

THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

Introduction

Galatians is a classic statement of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. It was written to counter false teachers who believed a person must keep the Jewish law in order to be right with God.

Author

The Pauline authorship and the unity of this epistle are virtually unchallenged. In fact, the original manuscript of the letter was written at least in part by Paul himself (6:11).

Date

The date of the epistle cannot be determined with certainty but from biblical references can be narrowed to Paul's third missionary journey. Paul had been in Galatia twice, having confirmed the Galatians on his second journey; compare Acts 16:6, 18:23; Gal 1:9, 5:21. The similarity between Galatians and Romans and the Corinthian letters makes it probable they were all written about the same time. The relationship between Romans and Galatians is mainly the Topic of Salvation by grace. The relationship between 2 Corinthians and Galatians is more personal, Paul's defense of his apostleship.

For similarities see: 2Cor 11:32 & Gal 1:17; 2Cor 2:7, 8:12 & Gal 2:1-3; 2Cor 10:1-11 & Gal 4:18,20; 2Cor 12:20,21 & Gal 4:19-21; 2Cor 9:6 & Gal 6:7; 2Cor 11:2 & Gal 4:17; 2Cor 11:20 & Gal 5:15; Rom 8:14-17 & Gal 4:6-7; Rom 10:5 & Gal 3:12; Rom 4:13,14,16 & Gal 3:14,16,29; Rom 11:31 & Gal 3:22.

The date of the epistle is related to the question of to whom it was addressed. This uncertainty is due to the fact that the term "Galatia" was used in both a cultural/geographic sense and a political sense. The Roman political province of Galatia included some areas in southern Asia Minor (e.g., the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) which were not part of the portion of central Asia Minor inhabited by Celtic tribes and known as "Galatia." 1

Themes and Literary Structure

The book of Galatians addresses problems raised by the oppressive theology of certain Jewish legalizers who had caused some of the believers in Galatia to trade their freedom in Christ for bondage to the law. Paul writes this forceful epistle to do away with the false gospel of works and demonstrate the superiority of justification by grace through faith. This carefully written polemic approaches the problem from three directions: the gospel of grace defended (chs. 1–2), the gospel of grace explained (chs. 3–4), and the gospel of grace applied (chs. 5–6). 1

1Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

2Gospel Light Publishing Co., *Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans*, McGarvey J.W. & Pendleton Philip Y.,