where Paul had Barnabas had preached and established churches on their first journey, “*they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem*” (Acts 16:4). These letters were written in response to the efforts of Jewish Christians to compel Gentile Christians to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses (Acts 15; Gal 2:1-10). The Gentiles were not burdened with having to keep the law of Moses, but were told rather to refrain from idolatry and fornication, and eating blood and things strangled (Acts 15:28-29). Acts 16:6 summarizes this part of the second journey, saying that Paul Silas and Timothy went “*throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia*” (Acts 16:6). The Galatian churches grew both spiritually and numerically: “*And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily*” (Acts 16:5).

False doctrine in Galatia

In spite of Paul’s preaching, and in spite of the letters from the apostles and elders of Jerusalem (which came directly from the Holy Spirit, Acts 15:28), the churches of Galatia continued to be plagued with Judaizing false teachers. This is the primary subject of Paul’s epistle to “the churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:2). In this epistle, Paul marveled that the Galatians were “so soon removed” from the Lord to “another gospel” (Gal 1:6). Some were troubling the Galatians by perverting the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:7), and they would be cursed (Gal 1:8-9). The Galatians had been foolish in being “bewitched” by those who were bringing them under the law of Moses (Gal 3:1-5; 4:8-11, 17-5:6). They had “run well” but now were being hindered and troubled by these Judaizers (Gal 5:7-12), who were constraining them to be circumcised (Gal 6:12-16). Some of the Galatians evidently were rejecting Paul for teaching them the truth on this point (Gal 4:16), but Paul said that from henceforth no man should trouble him as he bore in his body the marks

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of the Lord Jesus (Gal 6:17). Paul reminded them of the conference in Jerusalem described in Acts 15 and the fact that he had taken Titus, a Greek, with him there and refused to circumcise him for the sake of the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:1-5). Paul had even rebuked Peter publicly in Antioch for succumbing to the pressures of the Judaizers and carrying Barnabas along with him (Gal 2:11-14).

Other matters in the letter to the churches of Galatia

The remainder of the epistle to the churches of Galatia proves that justification does not come by the works of the Old Law but by faith in Christ, and those who try to follow part of the Old Law are indebted to follow it all, which will bring them under a curse and cause them to fall from grace. The Galatians were also encouraged not to bite, devour, envy and provoke each other but to love each other and to put away the works of the flesh and to have the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:13-26). They were also told how to restore erring brethren and do good to others (Gal 6:1-10).

Galatia from Paul's third missionary journey onward

Paul completed his second missionary journey and began his third journey around 52-53 A.D. He departed Antioch and "*went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples*" (Acts 18:23). On this third visit to Galatia, Paul began to take up donations from the churches there to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-2; Rom 15:25-31; 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:2). Paul commanded the Galatians to lay by in store every Sunday as God had prospered them (1 Cor 16:1-2). We do not know if this third visit to Galatia was Paul's last. At the end of his life, in about 67-68 A.D., Paul was again a prisoner in Rome and was facing execution (2 Tim 4:6-8). Crescens was in Galatia then (2 Tim 4:10). Paul was obviously still concerned about the churches in Galatia up to the very end of his life. His involvement with the congregations there spanned some 17 or 18 years. Somewhere around this time, Peter wrote his two epistles to "*the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,*" among other places (1 Pet 1:1). Peter's first epistle emphasized enduring sufferings for righteousness' sake. The second epistle emphasized resisting false doctrine, a message which was right in line with what Paul had written the Galatians some time before.