



Overview for Galatians

Author: The Apostle Paul

Purpose: The Epistle to the Galatians was written to address the first major doctrinal controversy that plagued the church in its early years—a contention regarding requiring Christians to obey the Mosaic Law. Paul wrote to refute the false teachings of the Judaizers who were insisting upon the rite of circumcision as a requirement for Gentiles who wished to be saved, and to reinforce the essential truth of justification by faith rather than by the works of the Law.

Key Verse: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty where-with Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)

Date Written: No information in the text identifies a precise date of writing. Biblical historians have proposed dates ranging from A.D. 48-56, but most accept a probable timeframe of A.D. 53-55.

To Whom Written: Paul directed his epistle to the “churches of Galatia” (Galatians 1:2).

Setting: The exact location of the Galatian churches is uncertain because the term “Galatia” was used in two different ways at the time of writing. The Romans gave this name to an area in north central Asia Minor that came into their possession around 25 B.C., which they made into a province. However, in broader traditional usage, Galatia referred to a small southeastern portion of that province encompassing such locations as Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Most probably, the letter was addressed to the churches in these locations of southern Galatia which Paul had founded earlier on his first missionary journey.

Summary: Paul had received a report that the churches in Galatia had fallen into error. After a brief salutation, he addressed those who were departing from the truth and accepting the distorted teaching of the Judaizers. Since this false teaching challenged Paul’s authority as an Apostle, he spent the first two chapters defending his authority on the basis that his call had been given to him by God, not man. Then in

chapter three, Paul went to the heart of the error that was subverting the Galatians’ faith: that justification came by adherence to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Paul insisted that justification is obtained only by faith in Jesus Christ. Chapter 4 records Paul’s personal entreaty, and chapters 5-6 explain how the Gospel should be put into practice, contrasting life in the Spirit with a life of the flesh.

Style: Although by placement Galatians is the fourth of Paul’s letters, chronologically it likely was his first epistle. Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Nine of these books were letters to local churches (like the ones in Galatia).

Paul’s epistle to the Galatians is very personal in nature; approximately one-third of its contents revolve around his own experience. The remaining portion is rooted in his relationship with the One “who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

The news that his Galatian converts were being swayed by false teachings clearly was felt deeply by the Apostle, and he reacted by addressing them with piercing and forceful words. Paul’s close connection to these churches helps explain the strong tone that characterizes his letter. The epistle is not a systematic or tightly-organized treatise, but rather an impassioned rebuttal that is filled with emotion and firmly held convictions rooted in truth.

A tone of contention is present throughout the epistle, as both the Gospel message and Paul’s authority to preach it were being attacked. The Apostle, recalling the openness and enthusiasm with which his message of salvation through faith had been received initially, revealed his indignation over their defection in sharp words. However, in spite of the challenging nature of the epistle, Paul’s love and deep concern for the Galatian churches underscore every word. He wanted to make sure these early converts turned back to the path of truth and were not led further into deception, for he was absolutely convinced that any reliance upon religious law, form, or tradition for salvation, instead of repentance and faith through the grace of God, was heresy.

Timeline

Many of these dates are approximate, as reference materials differ slightly.

Jesus crucified; Pentecost; Church begun A.D. 30	Stephen martyred; Paul's conversion 35			Peter's ministry in Asia Minor 47	Jerusalem council 50	PAUL IMPRISONED (CAESAREA) 57-59	PAUL'S HOUSE ARREST 60-62	James (Jesus' brother) martyred 62	Peter & Paul martyred 67/68?	Jude martyred 72
	PAUL IN CILICIA & SYRIA 35-46			PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS 46-48	50-52	53-57	Paul's trip to Rome 59			Rome destroys Jerusalem 70
			Holy Spirit falls on Gentiles 41	James (the Apostle) martyred; Peter imprisoned 44	<i>Galatians; James 49</i>	<i>1 & 2 Thessalonians 51/52</i>	<i>1 & 2 Corinthians 55</i>	<i>Romans 57</i> <i>St. Mark 58/60</i>	<i>Ephesians; Colossians; Philemon 60</i> <i>Philippians 61</i> <i>St. Matthew; St. Luke 61/64</i> <i>1 Timothy; Titus; 1 Peter 64</i> <i>Jude 65</i> <i>Acts; 2 Peter; 2 Timothy 66/68</i>	<i>Hebrews 68</i>

Outline

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- I. Introduction (1:1-10)
 - A. The salutation (1:1-5)
 - B. The situation (1:6-10)
- II. Paul's Gospel defended (1:11—2:21)
 - A. Received by revelation (1:11-24)
 - B. Recognized by the Jerusalem council (2:1-10)
 - C. Revealed by Paul's rebuke of Peter (2:11-21)
- III. Paul's Gospel defined (3:1—4:31)
 - A. The principle of faith established (3:1-14)
 - B. The priority of the promise established (3:15—4:7)
 - C. The personal entreaty of Paul (4:8-31)
- IV. Paul's Gospel practiced (5:1—6:16)
 - A. In liberty (5:1-12)
 - B. In Love (5:13-15)
 - C. In the Spirit (5:16-26)
 - D. In service (6:1-16)
- V. Conclusion (6:17-18)
 - A. The brand-marks of Jesus (6:17)
 - B. The benediction (6:18)