

GALATIANS

STUDY GUIDE

AUTHOR & DATE

Paul wins again! (1 Cor. 1:1)

Dating the book of Galatians is a far trickier venture, because we don't know who the actual recipients of the letter are. All we know is that it is addressed to "the churches of Galatia" (Gal. 1:2), which is a region Paul traveled through on at least two different occasions (now a portion of modern Turkey). The fact Galatians 2 mentions Barnabas leads to believing the letter was written to the southern Galatians, for Paul & Barnabas traveled Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Pisidian Antioch during the first missionary journey (Acts 13:4, 14:19-21). Additional support for the letter being written to the southern Galatians is that Jews would have been present to cause the events mentioned in the letter to the Galatians (Acts 13:14-51, 14:1, 16:1-3). Based on the above, Galatians would have been written prior to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and likely would have been written from Syrian Antioch following the first missionary journey (Acts 14:26-28), so around AD 48-49, making Galatians Paul's first written epistle.

However, if the letter was written to Galatians in the north, it would have had to have been written after the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and during Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 19:10). Additionally, closeness in content between Romans and 2 Corinthians presents the possibility that Galatians might have been written around the same time as these other letters to Southern Galatians while Paul was residing in Ephesus. If the letter was indeed written to northern Galatians, then the date of the letter would be between AD 52-56.



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Literary Structure

This book is easily divided into three main sections with an introduction and conclusion.

Introduction (1:1-10)
Paul Defends His Authority (1:11-2:21)
Paul Explains the Gospel of Grace (3:1-4:31)
Paul Gives Application to the Gospel (5:1-6:10)
Conclusion (6:11-18)

THE PROBLEM OF THE JUDAIZERS

To Judaize is in essence to make Gentiles live according to Jewish customs and traditions. This was not a new problem that arose in the New Testament, for the same word used in the New Testament (Gal. 2:14) is also used in reference to the actions of Gentiles who adopted Jewish practices in order to avoid the consequences of Esther’s decree (Esther 8:13).

Keep in mind that most early Christians were Jews prior to their conversion, and even some Gentiles converted to Judaism before ultimately becoming Christians (Acts 6:5). Conversion to Judaism required three separate steps: (1) male circumcision, (2) a ritual bath in water, and (3) agreement to take the “yoke of the Law” upon oneself – or to obey the 613 commands of the Mosaic Law which were interpreted and expanded by Jewish leaders.

For early Christians who came from Jewish backgrounds, Jesus as the Messiah enhanced but did not replace Judaism. Christianity was not considered a separate religion, but instead the truest form of Judaism, and most early Christians had been circumcised, practiced kosher dietary laws, and the rules of ritual purity. They worshipped in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 3:1, 21:26) until the Romans destroyed it in AD 70 and Jewish synagogues scattered throughout the Roman world (Acts 13:5, 14, 42-43; 14:1; 17:1-5). Jewish Christians were also forced to scatter due to persecutions (Acts 8:1, 11:19-24), proclaiming the gospel in the various places they went. As the gospel went forth, Gentiles readily embraced the message and the Pentecostal empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:45).

The growing amount of Gentile converts presented a problem for the Jews: Must a Gentile first become a Jew in order to be Christian? Some Jewish Christians believed this necessary, becoming known as the circumcision party (Acts 11:2; Gal. 2:12). Others, such as Peter, Barnabas, and especially Paul, vigorously disagreed. These two incredibly different viewpoints could have literally split the early church, but that didn’t occur. Why? The Jerusalem Council.

Acts 15 describes what took place at the Jerusalem Council, where those who believed that Jewish ways were required for Christianity and those who didn’t presented their reasoning before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:4-12). Led by James, the brother of Jesus, the team of apostles and elders came to a compromise, which was drafted into a letter (Acts 15:23-29). It was decided that Gentile converts need only (1) abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, (2) abstain from consuming blood, and (3) abstain from sexual immorality. Notice that circumcision and the practice of

Jewish rituals are missing. The obligations which were singled out were universal elements of the covenant between God and Noah, the ancestor of both Gentiles and Jews. The Mosaic covenant, on the other hand, was required of Jews alone. For this reason the Jerusalem Council determined that abstention from meat sacrificed to idols, blood, and sexual immorality applied to all Christians, whereas the obligation of circumcision and ritual purity was not universally required.

Based on the remainder of Acts, one might believe the decision of the Jerusalem Council was satisfactory to the circumcision party. However, Paul's letters reveal this was not the case. Galatians demonstrates how powerful the pull of the Judaizers was, even causing Peter & Barnabas to temporarily isolate themselves from Gentile Christians, for association with Gentiles would make one religiously unclean.

This leads to the primary reason Paul wrote to the Galatians: to combat the Judaizers who had invaded Christian communities in that region following Paul's departure. The Judaizers apparently had some success in persuading some of the Galatian Christians that circumcision and observance of Mosaic law to be necessary (Gal. 5:12; 6:13). This problem is also apparent in the churches of Corinth (2 Cor. 11:12-15, 22), Philippi (Phil. 3:2-3), and Colossae (Col. 2:16-17).

It is of note that the most vehement opposers of the Judaizers was Paul – the zealous Jew who formerly persecuted Christians and later had a radical encounter with Jesus. He understood that Jesus is the ONLY way to obtain salvation, and that all other requirements were invalid and/or illegitimate. He understood that Jewish observance did not lead to justification before God (Phil. 3:2-11), but only through faith in Christ. Because of the persistent activity of Judaizers, Paul had to consistently insist on the necessity of faith and not adherence to the Law as the means of right relationship, key themes found in both Romans and Galatians.

Jewish Christianity gradually withered and disappeared, and with it went the insistence of the Judaizers that Gentiles live according to Jewish customs & traditions in order to receive salvation. The concept that Gentiles must first become Jews in order to be Christians also disappeared. However, there has been a minimized resurgence of the Judaizer influence in modern day. There are some (not all) Messianic Jews which push attention of Jewish celebrations and customs so strongly that care must be taken not to place faith in Jewish observances as the means of salvation instead of justification by faith alone.

OBSERVATION WORDS

Take note of what you learn about each of these. For God, Jesus, & the Holy Spirit, note what you learn & also specific references to how Jesus & the Spirit are represented.

- **God, Jesus, Holy Spirit**
- **Good News/Gospel**
- **Justification/Justify**
- **Promise**
- **Liberty**
- **Law**

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did God teach YOU through this book?

- What did you learn about God the Father through this book?

- What were some ways Jesus & the Holy Spirit were represented? What are some things you learned about each of them?

- How does Paul explain his apostolic authority? How do the actions of Peter, James, & John play into Paul's defense of his authority?

- Explain how Paul defends the gospel he preaches? What specifics of the gospel does he mention as being crucial? Do you hear those specifics preached today when the gospel is preached?

- How is the gospel different from the Law? What purpose does the Law have in light of the gospel?

- What is the relationship between God's grace and human effort? Is there one? Why/why not?

- Explain in your own words the example of the promise to Abraham & the Law given to Moses. Why does Paul speak of a mediator? What does this mean?

- Explain the example of Abraham's 2 sons & the slave vs. free wife? What does this mean for us as believers?
- What are the benefits and responsibilities of our freedom/liberty in Christ?
- What is circumcision supposed to represent? What does Christian faith demand?
- Based on Galatians, what can/should a believer expect from their faith?

Key Word – How do you summarize the whole book in one word or short phrase?

Key Verse – What verse stands out to you as the summary of the whole book, or a verse that the Lord used to teach you something important. Why did you choose the verse you did?

Key Chapter – What chapter summarizes the book, is a turning point, or just stands out to you? Why did you choose this chapter?