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# INTRODUCTION

## I. THE LOCATION OF THE GALATIAN CHURCHES

The Epistle to the Galatians is addressed to "the Christian congregations of Galatia" (1:2b). Where exactly these "churches" (AV, RV, RSV, NIV) were situated is a much debated question. This problem arises because by the time Paul wrote Galatians the term "Galatia" had acquired two meanings:<sup>1</sup> (a) in its ethnographical sense, it denoted the old Galatic region in the central plateau of Asia Minor originally inhabited by the Gauls, that is, North Galatia; (b) as a political division, it referred to the whole of the Roman province called Galatia, which also included the region to the south in some of the cities of which—Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe—Paul had founded churches during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:13–14:28). The question is: Was Galatians written to the churches of North or South Galatia? This question is important in its own right, as a historical problem in biblical study, but also because it has a bearing on the issue of the time when the letter was written.<sup>2</sup>

Up till the nineteenth century, the view that Paul wrote to the churches of North Galatia held sway. This North Galatian hypothesis, given its classic expression by J. B. Lightfoot in that century and subsequently forcefully stated by James Moffatt,<sup>3</sup> is still championed by many scholars today, predominantly but not exclusively in Germany.<sup>4</sup> The South Galatian hypothesis, first laid on a firm archaeological foundation by W. M. Ramsay, who based his arguments for the case on the facts of historical geogra-

1. On the historical and political background of this term, see, e.g., Bruce 3-5; *Paul*, 163; Betz 2.

2. Cf. Harrison, *Introduction*, 274, who also mentions a third reason: "it has a bearing on one's conception of Paul's objectives and procedures as a missionary." This is true; at the same time, one's prior conception of those matters, gained independently of the present question, is bound to influence one's decision on this question.

3. See Lightfoot 18-35; Moffatt, *Introduction*, 90-94.

4. E.g., Kümmel, *Introduction*, 296-298; Marxsen, *Introduction*, 46; Betz 3-5; Harrison, *Introduction*, 272-274; Grant, *Introduction*, 185.

phy,<sup>5</sup> is followed by the majority of modern interpreters—at least as far as the English-speaking world is concerned.<sup>6</sup> We will not rehearse in detail here the arguments which have been used in the debate,<sup>7</sup> but only mention three considerations in support of the South Galatian hypothesis which commend themselves to us as particularly cogent: (a) what is known of the geographical situation at the time: none of the main roads in Asia Minor even passed through North Galatia, so that had Paul wanted to go to preach the gospel there he would not have set out from Lystra (cf. Acts 16:1, 6);<sup>8</sup> (b) Paul's evangelistic strategy: it is obvious from Acts that Paul consistently concentrated his efforts on the main roads and centers of communication in the Roman Empire, and until the end of the third century South Galatia was more important than North Galatia and correspondingly more developed;<sup>9</sup> (c) the silence of Acts regarding the establishment of churches in North Galatia: this silence, over against the author's explicit mention of churches in South Galatia, would be extremely difficult to explain if the controversy

5. See Bruce 8-9; "Galatian Problems. 2," 250-252.

6. One hesitates to speak of a "majority" *simpliciter*, in view of the seemingly conflicting statements by Guthrie, *Introduction*, 457 ("Most modern scholars lean to the South Galatian theory"), and Betz 4 ("today most commentators tend to favour the territory hypothesis"). (Or is the discrepancy more apparent than real, since "scholars" may be presumed to denote a wider group than "commentators"?) In the middle of this century, Hunter, "St. Paul," 357, said: "In this country, we are now almost all 'South Galatianists', and I cannot think of a recent British commentator on Galatians prepared to defend the old view." The picture does not appear to have changed significantly since. Some modern champions of the South Galatian theory are: Guthrie 15-27; *Introduction*, 450-456; Bruce 10-18; "Galatian Problems. 2"; Hemer, "Acts and Galatians," 82-85; Martin, *Foundations*, 2:145-148; Robinson, *Redating*, 55.

7. We have done so in our earlier work: Fung 7-11. Betz 5 dismisses "the pros and cons of the two theories" as "mostly speculative." But then one is at a loss to know on what basis the author reaches the conclusion that the North Galatian hypothesis is "more probable" than the South Galatian theory. This seems to add substance to the complaint of Bruce 14, where he speaks of the disquieting superficiality with which the North Galatian hypothesis is defended by many of its champions today, illustrating his statement by reference to the arguments of Willi Marxsen and W. G. Kümmel (14-17).

8. See Bruce 13; "Galatian Problems. 2," 258; Hemer, art. cit., 82 with n. 6. In the complaint referred to in the previous note, Bruce finds it "especially disquieting to see how little attention is paid to the relevant data of historical geography." He (8; "Galatian Problems. 2," 252, n.1) aptly cites J. A. Findlay, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1934), 166: "It is significant that all those who know the geography of Asia Minor well are 'South Galatianists' to a man." In this connection, special attention may be drawn to the article (n. 6 above) by the late C. J. Hemer, who had "for many years specialized in the historical geography of Asia Minor, particularly in the New Testament period" (editorial introduction to article). At the time of his untimely death on June 14, 1987, he "had almost completed a study of the historicity of Acts" (editorial comment in *EQ* 59 [1987] 347).

9. See Bruce 9; "Galatian Problems. 2," 253; Hemer, art. cit., 82, 85.