

Where Were the “Churches of Galatia”?

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Introduction

The epistle to the Galatians stands as a very significant epistle in church history, and in the New Testament in particular. While volumes have been written on the epistle and what it means for Christians seeking to be right before God, such studies must take a position on the destination of this epistle in order to all the exegetical enterprise to begin. One of the significant areas of disagreement over the past three centuries regarding this epistle’s background is the identity of the “churches of Galatia,” with two primary views regarding the location of these churches. This paper will discuss the critical issues behind this modern debate and will demonstrate why these churches should be identified as those churches in South Galatia, the same churches founded by Paul on his first missionary journey in Acts.

Reasons Why the Destination of the Epistle Matters

Before beginning to discuss the issues concerning the identity of the “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:1),¹ one of the basic questions is reason this identity is important. On very basic level, it is self-evident why it matters. Galatians is an occasional letter (see Gal. 1:6) written to a specific group of people by the apostle Paul, viz. the “churches of Galatia.” (1:2). Attention to the history of the letter must be given when interpreting the letter using grammatical-historical hermeneutics, and the identity of these churches is an essential part of that history.² Secondly, the identity of these churches also exerts some degree of influence in our dating of the epistle. The South Galatian view is generally associated with an early date, and the North Galatian view is generally associated with a later date.³ The dating question can prove to be very important in our exegesis of the epistle, especially in context of the relationship of Galatians 2 to the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. In conclusion, the destination of the letter to the Galatians is crucial for both our understanding of the context of the epistle and the date in which it was written.

Foundational Perspectives

As the question of the location of the Galatian churches is considered, there are a couple of foundational perspectives that need to be established from the beginning. First, the historicity of Acts is an assumed position for the purposes of this discussion. Many scholars find reasons to reject Luke’s historical accuracy, and such rejections will invariably color any discussions about the destination of the epistle to the Galatians.⁴ As I discuss the issues of where the churches of Galatia are, I will be assuming

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), accessed from <http://www.blueletterbible.org>.

² See helpful introduction in Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 131

⁴ For example, see the treatment in Clare K. Rothschild, “Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13: The Denouement of the South Galatian Hypothesis,” *Novum Testamentum* 54 (2012): 334-353.

the historical value of the materials in Acts.⁵ Second, it is clear that Paul did visit the churches of Galatia and preached to them. Most explicit is Paul's statement in Galatians 4:13 that "it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first." Additionally, Paul provides numerous personal appeals in the letter that seem to suggest the likelihood that he founded these churches. When one compares Galatians to an epistle such as Romans which was to a church Paul did not found, it is not hard to see the differences. As a result, the discussion that follows will assume that Paul had to have visited and founded these churches at some point in his ministry prior to the writing of this letter. Having set out these assumptions of Acts's historical value and Paul's visitation and founding of the Galatian churches, the focus must now turn to different sources available for the question of the destination of the epistle.

⁵ Much literature has been put out by evangelical scholars supporting the historicity of Acts (e.g. F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), and William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983; reprint, n.p.:n.d.).)

Sources

There are three basic sources of information in this discussion, and they are each emphasized by scholars in differing degrees. First, there is the historical information about the people who lived in the Galatian province in the Roman Empire and the ethnic Gaul peoples. William Ramsey is an example one of gives primary place to this type of evidence.⁶ Secondly, the history in Acts about Paul's travels and experiences is an important source of information to discerning when and where Paul may have planted the Galatian churches. In fact, Dr. Ben Witherington even sees this information as the source in which the debate as primarily centered.⁷ Thirdly, the internal evidence, evidence inside of the epistle is an important source of information. I myself have already pointed to internal evidence to demonstrate that Paul has already visited the Galatians (see Foundational Perspectives above). In a sense, internal evidence must be given a primary role.⁸ In light of the lack of details about the original visit in Acts, Silva argued that internal evidence must be given first place in the reconstruction of the context of Paul's original visit.⁹ To an extent, this argument does apply to the identification of the location of that visit. However, the details given in Acts may be more helpful in our identification of the location of the original visit, and, depending on the location determined, further details of what happened at that visit. In the end, there are three primary sources to be used in determining the location of the "churches of Galatia."

⁶ William M. Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965; reprint, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), 6 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁷ Ben Witherington, III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5.

⁸ So points out F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 10.

⁹ *Interpreting Galatians*, 104.

The Phrase “Churches of Galatia”

Having given a basic introduction to the subject at hand, it is important that to the text of the epistle’s declaration of its destination. As a part of his epistolary opening, Paul wrote, “To the churches of Galatia[.]” (Gal. 1:2) What does the term “Galatia” mean? Generally speaking, there is an ethnic usage of the term and a political usage of the term.¹⁰ The term Galatian began to be used in the 3rd century B.C. as a synonym of the terms Celtae and Galli, both of which refer to people from Europe who dominated the region west of the Rhine River,¹¹ a region that came to be known as Gaul¹² and thus these peoples were also known as the Gauls.¹³ Over time in the Roman Empire, the term was used in slightly different ways by the Romans and the Greeks, referring sometimes to the Celtic peoples as a whole and other times specifically to those Celtic peoples who had migrated to Asia Minor.¹⁴ This is the ethnic usage of the term. However, Galatia was also the name of a Roman province in existence at the time of the early church. As a result, the term Galatian could refer to a person in the Galatian province, which as will be shown later included more than just the region settled by the ethnic Gauls during the time of the Paul. So, the discussion of the complex matters of the ethnic Gallic peoples and the Roman province of Galatia will be necessary in order to help us to determine the identity of these churches.

Historical and Geographical Evidence

Peoples of North Galatia

As already discussed, the Galatians as an ethnic people are to be identified with the Gauls from Western Europe. In the early 3rd century B.C., a group of Gauls was migrating as a nation, not merely as mercenaries, into southeastern Europe.¹⁵ The turning point of that migration that led to settlement in Asia Minor was in 279 B.C. when a group of these Gauls separated from the main force, which was about to invade Delphi,¹⁶ and instead at the invitation of king Nicomedes of Bithynia headed into Asia Minor¹⁷ to assist that king in defending his territory.¹⁸ After the dust settled involving a combination of factors, including Gallic desire for conquest, these Galatians found themselves in control of a small kingdom with Ancyra as its capital.¹⁹ The next 200 years would prove to be a period of decline of Gallic power and an introduction of Hellenistic ideas, until Rome intervened and ensured Galatian independence.²⁰ During this period, the Gauls appeared to have adopted the religion of the Phrygians, rather than the other way around.²¹ As the Roman Empire began to grow and expand, those changes were bound to affect the Galatian Kingdom. Initially, the Galatians maintained a client-state status, but by B.C. 25 the province of Galatia was formed by Caesar Augustus.²² While Ramsay admits that the borders of the Galatian

¹⁰ D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 458.

¹¹ J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan, 1896), 1-3.

¹² Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC 30 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 39.

¹³ Lightfoot, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁵ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 45.

¹⁶ Lightfoot, 5.

¹⁷ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 45.

¹⁸ George, *Galatians*, 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 53.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²² George, 39.

province are difficult to trace at various points,²³ on the whole it was at this point that the term Galatia was expanded to stretch into the regions of the south that include parts of Phrygia and Lycaonia.²⁴ For the next 100 years the province would have a significant role in broader Roman interests in the region.²⁵ In the new political construct, the Gauls were very loyal to Rome, having fought alongside the Roman armies.²⁶ In contrast, however, they were decidedly anti-Hellenistic and much more favorable to their tribal roots. In fact, this feeling continued well into the 2nd century, over 100 years after Paul's time.²⁷ As a result of these considerations, one of the things that will need to be addressed is whether the epistle to the Galatians suggests these churches were influenced by Hellenistic thought or not. That will be addressed later. However, at this point, the peoples in the southern part of the newly formed province will need to be concerned, as they may now be properly called "Galatians," in a sense.

Peoples of South Galatia

When the Roman province of Galatia was created, it added southern regions that were not settled by Gallic tribes. In particular, the new regions included parts of Phrygia and Lycaonia.²⁸ On the whole, these peoples were similar, if not distinct. The Phrygians had more in common with the peoples who were in the region prior to the Gallic invasions, but the Lycaonians went even further back. The Phrygians were concentrated in the more mountainous environments, including the regions taken over by the Gauls in the north, whereas Lycaonia was a flat plain. The flatlands that constituted Lycaonia may have contributed to the way that the region was the location of a major thoroughfare²⁹ through the region between Greece and the East, in both the Greek era and the Roman era. More shall be said on this point later. While it is true that here, as in North Galatia, the Romans did leave these peoples alone in terms of not forcing Roman culture on them,³⁰ their state is altogether different from the Gauls in North Galatia. Before Roman times, the Greeks undertook a significant remaking of the region.³¹ The resulting environment was not pure Greek culture, but a mixing of both the local elements as well as Greek learning. This mixing followed the trajectory of Ephesus and other Hellenized Asiatic cities in western Asia Minor.³² Yet, to be sure these peoples delighted to be considered Roman, and Hellenized in particular during the Pauline era. This stands in some contrast to the situation of the Gauls in the north, who at this point were more resistive to the Hellenizing trends.³³ The relation between the Phrygians in the North and the South may be complex, but there is no doubt that the contrast about Hellenization is significant and must be reckoned with in an evaluation of the Galatian churches. While Roman interests were very high in the region during the Pauline era, it is very significant that by the mid-2nd century these regions were no longer a part of Galatia.³⁴ This fact may contribute somewhat to the assumption throughout history of the North Galatian position. Having sketched the relative history of both the northern Gauls and the southern Galatian peoples, attention must be drawn to specific issues concerning the identity of the churches of Galatia.

²³ *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 113.

²⁴ George.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

²⁶ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 116.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

²⁹ See later discussion in section on roads in the Roman Empire.

³⁰ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 181.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 183.

³⁴ Witherington, 5.

Evaluating the Historical and Geographical Context

Does the Epistle of the Galatians give us any indication that the people written to match the North Galatian peoples or the South Galatian peoples? I believe the evidence is on the South Galatian side of this question, in five distinct ways.

First, the epistle to the Galatians does reflect a sensitivity to Greek law that would not have been found in the less-Hellenized regions of North Galatia.³⁵ Ramsay points to several concepts³⁶ and arguments used in the epistle that reflected this Greek sensitivity, such as (1) The discussion reflecting adoption in being children Abraham in Galatians 3:6-9,³⁷ (2) his reference to a man's will in 3:15-18,³⁸ (3) the child/guardian discussion in 3:23-25,³⁹ and (4) the point regarding an infant son being an heir in 4:1-7.⁴⁰ Additionally, Ramsay argues that a level of education in Galatians is assumed, a level higher than that would be found in North Galatia.⁴¹ Finally, Ramsay also argues that the reference to Greek concepts should be connected with a Greek heritage earlier than Rome, which heritage would be found in the Greek dominance of Southern Galatia in the times before Rome.⁴² This is contrasted with the possibility that it would've been Roman ideas that would've been introduced into North Galatia, rather than Greek.⁴³ Ramsay has built a good case to the Greek culture was expected in Galatians, and thus nearly requires a South Galatian location of the churches of Galatia.

Secondly, in the Roman Empire, the existence of roads and the way these roads were in existence in the 1st century provide stronger evidence for a South Galatian location of these churches.⁴⁴ Ramsay has argued that in many ways, Christianity was on a similar path of development that the rest of the empire was in regard to social, political, and other religious developments. These developments in Asia Minor, he believes, were focused on the three main road paths in the region, and none of them passed through north Galatia.⁴⁵ This would later change, as in 285 Nicomedia in Bithynia was named as one of the capitals of the empire. This development placed Ancyra on one of the main lines of communication with that new capital city.⁴⁶ However, at the time the epistle to the Galatians was written, the main roads of communication and development passed through South Galatia. As I already mentioned, the Lycaonian flatlands may have been part of the picture that shows why these roads developed through that region. The context of the Roman Empire the first century in terms of its

³⁵ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 370-375.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 370, n. 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 337-344. This discussion argues that the concepts of adoption used here fit the Greek rather than Roman conception of adoption.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 349-356.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 381-385.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 391-394.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 370-371.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 371-372.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁴⁴ For several maps, several of them consulted, see C. Marvin Pate, "What did John Really Care About? Revelation," in *What the New Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Their Writings*, Kenneth Berding and Matt Williams, eds., (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 115; Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, inside front cover, unmarked pages and inside back cover, unmarked pages; Witherington, xvi-xvii; and George, 20.

⁴⁵ William M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), 10-11.

⁴⁶ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 170.

communication network through roads and its development support a South Galatian location for these churches.⁴⁷

Thirdly, the Jewish and Christian history in the region both support a south Galatian location. The situation in Galatia presupposes a certain familiarity with Jewish ideas, and Jews would've been far more likely to have been found in South Galatia.⁴⁸ This isn't to suggest that there were no Jews in North Galatia, but they would've been less common, and in fact, were likely immigrants from the South Galatian region rather than from the land of Israel itself.⁴⁹ Likewise, the Christian history of North Galatia supports the idea that the Northern churches were not as developed and thus reflect a later founding. By the fourth century, the church was not as developed as elsewhere in Christendom.⁵⁰ The Jewish and Christian situations of the region support a South Galatian location of the churches of Galatia.

Lastly, the prevalence of the North Galatian view throughout church history can be explained by later history in the province of Galatia.⁵¹ From A.D. 74 to A.D. 297, the province of Galatia was slowly shrunk so that by the 4th century, the province was limited to solely that region occupied by the ethnic Galatians. As a result, it is not hard to see how many church fathers and commentators, who were far removed from the original situation, would've been ignorant of the unique development in the province and thus not realize that the province was much larger at the time of Paul. It was not until recent scholarship that the situation in Galatia has been better understood. As a result, the historical preference for the North Galatian location is not a problem to the South Galatian theory.

In conclusion, the history of the Galatian region supports a South Galatian location of the Churches of Galatia.

Acts and Galatians

The discussion about the churches of Galatia cannot be complete without making specific reference to the issues that the events in Acts introduce. There are four primary events or periods in the book of Acts that warrant our attention. First, concerns the first missionary journey which took place predominantly in the Southern region of Galatia (Acts 13-14). Second, concerns the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and its relationship to Galatians 2. Third, concerns the references to Galatia in Acts 16:6 and 18:13 and whether the events of those verses have any bearing on Paul's missionary activities in the province of Galatia, and in particular the North Galatian area.

The First Missionary Journey and the Epistle to the Galatians

The consideration of the First Missionary Journey to the discussion of the destination of Galatians is very significant. If the South Galatian theory is true, then much background material for exposition of this epistle is available in the First Missionary Journey.⁵² Acts 13:14-14:24 details Paul and Barnabas's extensive ministry in the South Galatia region. In the Acts account, they ministered in Pisidian Antioch for two Sabbaths (Acts 13:14, 44) with the word spreading throughout the "whole

⁴⁷ See good summary in Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 9.

⁴⁸ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 24-26.

⁴⁹ Ramsay, *Historical Commentary on Galatians*, 167-170.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁵¹ Witherington, 5.

⁵² *Epistle to the Galatians*, 18.

region”⁵³ (13:49), in Iconium (13:51), and in the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe (14:6). To conclude the trip, the missionaries also back tracked to strengthen the converts. (14:21) In fact, there are several provocative similarities between the ministry in these cities in Acts and the Epistle to the Galatians. Timothy George identified five different points on this matter.⁵⁴ While some of the points are stronger than others, I will mention the ones I find strongest. First, in light of the discussion of justification by faith in this epistle, it is very interesting and provocative that Paul used justification language in the Jewish synagogue of Pisidian Antioch. He said to them “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed [“Greek *justified*”, according to footnote in ESV] from everything from which you could not be freed [“justified”, like the previous reference] by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38-39). I note that this language, while not entirely absent from Acts, is yet not common, at least not as common as the resurrection of Jesus. When one considers the way the Jews were so repeatedly hostile in the region, it is reasonable that their influence may have continued to be strong and ultimately lead some form of perversion of the gospel being accepted by the Galatians. Second, George points out that there were signs and wonders in the ministry in South Galatia (Acts 14:3, 8-10). This squares with such versus as Galatians 3:5 which demonstrate that they were familiar with one working miracles among them by faith. Thirdly, the immense persecution, at the hands of the Jews which I have already mentioned, fits with Paul’s references in Galatians to his suffering. Most poignant is his statement in the conclusion in which he says, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” (Gal. 6:17). In the end, there is sufficient similarities between the South Galatian ministry in Acts and the references in the epistle to the Galatians to make the South Galatian theory possible.

A problem that I note about the epistle is the considering of where Paul’s sickness fits in to this account. In Gal. 4:13, Paul noted that “it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first[.]” It is a problem to identify this within the account of this missionary journey, and Lightfoot believes this instance is key to understanding that Paul’s planting of these churches was in the context of an unplanned visit through the North Galatian region.⁵⁵ However, but perhaps it is best to view this as a localized reference to a specific ministry Paul had in one of the cities, not necessarily to his entire ministry. He was simply recalling a single instance in which he had preached to some of the Galatians because he was sick. This sickness may fit within either the broader context of persecution in South Galatian ministry, or simply Paul’s known thorn in the flesh or other bodily sickness.

In the end, the Acts 13-14 account does not prove the South Galatian theory, but I think the evidence is good. In spite of the issue of Paul’s illness in reference to the account, I think the account provided here is a much better foundation for explaining the circumstances of Paul’s founding of these churches than the circumstances of the later journeys through Galatia.

The Jerusalem Council and Galatians 2

The second major issue between Acts and Galatians is the Jerusalem visit in Galatians 2, and which visit it should be identified as. This issue’s relevance should be understood primarily in connection with the other two issues. I am discussing it next merely as a matter of chronology in reference to Acts. The identity of the Galatians 2 visit to Jerusalem significantly affects the dating of Galatians, and the

⁵³ This phrase should not be taken to mean the entire South Galatian region, as it does not include even Iconium (c.f. v50b). The reference is to the region around Pisidian Antioch, perhaps Pisidia itself as Iconium was a bit to the east from Antioch.

⁵⁴ George, 44-45.

⁵⁵ Lightfoot, 22-24.

dating will exercise some degree of influence in our decision about which Galatian ministry is the period in which these churches were founded by Paul,⁵⁶ even if preference is given to the historical considerations and the case already made for the South Galatian view.

In a surface level, Galatians 2 would seem to fit with the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. Some of the factors include the discussion about Titus's circumcision (Gal. 2:3) and the organization of the apostolic ministry in regard to Jews and Gentiles (v9). Especially noteworthy is the fact that Paul said the very reason he went to Jerusalem was "because of a revelation" (v2). Nevertheless, it can be pointed out that neither of the first two points are found in the Acts 15 account, and Paul does not elaborate on the exact nature of the revelation behind this visit. Additionally, some consider it to be entirely unlikely, given the nature of the letter to the Galatians, that Paul would not have discussed or made mention to the Jerusalem Council's verdict,⁵⁷ and the letter from James in particular (which letter is found in Acts 15:23-29). Some do prefer to identify this visit with the famine relief visit to Jerusalem found in Acts 11:27-30.⁵⁸ A problem arising from this position is that Paul said his actions on this visit were "so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." (Gal. 2:5) As of Acts 11, there is no evidence that Paul had even visited Galatia yet or began his missionary career. However, this is not an unassailable problem. One can view Paul's statement as that his actions were protecting the gospel for all Gentiles, including those whom had not yet believed yet, such as the churches of Galatia.

In the end, caution is warranted in the identification of the Galatians 2 Jerusalem visit. Nevertheless, I do favor Carson and Moo's position cited above that the visit in Galatians 2 does not fit with the Acts 15 visit. While I would not press this point too firm given the tentative nature of the identification of this visit, this dating of Galatians does appear to rule out any identification of the founding of the churches of Galatia in the second or third missionary journeys.⁵⁹ Now, consideration must be given to these later journeys as they pertain to the destination of this epistle.

"Galatian" Ministry during the Second and Third Missionary Journeys

In Acts, there are two further references to Galatia after the Jerusalem council, found in Acts 16:6 and 18:23. In these verses, Paul travels through a region called Galatia on two separate occasions. After dismissing the South Galatian perspective as creating more problems than it solves, J. B. Lightfoot proceeds to defend that both of these references are to two later visits to the region of Galatia inhabited by the Ethnic Gauls.⁶⁰ From there, Lightfoot proceeds to provide an impressive reconstruction of these two visits of Galatia and how these visits form the background of the epistle and Paul's relationship to these church.⁶¹ Lightfoot's approach involves combining Paul's presence in ethnic Galatia, based on his interpretation of Acts 16:6 and 18:23, and the allusions in the epistle to what had happened in previous visits. In his own words, he describes his reconstruction based on this information as, "[W]e arrive at the following scanty facts." I find it interesting that he calls the 8 page reconstruction that follows as scanty. This may be an admission that his reconstruction is utterly inferior when compared to the alternative hypothesis, viz. the nearly two full chapters of the South Galatian ministry I have already pointed out. The real question behind Lightfoot's approach is not the material he uses in the epistle, but whether the references in Acts truly support both Paul's presence in the region

⁵⁶ Silva, 131.

⁵⁷ Carson and Moo, 462.

⁵⁸ Carson and Moo, 365, 461-465.

⁵⁹ Silva, 131.

⁶⁰ Lightfoot, 19-20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 20-30.

inhabited by Ethnic Gauls and the ministry of establishing churches in the regions in which he was traveling.

Acts 16:6 and the Second Missionary Journey

In Acts 16:6, Paul is embarking on his second missionary journey, and was last found in Derbe and Lystra. (16:1) This phrase finds itself in the midst of Paul's famous "Macedonian call" narrative, in which the Spirit was forbidding him from preaching in various locales until he finally found his way to Troas in which he received the Macedonian vision (see 16:6-10 for the full story). Paul's travels in "the region of Phrygia and Galatia" (16:6) are in the context of having been forbidden to speak in Asia. The question here concerns whether Luke is narrating that Paul and his companions traveled through the Northern part of Galatia or if this account is narrating that they traveled west through the South Galatian area, having departed from Derbe and Lystra.

In this verse, there is an issue to be reckoned with in the original Greek with relevance to this question.⁶² The primary question is whether Φρυγίαν is functioning as an adjective modifying χώραν or whether it is standing as a noun joined with the phrase Γαλατικὴν χώραν. The matter is further compounded by the fact that there is a noteworthy textual variant that places the article τὴν prior to Γαλατικὴν in the phrase.⁶³ This variant falls on the normal Byzantine versus Alexandrian text-types, with the Byzantine text-type generally adding the second article but the other witness omitting it.⁶⁴ If the article is present, then the suggestion would've been that Paul traveled through Phrygia and the Galatian region separately as two stops on their journey to Mysia.⁶⁵ There was concern about whether there was any evidence for the adjectival use of Φρυγίαν,⁶⁶ but research by C. J. Hemer appears to substantiate its use as an adjective with sound evidence of use in other Greek literature.⁶⁷ As a result, it does appear safe to translate and interpret the verse as the "Phrygian and Galatic region."⁶⁸ Even while accepting the identification of the region traveled as the "Phrygian and Galatic region," Lightfoot still attempts to explain that this would refer to the Northern Galatian region because the region was once considered to be Phrygia.⁶⁹ Bruce does not believe this to have been valid, because Luke would not have made such a reference to a period far removed from the present.⁷⁰

Does this account support the historical reconstruction offered by Lightfoot? Several lines of argument demonstrate it does not. As already discussed regarding the South Galatian ministry, Lightfoot does make an interesting suggestion in connecting Paul's illness (Gal 4:13) with the events of this verse. However, this does not appear to be a good identification. The Pauline sickness has the same problem identified with the first missionary journey. One could suggest that the sickness was the way the Holy Spirit was forbidding them. To be sure, the reference to the Holy Spirit forbidding them is a curious one,

⁶² Unless otherwise noted, the Greek text cited is Barbara Aland and others, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed., (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 2012).

⁶³ See Robert Estienne, ed., *Textus Receptus*, (n.p.: 1550), accessed from <http://www.blueletterbible.org>.

⁶⁴ Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 11, n. 42.

⁶⁵ So the *New King James Version*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), accessed from <http://www.blueletterbible.org>, following the Byzantine witnesses, reads "Phrygia and the region of Galatia."

⁶⁶ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament (Fourth Revised Edition)*, 2nd Ed., (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 390.

⁶⁷ "The Adjective 'Phrygia'," *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976): 122-26; Idem, "'Phrygia': A Further Note," *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1978): 99-101.

⁶⁸ Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 11.

⁶⁹ Lightfoot, 22, cited in Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 11, n. 44.

⁷⁰ Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 11.

but we cannot make a positive identification of the means the Spirit did this. In fact, Pauline sickness does not seem to fit to the context. Secondly, the reconstruction offered by Lightfoot also has little parallel in Paul. At times, Paul did plant churches and not stay with the people for very long (e.g. Thessalonica, in Acts 17:1-10). However, the passage in question in Acts 16 just does not support this type of ministry. The context of Paul's indecision and lack of clarity about his ministry here does not fit with Paul's normal practice or manner. Finally, the Roman road system does not support the idea that Paul went through Phrygia first, and then North Galatia.⁷¹ The road network fits with an understanding that Paul went through the Phrygian portion of Galatia on to Mysia. In the end, Acts 16:6 does not suggest that Paul had any kind of ministry in North Galatia that led to the planting of these churches.

Acts 18:23 and the Third Missionary Journey

Acts 18:23 has a similar place in the Third Missionary Journey as Acts 16:6, as it describes the first destination of Paul on this journey having set out from Antioch (Acts 18:22-23a). The difference here is that Paul is much more intentional about his ministry, setting out as he normally does to "[strengthen] all the disciples" that were already in "the region of Galatia and Phrygia." (18:23) Here, the Greek construct is slightly different and is explaining two distinct areas Paul visited. However, it does not require to be understood that Paul visited the North Galatian region. Coming from the East, Paul would've had to pass through Galatia first,⁷² likely referring to Lycaonian Galatia,⁷³ and then Phrygia. It makes perfect sense in context that the Phrygia meant here is Galatic Phrygia, mentioned in Acts 16:6, but it could here also including Asian Phrygia.⁷⁴ Additionally, the context here has no reference of church planting activities, but are clearing visiting existing disciples. The visit does find a place in Lightfoot's reconstruction, but that place is secondary for our purposes. This verse is clearly less significant in the context of this discussion, but this does not require a North Galatian visit either.

Summary on Acts and Galatians

The book of Acts serves as an important piece of historical background for the interpretation of Paul's epistles, and Galatians is no different. In the end, the evidence of Acts supports the South Galatian theory than the North Galatian theory. There is hardly any clear reference that Paul ever visited North Galatia, but there is an extensive account of Paul's South Galatian ministry during his first missionary journey. Additionally, the identification of the Galatians 2 visit with the Jerusalem visit in Acts 11, rather than the Jerusalem council, would appear to rule out Acts 16:6 and 18:23 as providing any kind of basis for a North Galatian ministry referred to in these verses. The accounts of Acts support the South Galatian theory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper surveyed the issues involved in the location of the churches of Galatia, and has demonstrated why the South Galatian theory has more support historically and Biblically than the North Galatian theory. The sources for this discussion were the historical information about the Galatian peoples and the Galatian province, the historical information found in Acts, and the internal

⁷¹ See summary in Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 12-13.

⁷² See Pate, "What did John Really Care About? Revelation," in *What the New Testament Authors Really Cared About*, Kenneth Berding and Matt Williams, eds., 115. This map should not be considered authoritative for province boundaries, as I have already pointed out that there is some disagreement about those boundaries and this one places Pisidian Antioch outside of the province of Galatia.

⁷³ W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897), 90ff, cited in Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 13.

⁷⁴ Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 13.

evidence found in the epistle to the Galatians itself. The information about the Galatian peoples, the Galatian province, and the situation in the Roman Empire in the mid-first century were shown to support a South Galatian location for these churches. The history in Acts was also shown to provide a detailed account of the founding of these churches on the first missionary journey, while not providing strong evidence that Paul planted churches in North Galatia. In conclusion, it is important for the exegete of Galatians to make a basic decision on his position on this issue, so he can acknowledge the assumptions he will be working from as he interprets the epistle. The stronger hypothesis is the South Galatian theory. F. F. Bruce's conclusion of the matter is appropriate:

The fact that so many competent scholars can be cited in support of either position suggests the evidence for neither is absolutely conclusive. But, the weight of the evidence, it seems to me, favours the South Galatian view. If the Epistle to the Galatians was indeed addressed to the churches of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, then we have important historical, geographical, literary and epigraphic data which will provide material for its better understanding.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 18.

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