

NAME

The book gets its name from region of believers it is addressed to. For a discussion of Galatia see below under Recipients.

AUTHOR

Galatians has always been recognized as a genuine letter of Paul. It harmonizes well with the account of Paul's mission in Acts and with the other letters, and it authentically reflects Paul's conflict with Jewish Christians who sought to make keeping the Jewish law a necessary element of Christian faith for Gentiles. Galatians has a message similar to that of Romans; but where Romans is grand and exalted, Galatians is intense and personal. Here we feel the heartbeat of Paul's care for the church.

DATE

There are two theories as to when Paul wrote this epistle. The discussion centers around Paul's use of the term Galatia. The term may refer, according to its original meaning, exclusively to the territory north of the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra; or it may also include those cities, for the Romans added southern districts when they made (north) Galatia.

The North Galatia Theory - contends that Paul addressed the letter to Christians in North Galatia, which he did not visit until his second missionary journey on his way from Pisidian Antioch to Troas. According to this theory the order of chronological sequence: Paul's first missionary journey, Jerusalem Council, Paul's second missionary journey, writing Galatians. The epistle was written a while after the establishment of the churches and thus it would place a late date upon this epistle. According to this theory Paul would have written Galatians from Ephesus or Macedonia in 53-56 A.D.

The South Galatia Theory - contends that Paul addressed his first epistle to the churches of South Galatia just after the first missionary journey but before the Jerusalem Council. Then the visit to Jerusalem describe in Galatians 2 cannot refer to the Jerusalem Council, which had not yet taken place, but refers to the famine relief visit mentioned in Acts 11:27-30. According to this theory the order of chronological sequence: Paul's first missionary journey, writing of Galatians, Jerusalem Council, Paul's second missionary journey. This theory is favored by most conservative scholars. It contends for an early date for the epistle, written relatively soon after the initial founding of the churches. Paul remarked, "*I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you*" (Galatians 1:6).

The South Galatia Theory presents few difficulties in identifying the occasion describe in Galatians 2:1-10 with Acts 11:30 and 12:25. This would suggest that Paul wrote Galatians shortly before the council just at the time when the controversy over circumcision was escalating in the church (Acts 15:1,2). According to this theory Paul would have written Galatians from Syrian Antioch around 48 or 49 A.D.

Summary:

Galatians was probably written from Antioch about 48 A.D., a short time after Barnabas and Paul's first missionary journey, to the churches that had recently been founded in the Roman province of Galatia. At that time, the controversy over whether to circumcise Gentile believers was heating up and had not yet been resolved by the council in Jerusalem (49-50 A.D.; Act 15).

THEME

Halley (page 44): "*By Grace, Not Law*"

Mitchell: *"Saved by faith apart from law - live by faith above law."*

Key Word (Nelson's): Freedom from the Law - This epistle shows that the believer is no longer under the law but is saved by faith alone. Galatians is the Christian's Declaration of Independence.

Key Verses:

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the Law, then Christ died for no purpose." (Galatians 2:20,21)

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." (Galatians 3:25,26)

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 5 - The impact of the truth concerning freedom is staggering: freedom must not be used *"as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another"* (5:13). This chapter records the power, *"Walk in the Spirit"* (5:16), and the results, *"The fruit of the Spirit"* (5:22), of that freedom.

TNLT - Introduction to Galatians:

Paul's letter to the Galatians establishes the purity of the Good News - that salvation is available to all purely by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and not by observing the law. It also establishes the unity of God's people: No division exists between Jews and Gentiles or between any other classes of people. We all come to God and gain new life by the same means, through faith in Christ. Galatians establishes our liberty in Christ: We fulfill Christ's law not by human effort but by living in faith and love by the Holy Spirit. Finally, the letter establishes our need for the grace of God, which rescues us from the curse of sin, gives us new life and the promised Holy Spirit, and makes us God's children, empowered to fulfill Christ's law of love.

Mitchell:

A study of the epistle reveals at least three factors that evidently prompted Paul to pen this letter:

1. The presence of legalism in the young churches is the most obvious reason that occasioned this letter. A study of the book of Acts reveals that legalistic teachers followed Paul like a pack of hungry dogs (Acts 15:1) teaching the new converts to submit to circumcision and the legal system.
2. The legalists evidently were also challenging Paul's apostleship and this necessitated an extensive defense of his apostolic authority.
3. Finally Paul evidently felt constrained to correct certain mistaken ideas about grace. This involves both what grace is and what it is not. Grace above all does not lead to loose living.

Characteristics of the Epistle to the Galatians:

Mitchell:

1. It is a stern, severe, and solemn message. This is Paul's mad letter. Paul could tolerate a great deal but he could not stomach legalism. His sleeves are rolled up because legalism is

doctrinal defection that challenges the very foundation of Christianity. Notice that there is not one word of commendation, praise, or thanksgiving. No mention at all of their standing in Christ; no request for prayer; and no mention of anyone by name, so common in all of Paul's other epistles.

2. It is an intensely emotional epistle. Paul's heart is laid bare. He reflects deep emotions and strong feelings. Every sentence is a thunder bolt. There can be no toleration of legalism. Romans comes from the head of Paul, but Galatians comes from his heart. Galatians takes up controversially what Romans deals with systematically.
3. It is the Declaration of Emancipation from legalism (of any type). It was the Magna Carta of the early church. It is for all the Manifesto of Christian liberty. It is the strongest defense of the doctrine of justification by faith to be found in the entire Bible. (Romans is the greatest declaration of the same doctrine.) Paul lets us know that sinners not only are saved by faith but are to live by faith. Grace is not only a way to life but is also a way of life. This epistle shows that the believer is no longer under the law but is saved by faith alone. Galatians is the Christian's Declaration of Independence. Thus, the key concepts are: Saved by faith apart from law - live by faith above law.

Richard Longenecker (NT scholar, teacher, BA, MA - Wheaton): *"Paul's Galatians is... like a lion turned loose in the arena of Christians. It challenges, intimidates, encourages, and focuses our attention on what is really essential... How we deal with the issues it raises and the teachings it presents will in large measure determine how we think as Christians and how we live as Christ's own."* (from TNLT Introduction to Galatians)

Outline:

I. Introduction 1:1-10

II. Apology - The Defense of The Gospel 1:11-2:21

Autobiographical: The direct revelation of the Gospel by Jesus to Paul, the impossibility of its originating from Paul's own extremely Judaistic background, the impossibility of Paul's learning it from merely human sources - the apostles whom Paul met not until three years after his conversion and then only for a brief time, the later acknowledgement of Paul's Gospel by the ecclesiastical leaders in Jerusalem, Paul's (successful) rebuke of Peter for his yielding to Judaizing pressure in Syrian Antioch.

III. Argument - The Declaration of The Gospel 3:1-5:12

The argument for the gospel of God's free grace: The sufficiency of faith, the example of Abraham, the curse of the law, the divine covenant of promise to Abraham and his offspring or seed (Christ and those united to Him by faith) prior to the law of works, the purpose of the law - not to provide a way of salvation through human merit but to demonstrate the necessity of divine grace through faith in Christ, a plea to retain trust in God's grace alone with an allegory on Christian freedom based on Abraham and his two sons - slave born Ishmael and freeborn Isaac.

IV. Appeal - The Demands of the Gospel 5:13-6:10

The warning against antinomianism: Christian liberty, living by the Spirit rather than according to the flesh, Christian love, Christian liberality.

V. Conclusion 6:11-18

A contrast between the Judaizer's fear of persecution and boastful pride and Paul's humiliating persecutions - and a benediction.

RECIPIENTS

Mitchell:

The Galatians were a mixture of Hellenic and Oriental cultures. They were Oriental in origin but much Greek culture had taken over at a time of this epistle. Though they were political subjects of Rome, they were little influenced by Roman culture.

The Galatian was noted for his instability. He was typically fickle and flighty, zealous over an issue today but cool toward it tomorrow.

They were Asian Gauls or Celts.

The Biblical account of the founding of the Galatian churches is found in the Book of Acts, chapters 13 and 14. On his first missionary journey, Paul established churches in the Roman province of Galatia. He revisited the churches on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-6) and again on his third journey (Acts 18:23).

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

- Galatians upholds the significance of grace (2:16,21). Spiritual life and liberty are God's gift of grace. Human effort destroys the heart of a Christian. Christianity is all about grace.
- Warning against legalism and a reliance on works for salvation. Reliance on self effort cannot secure liberty. Ultimately reliance on human effort has no place in the grace system of salvation. The secret of liberty is to walk by the Spirit.
- Galatians presents the true function of Mosaic Law (3:23-26). The law is a tutor (instructor of children) to lead us to Christ.

Mitchell:

- Romans presents the doctrinal aspects of justification by faith.
- First and Second Corinthians deal with practical errors with regard to justification by faith.
- Galatians instructs against doctrinal errors pertaining to justification by faith.

RESOURCES

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Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

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The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Frank E. Gaebelein, General Editor, Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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