

# Studies in Galatians

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For several years the undersigned read St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians exegetically with the Junior Class of our Seminary. It was suggested that the material of this course be made available to the readers of the *Theol. Quartalschrift*. The aim of the course was not to hand to the students a final and definite interpretation of every passage, which they must adopt on their teacher's authority, but rather to point out to them the facts that should be taken into consideration as having a bearing on the problem. Naturally, the general truth which Paul so forcefully presents in this short letter admits of no question, but the specific aim of some statements and particularly the thought-connection in many cases may be conceived in various ways. For example, just think of the scores of interpretations the little remark in ch. 3:20 has found: God is one.

Similarly, it will not be the aim of these present studies to provide a ready-made exegesis, but rather to assemble some helps which should enable the reader to do his own research work, which, after all, is the only satisfactory method insuring the most lasting results.

In this first installment\* it will be in place to discuss some isagogical matters.

## 1. Who were the Galatians?

The name occurs several times. In the address Paul calls his readers "the churches of Galatia." In ch. 3:1 he exclaims, "O foolish Galatians." He refers to these churches also in 1 Cor. 16:1, where, speaking of the "collection," he mentions some orders which he has given to the "churches of Galatia."

The word Galatia reminds one of Gaul, the similarity of sound being even greater in the original: *Galatia* and *Gallia*. The affinity of the names is embodied in a variant reading of 2 Tim. 4:10. Both our German and our English versions have it that Crescens departed to *Galatia*, while other manuscripts have to *Gaul*.

There is more than just a similarity of sound. The two names are connected etymologically. There is an ethnological connection between the inhabitants of Galatia and those of Gaul.

About the year 280 B.C. three chiefly Celtic tribes (there was a little admixture of Germans) pillaged the Greek city of Delphi, famous for its oracle of Apollo. They were the Tectosages, the Tolistobogi, and the Trocmi. Here remember the opening sentence of Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*: *Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres, quarum...iucolunt...tertiam qui ipsorum lingua **Celtae**, nostra **Galli** appellantur.*

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\* The successive installments of these studies were not published in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*.

About this time King Nicomedes I of Bithynia had trouble in his country, which he felt unable to suppress successfully. He heard of the marauding Celts and engaged them to help him quell the insurrection. This they did in 278 B.C. But Nicomedes got more than he had bargained for. Once in the land, the Celts decided to stay. They settled around the three cities of Ancyra, Pessinus, and Tavium. This thereafter was the kingdom of Galatia.

It remained independent for less than one hundred years. In 189 B.C. the Galatians were subdued by the Romans under the leadership of their Consul Manlius. Galatia continued as a kingdom, but under Roman supervision, till 25 B.C., when Amyntas, the last king of the Galatians, died.

A question which is much discussed by students of the Epistle to the Galatians, and which very likely will never be conclusively settled, is what is meant by *Galatia*. Some assume that it is the original territory of the Galatians, others assume that it is the Roman province. The church fathers do not touch this question till after 350 A.D., *i.e.*, till after the Roman province had been dissolved for more than a half century.

The Book of Acts contains no account of Paul's activity in northern Galatia, the original territory of the Galatians, or of the founding of congregations there by him or by anybody else. On his second journey, which carried him to Philippi, Thessalonica, and other Greek cities, Paul is reported to have "gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia" (Acts 16:6), but no missionary activity is recorded, since the Holy Ghost, as Acts 16:9 plainly shows, hurried His messengers on to Europe. When Paul on his third journey was on his way to redeem his promise made to the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus (Acts 18:19-21) he traversed in order "the country of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23).

What is meant by "the region of Galatia" and "the country of Galatia"? (Be sure to compare the map, in order to get the full import of St. Luke's remarks.)

It is advisable to study the first of these two passages first, since the second presupposes the facts recorded in the first. The two words "region" and "country," which we find in our English Bible, are the same word in the Greek: χώρα. The Greek in Acts 16:6 reads: τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν. Note the definite article with the noun and the two adjective modifiers in the attributive position: the country which is Phrygian and Galatian. The most natural assumption seems to be that Luke is referring to a territory which might rightfully be called either Galatian or Phrygian, *i.e.*, a parcel of land which had originally belonged to Phrygia but which in 25 B.C. had been joined to the province of Galatia. Call it Phrygian Galatia or Galatian Phrygia, both terms would convey about the same idea as the Greek τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν.

Since only parts, the eastern parts, of Phrygia had been annexed by the Romans to Galatia, and since Paul on his third journey was headed for Ephesus, the expression in Acts 18:23 no longer offers any difficulty: τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν. It was Galatian territory and Phrygian which Paul had to cross on his way.

This still leaves us without a single clue as to the founding of congregations in original Galatia. Yet the fact that the Judaizers pounced upon these congregations as a promising field for their nefarious activity, the fact that Paul in his epistle treats the matter as of great consequence, and also the fact that Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians, written during his stay at Ephesus, about Easter,

56 A.D., mentions the Galatians as well known to the Corinthians, point to the eminence of these churches. They are an important part of Paul's field; and yet not a word about his missionary work in northern Galatia.

These and other considerations, soon to be mentioned, induce the undersigned to look for these churches in southern Galatia, which Paul covered on his first mission journey.

Students who assume that the Galatians of Paul's Epistle are not ethnographically such, but are called Galatians because they were included in the Roman province by that name, point to the preference which Paul and Luke give to certain designations. Paul seems to use chiefly the political names, while Luke prefers the ethnographic. When Paul, *e. g.*, in Rom 15:26 ; 2 Cor. 9:2, mentions Achaia he is speaking of the Corinthians, who were, indeed, included in the Roman province by that name, but were of a different Greek tribe from that of the original Achaians. Similarly he mentions Macedonia and Asia (see 1 Cor. 15:5; 16:19). Luke, on the other hand, speaks of Lycaonia and Pisidia (Acts 14:6,24) although these countries were included in the Roman province of Galatia. Similarly he mentions Mysia, Greece, Bithynia (see Acts 16:7; 20:2).—This is interesting, though hardly conclusive. In Acts 18:12, *e. g.*, Luke uses Achaia for the Roman province.

## **2. Some Facts Concerning the Galatian Churches**

It has been pointed out before that the Galatian churches were properly Paul's field. He had brought the Gospel to this territory, and he had founded these churches. In the epistle itself he refers to the fact in an emphatic, appealing way. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, ch. 4:19. Birth pains he experienced when he brought the Gospel to the Galatians, and birth pains he experienced a second time when he labored to rescue them from the enticing error of the Judaizers.

In the light of this fact must be understood the statements in verses 11 and 14 of the same chapter. Paul expresses the fear that all the labors he had spent on the Galatians might, after all, prove futile in spite of the fact that at first they had received him with open arms, rejoicing over his coming with the Gospel as though an angel from heaven had visited them, yes, Jesus Christ Himself in person. These statements corroborate the claim made in v. 19 that he is the founder of the Galatian churches.

Paul was not alone when he brought the Gospel to Galatia. He had a coloborer. In ch. 1:8,9 he uses the plural "we." When Paul uses the plural he means the plural. With us the plural of the first person is frequently only a matter of form. Either out of modesty, or out of the very opposite, we say "we" where we mean a plain "I." Not so Paul. He uses the singular when he alone is concerned, and when he uses the plural some one else is to be understood besides himself. If, as we assume, the congregations of Galatia are the ones founded by Paul on his first mission journey, then the co-founder referred to in ch. 1:8,9 is Barnabas, Paul's companion on that journey.

Before Paul wrote his Epistle he had made two visits to these congregations. In ch. 4:13 he speaks of his first coming to Galatia in such a way that only two visits in all can be understood to have taken place till then. He says τὸ πρότερον, which means the first time of two. —Again, if the Galatian congregations were located in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, the two

visits can easily be accounted for from Acts. The first visit is reported in detail in ch. 13 and 14; while the second, planned by Paul according to ch. 15:36, is summarily recorded in ch. 16:1-6.

When Paul, in ch. 4:8, speaks of the Galatians as people who formerly “did service unto them which by nature are no gods,” we infer that the main body of the Galatian churches consisted of Gentile-Christians. By accepting the Mosaic Law as binding upon them also and as necessary for salvation they were in essence reverting to the original heathendom, although the outward form of their new service differed from their former practices.

This fact again agrees perfectly with the account in Acts concerning the constituency of the churches founded in southern Galatia. Although Paul and Barnabas made it a point to contact the Jews first, and although they apparently received a hearty welcome from them, yet when the Gentiles were declared eligible to the blessings of the Gospel directly, without first becoming Jewish proselytes, the great mass of the Jews, particularly the leaders, strenuously protested and instigated persecutions against the messengers of a law-free Gospel. Antioch in Pisidia is typical, and what happened there was repeated, with modifications, in the other cities. Read Acts 13:44-51.

In ch. 2:4,5 Paul assures his readers that the matter at stake in the council held at Jerusalem, Acts 15, was the *continuance* of the pure Gospel with them, ἵνα ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου διαμείνη. They had received the Gospel, but would they continue to enjoy it? Not if the Judaizers had their way. They were bent on adulterating the Gospel by supplementing the work of Christ with their own circumcision and other exercises according to the Law of Moses. Paul championed the cause of a law-free Gospel in Jerusalem, as he had done in Antioch. On the outcome of the deliberations depended whether the Galatians would be permitted to *keep* the law-free Gospel they had received.

The Jerusalem Council took place shortly after Paul had submitted his report on his first mission journey to the congregation at Antioch, which had sponsored the undertaking.

It would be difficult to find a justification for the use of διαμείνη if the law-free Gospel had not been brought to the Galatians prior to the Council at Jerusalem. But the only congregations founded by Paul up to this time were those of southern Galatia. He had not yet even set foot in Galatia proper.

From the way Barnabas is mentioned in Gal. 2:1,9,13 it is evident, not only that he was well known, but also highly respected by the Galatians. When Peter’s example confused the other Jewish Christians in Antioch, even Barnabas, yes the beloved Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

Paul labored together with Barnabas in Antioch (Syria). Together with Barnabas he undertook the first mission journey, the Holy Ghost having expressly designated these two men as His choice for this work (Acts 13:2). But before Paul undertook his second visit to southern Galatia he and Barnabas were separated. Barnabas went to his home land, Cyprus, and Paul with another companion to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Antioch.

If the congregations addressed in the Epistle to the Galatians were founded at a later date than the Council at Jerusalem, it is difficult to understand how they came to know and revere Barnabas, as they evidently did. After his separation from Paul Barnabas disappears from the record of St. Luke, nor does Paul mention him in his epistles. But with the people visited by Paul on his first

mission journey it was different; they held Barnabas in high esteem. Even before their conversion the people at Lystra had regarded Barnabas as the supreme ruler of the Greek pantheon. They called him Jupiter (Acts 14:12). Thus the esteem in which Barnabas was held makes it almost certain that the Galatians of the Epistle were none other than the congregations in the southern part of the Roman province. To assume that the addresses were located in northern Galatia would present insurmountable difficulties, problems insoluble from the New Testament records.

One more fact should be noted. When Paul brought the Gospel to these people, he testifies that in their first enthusiasm they received him as an angel of God, ch. 4:14, even as Christ Jesus. The first joy of having received the Gospel is frequently marked by unusual exuberance. It may well be assumed that other newly converted Christians treated Paul as did the Galatians; compare, *e.g.*, Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15), but the attitude of the Galatians made an especially lasting impression on Paul. Even when penning his letter, they stood before his mental eye as they were congratulating themselves on having received the Gospel, ready, if that were possible, to pluck out their own eyes for the benefit of the man that brought it to them (ch. 4:15). And all this in spite of the fact that Paul came to them as a sick man seeking recovery of his impaired health (ch. 4:14).

All of this agrees with Luke's record of Paul's first mission journey. Paul and Barnabas came to the higher altitudes of Antioch in Pisidia from the malaria-infested lowlands of the Pamphylian coast. They must have landed in the harbor of Attalia. They stopped at Perga. But they did no mission work there now, and John Marcus departed from them (Acts 13:13,14). They did mission work in these cities on their return trip (Acts 14:25). The assumption is not far-fetched that both Paul and Marcus contracted the disease; but while the latter was discouraged and went home, Paul simply pushed on to higher altitudes and continued his work in spite of his weakened condition.

Nor is the comparison of his reception by the Galatians to that of an angel of God very far-fetched. After the miracle in Lystra the people called Paul Mercurius because he was the chief speaker. Mercurius, in Greek mythology, was the messenger of the gods, a son of Jupiter. Hence: "angel," even "Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14).—Compare also the somewhat startling reference to angels in Gal. 1:8, which, however, was quite appropriate in the case of the southern Galatians, easily understood and most effective.

### 3. The Occasion for Writing the Epistle

A superficial reading of the epistle will readily reveal the fact that the Gospel doctrine was threatened in Galatia in such a way that Paul feared it might be lost entirely. This danger did not arise from within the congregations. Errors threatened also other churches, *e.g.*, Corinth. The first epistle of Paul to this church shows that errors even in articles of prime importance were held there. Yet there were some differences. While the Corinthian errors certainly vitiated the purity of doctrine and in this sense ultimately endangered not only the well-being but the very existence of the congregation, the error in Galatia, in spite of its seeming insignificance, was a stab at the very heart of the Gospel. While the errors in Corinth were traceable to insufficient education of the members, the errors in Galatia were injected by outside influences.

For this reason Paul clearly distinguishes between the seducers and the members of the congregations. He refers to the intruders as “some that trouble you” (ch. 1:7). He addresses the Galatians as “you,” and calls the seducers “they” (ch. 4:17; 5:12; 6:12). He even refers to the seducers in such a way as though they were personally unknown to him: “he that troubleth you...whosoever he be” (ch. 5:10).

The purpose of the epistle, then, was to fortify the Galatians against the insidious heresy which threatened them.

It was an error which, if unchecked, would change the very Christian faith into actual heathendom only thinly veiled. At the time before they had learned to know God they did service to them which by nature are no gods; and now, heeding the enticing words of the errorists, they were on the verge of turning again to a state of bondage (ch. 4:8-11), which would mean that all the labors Paul had bestowed on them were lost. They would be idolaters again as before, only under a different guise.

On the surface, the error did not look so treacherous. They were not asked to give up Christ, to renounce Him and persecute His adherents, as did the Jews. The errorists that troubled the Galatians are described in Acts 15:5, as men of the sect of the Pharisees *which believed*. The participle of the perfect tense is used, *πεπιστευκότες*, showing that they, having once accepted faith in Jesus, now continued actually to stand in the faith. There is no doubt about their Christianity, nor sincerity. But they are spoken of, further, as saying that it was needful (*δεῖ*) to circumcise them (the heathen as they sought to enter the church) and to command them (*i.e.*, to establish the rule in every case) that they must keep the law of Moses. This they considered necessary because otherwise the Gentiles could not be saved (Acts 15:1).

This then was the position these men took. They devoutly believed in Jesus Christ as the promised Savior. There is no salvation without Him. But in order to secure one's part in Jesus Christ one must wholeheartedly submit to the Law of Moses. Only by observing his commandments can a man's connection with the Savior be established and maintained. In other words, Jesus is indeed the God-appointed Savior, but His work of redemption must be supplemented by our own efforts at obedience to the Law of Moses. In justifying a sinner God looks at the merits of Christ, but He also looks at the sinner's own achievements.

This error plainly violates the great “either—or” of the Gospel, either by works on the basis of merit and worthiness, or without works, excluding works in every form, on the basis of pure grace for Christ's sake. Under present conditions, as brought about by sin, the first alternative spells death and damnation, while the second alone, but without doubt, leads to salvation. A combination of the two is impossible. The Gospel is robbed of its comfort, the virus of self-righteousness ruins it.

This same error, which attacks the very heart of the Christian faith, was insidiously injected into the Galatians' way of thinking. They were made to believe that they must submit to circumcision in order to be saved. They also began to observe days, and months, and times, and years, because they considered these exercises as contributory to their justification. This was what alarmed Paul and induced him to write his letter.

To this must be added the quickness with which this error gained a foothold and spread among the Christians of Galatia. Paul voices his astonishment, he simply cannot understand it that they are so soon (*οὐτως ταχέως*) removed from Him that called them (ch. 1:6). To be sure, it happened in Paul's absence (ch. 4:18); but he had visited them only a short time before, and on that occasion had delivered to them the very resolutions adopted by the Council at Jerusalem against the error of the Judaizers (Acts 16:4), and had in

this way established the churches in the faith (Acts 16:5). And now this sudden defection! Paul exclaims: O foolish Galatians, who hath *bewitched* you? (ch. 3:1). His loving, anxious heart undergoes birth pains a second time for his Galatians that their faith may remain and Christ be formed in them (ch. 4:19).

The introduction of this false, Gospel-destroying error in Galatia was the principal cause for the Epistle. In connection with it there were others.

As long as Paul was held in high esteem by the Galatians there was little chance of luring them away from his Gospel, but if the Judaizers succeeded in discrediting him, it might afterwards be so much easier to make them accept the error. It was a daring attempt. One could hardly believe that it might succeed. It would rather seem that an attempt to besmirch the good name of the beloved apostle would rebound as a boomerang on the heads of those who did so. Yet, the Judaizers tried, and apparently succeeded.

They represented Paul to the Galatians as an apostle of inferior rank, as one who at best had received the Gospel message from secondary sources. He had not been with Jesus during His earthly career, had not been called by Him like the Twelve, had not heard Him nor seen His miracles, was really inadmissible as a witness. More. He had not even been with Peter for any length of time before he preached to the Galatians. They, the Judaizers, on the other hand, were among those that continued in “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42), they heard Peter daily. Their way of presenting the Gospel was far more reliable than Paul’s.

This insinuation was a contributory cause for Paul’s writing. In the very salutation he emphatically presents himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Not an apostle of men, whom men had chosen, prepared, instructed, sent forth. Not an apostle through the instrumentality of a man. Jesus had, indeed, notified Paul by a man, Ananias, of what it meant to be an apostle (Acts 9:6ff.). He had, furthermore, moved the congregation at Antioch by the Spirit to release Paul from their service and to commission him for the special work He wanted him to do (Acts 13:1ff.). Yet, in spite of all this, no man was instrumental in making Paul an apostle. He was called to that position by Jesus Christ Himself.

Not only in the salutation does Paul emphasize his immediate apostleship, he devotes the entire first part of the letter to establishing just this point: he had received his Gospel through a revelation from Jesus Christ; the other apostles, and with them the whole church at Jerusalem, had acknowledged Paul’s work as a proper way of preaching the Gospel, as differing in no respect from their own; yes, even the foremost among the apostles, Peter, had on a certain occasion submitted to a correction from Paul.

Paul is sure of his apostleship, and he uses his apostolic authority in ridding the Galatians of the insidious error of the Judaizers. Mark the beginning of the fifth chapter: Behold, I Paul say unto you.

Aimed at discrediting Paul with the Galatians was also the slur that he did not seem to be consistent in his preaching and practice. He was vacillating. Paul alludes to this in ch. 5:11: If I yet preach circumcision. The *yet* in this sentence is evidently not temporal: if I to this time still preach circumcision; rather, it denotes degree: if I in the least preach etc., if I grant circumcision any place at all in my Gospel message.

Thus the Judaizers seem to have represented Paul as a man who, while preaching in Galatia, had denounced circumcision as unnecessary to salvation, but who was not so sure of his ground and might on other occasions acquiesce in, yes even recommend circumcision.

The occasion for these slanderous remarks was very likely the fact, well-known to the Galatians, that Paul had circumcised Timothy before he chose him as his companion and assistant on his second journey (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy was a Christian before he was circumcised, he was known and highly esteemed as a Christian. Paul did not circumcise him as though otherwise his salvation might be less secure. If the question of salvation had in any way been involved Paul would have strenuously opposed Timothy's circumcision, as strenuously as he did that of Titus (Gal. 2:3); and if Timothy had accepted circumcision under such conditions against the advice of Paul, Paul would have denied fellowship to him and would least of all have chosen him for his fellow-laborer.

All of this is evident, not only from the report of the event in Acts (ch. 16:1-3), but even more so from a closer consideration of the time and circumstances. Paul had testified for a law-free Gospel against the Judaizers in Antioch (Acts 15:1,2). On account of this question he had been delegated by the Antioch church to testify in their stead before the church at Jerusalem. Paul had taken the uncircumcised Greek Titus with him to Jerusalem and made a test case out of him. After the signal victory for the law-free Gospel he had returned to Antioch, and after some time revisited the congregations founded on his first journey. He delivered the Jerusalem decrees to them. And then and there he circumcised Timothy.

He did not feel anything self-contradictory in the act, nor did the congregations, who were firmly established in the faith by the Jerusalem decrees which Paul delivered to them.

Paul's action in Timothy's case must be explained from other considerations and motives. Paul circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters (Acts 16:3).

Paul knew that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision (Gal. 5:6). Paul also knew that all things belong to Christ and must serve His Kingdom, even circumcision not excepted. If he would win people for Christ, he must place himself in their position and fight through their battles in his own heart and conscience. Thus for Christ's sake Paul became unto the Jews as a Jew and unto them that are under the Law as under the Law (1 Cor. 9:20). And he carefully avoided everything that might prove a stumbling block to anyone's faith (1 Cor. 8:13). The circumcision of Timothy was in perfect accord with the Jerusalem decrees, which advocated tender consideration for Jewish sensibilities.

This action of Paul in Timothy's case, which plainly showed that his Gospel preaching was thoroughly law-free, so much so that he was able to make even circumcision subservient to the Gospel, was twisted by his opponents into an accusation of inconsistency.

That was a second contributory cause to Paul's writing his epistle.

The Judaizers, in addition, seem to have charged Paul also that he in his ambition to gather in great numbers of converts from the Gentiles toned down some of the demands of the Law that might be unpopular. What this charge implied may be gathered without difficulty from a practice not altogether unknown in our day. A home missionary in a new field may be tempted, *e.g.*, at first to hold back somewhat with his testimony against the lodge. A clear testimony on this point might frighten the people away and hamper the (outward) growth of the congregation.

But Paul did nothing of the kind. He was a true preacher of the Gospel. He knew that if he in any way tried to please men he then could not be the servant of Christ (ch. 1:10). For him it was not a question of mitigating the demands of the Law in order to make



his Gospel more acceptable, for him it was a question of *either – or*, either by the Gospel alone, or else by works alone. A combination of the two is impossible, so that if any one in the slightest degree introduced the works of the Law into the question of justification, he thereby automatically placed himself under obligation to the whole Law (ch. 5:3). And this simply spells a curse (ch. 3:10).

Paul must warn his Galatians against this mixing of Law and Gospel. He defended himself against the charge of toning down the Law.

The adulteration of the Gospel by an admixture of Law together with the concomitant attempt to rob Paul of his reputation as a faithful apostle of Jesus Christ was of recent development. Before the coming of the Judaizers the Galatian congregations had enjoyed a normal, healthy development. They prized the Gospel as a rich blessing from God, and considered themselves happy in its possession. There were many and loud expressions of self-congratulation (μακαρισμός, ch. 4:15) . They were running well (ch. 5:7).

They themselves were to blame, at least in part, that a change was threatening to develop. Paul had warned them. He had a witness with him who seconded him in his warning. He uses the plural: “we said before” (ch. 1:9).

It is not difficult to guess on what basis Paul had sounded the warning. He had experienced the opposition of Judaizers in Antioch. There he had seen how fanatic they were and what disturbance they caused (Acts 15:1,2). He had met another group of the same errorists in Jerusalem (Acts 15:5). While in both cases they had not succeeded to gain a foothold in the congregations for their error, yet, in Antioch at least, they had not been won for the truth. In Jerusalem they were put to silence by Peter’s convincing testimony (Acts 15:12), while it does not appear that the results were as favorable as that in Antioch. The congregation in Antioch, it is true, did not grant admittance to their error; but perhaps they might look for better success in other congregations not yet so firmly established in the Gospel.

It is possible that reports of their nefarious activities reached Paul while he was laboring in Antioch after the Council of Jerusalem. There is a tone of uneasiness in his suggestion to Barnabas to revisit the congregations of Galatia “to see how they do” (Acts 15:36). Hence Paul and Silas confirmed the churches and established them in the faith by delivering to them in writing and in additional oral explanations the Jerusalem decrees (Acts 15:41; 16:4,5; 15:30-32).

Yet in spite of this warning the Galatians admitted the Judaizers and stood in danger of being led astray by them. They had not yet fully accepted their error. In his entire epistle Paul never speaks in such a way as to even hint that the error had gained a firm foothold. But the poison had been injected and was in the process of doing its destructive work. In ch. 1:6 he expresses his astonishment that they permit themselves to be removed (μετατίθεσθε). He always speaks of the errorists as attempting to disturb the Galatians, never as having won them over; cf. ch. 1:7; 4:17; 5:10,12; 6:12. The errorists have impeded the healthy progress of the congregations (ch. 5:7), and the forms which Paul employs to characterize their activity indicate that they had won some adherents; cf. besides the passages cited above also ch. 4:10,11; 5:4.

The condition in Galatia seems to have been similar to that of Antioch (in Syria) when the Judaizers arrived. There was a great dissention and feelings ran high. But while in Antioch Paul and Barnabas had held their ground against the errorists, the Galatians do not seem to have been able to ward off the attack.

What should they do? The most likely procedure to suggest itself to them would be to send an appeal for help to Paul, who not only had brought the Gospel to them in the first place but had shown great concern in forewarning them against the very error which was now causing their trouble.

Did they do this? Did they send a letter or a delegation to Paul?

One cannot read the epistle without getting the impression that Paul has authentic information on the prevailing conditions. He knows that the Galatians, although they have not gone over into the enemy camp, yet are not showing the proper resistance, they are hesitating, they are yielding. Some are submitting to circumcision. They are introducing Sabbath observance, which means in principle the adoption of the entire Mosaic festival calendar. Paul is so well informed that he can use very strong language. He wonders, he cannot understand, how they could turn so quickly. He calls them foolish, who must have permitted themselves to be bewitched. The use of such invectives would have been entirely out of place if Paul had merely suspected that something was wrong in Galatia. When he says about the Judaizers, "whosoever he be" (ch. 5:10), this does not indicate lack of information, but is to impress the truth that nothing can save them from bearing their judgment even though they be angels from heaven.

How did Paul get this information? It cannot have been by hear-say. If Paul had had nothing but rumors he would have been duty-bound to disbelieve. He might have asked for information, but he could not have raised the serious charges as he did.

It may have been that the Galatians wrote him a letter. But then Paul would very likely have referred to it in his reply, as he does in his first epistle to the Corinthians (ch. 7:1).

Most likely the congregations of Galatia sent a delegation to Paul. It is a peculiar fact that this epistle does not convey any greetings besides Paul's own, not from a group nor from individuals. Yet Paul was not alone. In the salutation he mentions "all the brethren which are with me." Who were these? And why did they not send greetings? The matter becomes clear at once if we may assume that they were delegates from the Galatian churches. Having been sent from the troubled congregations they were afraid of the error and were in basic agreement with the truth of the Gospel as Paul preached it, but were themselves too inexperienced to defend it. Thus Paul could mention them in the salutation as being of one mind with him and as approving of his letter, but could not mention them as sending greetings, seeing they themselves would carry back his letter.

#### **4. Time and Place of Writing**

In ch. 4:20 Paul expresses his burning desire to visit the troubled Galatians personally. In spite of the information he has about their difficulties and their attitude toward them he still is in doubt. When he tries to visualize the situation there still remain many unanswered questions offering insoluble problems. A personal visit would greatly help to answer them. Then also he could change his voice, he could warn them that are unruly, he could comfort the fainthearted, he could support the weak, and he could do all this with patience toward all (cf. 1 Thess. 5:14). He could give them their portion of meat in due season (Lk. 12:42).

Why does he not visit them?

His words give the impression that this is simply impossible for him. Why was it impossible at this time? We must study the history of Paul's mission work for a time when he might receive visitors, hear detailed reports, discuss a difficult situation thoroughly, write a letter without the services of a penman, but when it was impossible for him to leave, or to travel at will.

The first thought that presents itself may be: imprisonment!

According to 2 Cor. 11:23, written likely in the fall of 57, Paul had then already been in prison frequently. But these imprisonments seem to have been of short duration, as the one in Philippi (Acts 16:23) or as when he was hailed before court in Corinth (Acts 18:12). Luke does not mention them all in his narrative, and Paul himself refers to them only in a general way. We know, however, of three major imprisonments after the time of 2 Cor. 11. In 58 Paul was made a prisoner at Jerusalem. After a few days he was transferred to Caesarea, where he spent two years. During the winter of 60-61 he was transported to Rome. There he remained for another two years. As appears from various remarks in the New Testament he was acquitted, but later made a prisoner again, and executed.

We have several epistles in which Paul speaks of his bonds, but Galatians is not among them. Nor do the various circumstances concerning Galatia seem to fit well into the picture of these extended imprisonments.

Unless our assumption that the addressees of Galatians are the congregations founded by Paul on his first journey is all wrong, in which case we know nothing of the history of the recipients of this important epistle, Paul cannot have written his letter during any of the later imprisonments. Paul clearly speaks of two visits to Galatia (ch. 4:13), but by the time he was made a prisoner in Jerusalem he had visited them at least three times (Acts 13:14ff.; 16:1 ff.; 18:23). There may have been a fourth visit from Ephesus, at least Paul kept up his contact with the congregations, as is evident from 1 Cor. 16:1.

What kept Paul from visiting the Galatian congregations at this critical moment cannot, then, have been his imprisonment which began in 58. The epistle must have been written at an earlier date. We can even set a certain limit of two dates between which it must be placed. In Acts 16:1, the second visit is mentioned (about 51 A.D.). It must have been after that. In Acts 18:23, the third visit is mentioned (about 53 A.D.). It must have, been before that. That would point to the time Paul spent in Macedonia and in Achaia. His remark in ch. 1:6 that the change took place very rapidly, suggests that the time was not very long after the second visit, hence, not toward the end of his 18 months' activity in Corinth, rather during the beginning.

It will be difficult to fit the epistle into the brief imprisonments recorded by Luke, and it will be equally difficult to fit any other imprisonments into Luke's record, to suit the conditions of Galatians. Although Paul suffered much persecution and was hurried from city to city due to it, yet only twice was official action taken against him by the police: in Philippi and in Corinth, as mentioned above. The one night Paul and Silas spent in prison in Philippi leaves no room for all that was involved in the composition of Galatians; and it is doubtful if Paul even was incarcerated in Corinth.

Something else must have detained him from going to Galatia. What may it have been?

In his account of Paul's second journey Luke more than in other parts of his book stresses the fact that Paul constantly stood under an immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paul's goal seems to have been Ephesus, but he was forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia (Acts 16:6). Where should he preach? Paul seems to have thought of the important cities near the Bosphorus,

soon to become famous in early church history, Nicaea, Nicomedia, Chalcedon; but again the Spirit suffered them not to go the Bithynia (Acts 16:7). In Troas Paul received positive instruction to go to Macedonia. Paul's departure from Philippi, from Thessalonica, from Berea is sufficiently accounted for by the principle Jesus laid down in Mt. 10:23. Luke does not tell us why Paul left Athens, but he does tell us how the Lord commanded him to continue his work in Corinth unafraid (ch. 18:9).

May this, then, have been the reason why Paul could not visit the Galatian churches in their distress? God had work for him in Corinth which, barely begun, was not so soon to be interrupted; and to this act of God's over-ruling providence, so it seems, the church owes this precious gem among Paul's epistles. May we cherish it properly.

Other considerations corroborate this assumption. We turn to Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians, which he wrote during his stay at Corinth. In the first epistle, ch. 1:8, he remarks that the conversion of the Thessalonians was known not only in Macedonia and Achaia, which was but natural, but also in every place it was spread abroad. Which places does he mean? Besides Macedonia and Achaia, Paul had done mission work in Galatia only. Can he have Galatia in mind? How could the news of the conversion of the Macedonians have reached Galatia? And how could Paul know that it had reached there?

We remember that Timothy, Paul's associate, hailed from Galatia and was highly esteemed in his home congregation (Acts 16:1-3). We remember also that Timothy had a very pious mother, who reared him in the knowledge of the Scripture. Is it an improper stretch of the imagination to assume that Timothy reported to his mother the experience he gathered on his first mission venture, and the success the Lord had granted?

But how could Paul know that such a report had reached Galatia? Mark the peculiar statements he makes to the Thessalonians: "so that we need not to speak anything; for they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you" (I Thess. 1:8,9). There is somebody to whom Paul wants to break the good news about the conversion of the Thessalonians, but before he can say one word they themselves begin to talk about it, showing that they are fully informed. Who may these mysterious, yet so well informed people be? If we assume that a delegation from Galatia reached Paul shortly before, everything becomes clear.

To this we add another observation. Paul calls attention to traces of persecution which he shows in his body. They are so bad that they have apparently ruined his handwriting. He must write this epistle with his own hand, but just look at the clumsy letters (ch. 6:11,17).

The Galatians themselves knew of the stoning Paul underwent in their very midst (Acts 14:19,20), which may have left him marked for life, and a stone may also have crippled his hand. Paul had also more recently undergone severe persecution. The wounds of the unmerciful beating he received in Philippi, followed by the torture of clamping on the stocks, may barely have had healed superficially when he wrote to the Galatians. If they knew about this from Timothy's report, Paul's references acquire a new significance.

The remark about Paul's writing with his own hand demands a little closer attention. Paul was in the habit of dictating his letters and of adding his greetings in his own hand. Compare Rom. 16:22; 2 Thess. 3:17; 1 Cor. 16:21; Col. 4:18. Why did he not also dictate the letter to the Galatians in a similar fashion? Evidently because he was alone, at least none of his companions was near him to whom he might have entrusted the work of taking down his dictation. This points to the first weeks of Paul's stay in Corinth.

According to Acts 17:14, he left Timothy and Silas at Berea; and although they afterwards joined him at Athens, yet they did not stay with him but were sent back to Macedonia (1 Thess. 3:1,2,5). Only after Paul had been in Corinth for some time did they return from this mission (Acts 18:5).

All of these considerations point to the first weeks of Paul's stay in Corinth as the likely date of this letter. And then, Galatians would be the first epistle in the New Testament that we have from Paul's pen.