

GALATIANS

For Freedom, Christ Has Set Us Free

Timeline

- **AD 30/33** Jesus was crucified & resurrected. The Christian mission begins.
- **AD 37/37** Paul is converted to Christianity and goes to Arabia & Damascus. (Acts 9:19-22, 26:20; Galatians 1:16-18)
- **AD 37** Paul meets with Peter in Jerusalem to confirm his gospel. (Acts 9:26-30, Galatians 1:18)
- **AD 37-45** Paul ministers in Syria, Tarsus, Cilicia and Antioch. (Acts 9:30, Acts 11:25-26, Galatians 1:21)
- **AD 44/47** Paul's second visit to Jerusalem. (Acts 11:27-30, Galatians 2:1-10)
- **AD 46/47** Paul and Barnabas' First Missionary Journey: They plant churches in Galatia - Antioch in Pisidia, Lystra and Iconium (Acts 13:4-14:26)
- **AD 48 Paul writes Galatians, perhaps from Antioch. (Acts 14:26-28)**
- **AD 48/49** The Apostolic Council in Jerusalem. After the council, Paul returns to Antioch. He and Barnabas part ways. (Acts 15:1-29, 30, 36-40)
- **AD 48/49-51** Paul's Second Missionary Journey (with Silas and Timothy): They visit the Galatian churches and then go on to Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens & Corinth. (Acts 15:36-18:22)
- **AD 52-57** Paul's Third Missionary Journey: He visits the Galatian churches again and then goes on to Ephesus and Greece. (Acts 18:23 - 21:17)
- **AD 57** Paul is arrested in Jerusalem, and held in prison in Caesarea.
- **AD 62** Paul arrives in Rome and lives under house arrest.

Introduction - Planting the Churches

'Galatians' is the 1st Epistle Paul wrote, not to one church, but to churches located in various cities in the province of Galatia: Antioch in Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium. Paul (accompanied by Barnabas) had preached the Gospel of 'salvation by faith' to a population who were of Gentile race (*ie.* not Jews). The Galatians had welcomed them, and many had been converted; but later visit(s) by Jewish-minded Christian teachers had maintained that faith in Jesus Christ alone was insufficient: it was necessary for men to be circumcised, and for all to adopt and follow the Law of Moses. These teachers had cast doubt upon Paul's Apostolic credentials and sought to undermine his authority. With sorrow, indignation, anger, and deep concern Paul writes, to refute the teaching of the legalists and defend his position, and especially to confirm the truth of the Gospel message he had proclaimed. The question at issue assumes a different *form* today, since our historical context is different; nevertheless it is still crucial: 'Is acceptance with God to be obtained by any effort of ours, or is it, as the Gospel declares, the Free Gift of God's grace through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, obtained by faith alone?'

1. Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13-52). How & where did Paul & Barnabas meet with people here? (vv. 13-15). What was the core content of the message Paul communicated? (vv. 23, 38-39). Who received their message? (vv. 42-43, 48-49). Who rejected their message? (vv. 44-47, 49-52). Why did Paul & Barnabas leave this town?
2. Iconium (Acts 14:1-6). How & where did Paul & Barnabas meet with people here? What was the core content of the message Paul communicated? Who received their message? Who rejected their message? Why did Paul & Barnabas leave this town?
3. Lystra & Derbe (Acts 14:8-20). How & where did Paul & Barnabas meet with people here? What was the core content of the message Paul communicated? (vv. 15-17). Who received their message? Who rejected their message? Why did Paul & Barnabas leave this town?
4. *Returning:* After going through Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, Paul and Barnabas turn around and head home (Acts 14:21-23). What did Paul and Barnabas *do* on their second journey through these cities? What did Paul and Barnabas *say* on their second journey through these cities - what did they stress as they spoke with people in the churches? What challenges do you think these congregations will face in the future? - think of who is in their churches, and consider that Paul & Barnabas have left them and have returned to Antioch.
5. *Reporting back:* (Acts 14:24-28). After planting and further establishing the Galatian churches, Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch in Syria (where this journey started), and give their first missionary report. What did they do when they arrived in Antioch? What news did they report to their home church? Does their report surprise you? What news might you have reported if you were them?

STUDY 1 - Galatians 1:1-10

- 1 What does Paul say, in vv. 1-10 (a) about God; (b) about Christ; (c) about himself; (d) about the Gospel?
- 2 How should the Galatians evaluate the truthfulness of someone's teaching, and how important are concerns about a) the message and b) the messenger? (Deut.13:1-5; 18:20-22; 1 Thes. 5:19-22).
- 3 How did the Galatians originally receive the Gospel? (Ie. from whom, and by what method?). What bearing does this have on the situation they face?

Note. v.10 is parenthetical (as if it's in brackets, like this): Paul appears to have been charged by his opponents with being a man-pleaser'. So, having written vv. 8 & 9, comes the important question 'What he means is, 'Words such as I've just written *don't look like man-pleasing, do they?*'

STUDY 2 - Galatians 1:11- 2:10

- 1 vv. 11-21. How does Paul show that the Gospel is a revelation of God? What does his personal testimony demonstrate? What significance has this for the Christian?
- 2 Why does Paul consider his Jerusalem visit significant? What issues were at stake, and what fact were confirmed?

STUDY 3 - Galatians 2:11-21

- 1 What were Paul's motives for his opposition to Peter? How does he justify the stand which he so courageously took? Re-state the truths he declared in vv. 16 & 20 in your own words.
- 2 What lessons are taught here concerning the principles which should govern (a) Christian fellowship; (b) Church unity; and (c) ministerial co-operation?

STUDY 4 - Galatians 3:1-14

These verses are a threefold argument in proof of 2.16: (a) vv. 1-5, an argument from experience; (b) vv. 6-9, an argument from Scripture's teaching about Abraham; (c) vv. 10-14, an argument, from the meaning of Christ's death.

- 1 Unravel the argument used by Paul in these verses, which demonstrate that justification and enjoyment of the gift of the Spirit are by faith in Christ, and not by 'works of the Law' (ie. of our own law-keeping).
- 2 Vv. 10-18. Distinguish between law and promise, and between works and faith, as bases in God's dealing with humankind. What two benefits has Christ made available to us by His redeeming work?

Notes

- 1 Vv. 2, 5. 'By hearing with faith': this is an abbreviated expression for hearing the Word of the Gospel and receiving it with responsive or obedient faith. Cf. Rom 10:8-17.
- 2 V. 7. 'The sons of Abraham': in the sense of spiritual likeness. Cf. Jn 8:39.
- 3 Vv. 8 & 9. Paul interprets the promise of Gen 12:3b to mean that just as Abraham received the blessing of justification by faith (Gn 15:6), so a time would come when men of all nations would 'in Abraham', ie. through his seed, which is Christ (vv. 14, 16), receive the same blessing in the identical way.

STUDY 5 - Galatians 3:15-29

- 1 Vv. 19-24. Paul seems to have made light of the Law. How does he state its purpose in this passage?
- 2 A key word anchoring Paul's teaching is 'promise' (16,18, 22). What does he teach about God's promise to Abraham? How are the Law and the promises complimentary? How does someone receive the promise of an inheritance?

Notes

- 1 3.19,20. 'Added because of transgressions': i.e. the Law gave to sin the form of transgression and so made men conscious of guilt before God when they sinned, Cf. Rom. 3:19, 20; 5:20; 7:7,13.
'It was ordained by angels through an intermediary': Paul introduces these words to show that the Promise is superior to the Law even in the very manner of its promotion and distribution. In the case of Abraham, God Himself spoke the promises directly whereas the giving of the Law was through intermediaries on both sides - God being represented by angels (cf. Dt. 33.2, LXX; Acts 7.53; Heb 2.2), and the people by Moses.
- 2 .29. Sometimes, Christians can have a tendency to disconnect the Old Testament and God's dealings with Israel, from the New Testament and our own lives today. There may be a temptation to assume the Old Testament stories are irrelevant for us. But Paul says the very opposite in this passage. He connects not only Christ, but all Christians, to Abraham and the covenant God made with him. When God began His plan of redemption with promises to Abraham, He had the Church in mind as well.

STUDY 6 - Galatians 4:1-11

- 1 According to this passage, what does Christian freedom imply?
- 2 How is a child no different from a slave according to Paul's opening illustration? (vs. 1-3). When does a child become an heir? How does someone go from being a slave to an heir? (vs 4-7). What connections do you see between being adopted as 'sons' in this passage, and becoming Abraham's offspring (3.29)?

STUDY 7 - Galatians 4:12-20

- 1 Who are Paul's opponents? What two actions does he accuse them of; what were their motivations (Cf. 2 Cor 11:23-29; Acts 20:17-35)?
- 2 In the passage, Paul uses his relational currency with the Galatians to call them back. Go back and read Paul's initial comments in Gal 1:6-7 — what is he calling them back to? What is at stake here? What was Paul willing to risk, for the sake of the truth?

Note. 4:17,18. A reference to the new teachers, who were eager to win the favour of the Galatian believers in order to cut them. Off from Paul and his Gospel so that they would have no-one to turn to but themselves. If these teachers had really come to do good, Paul would have raised no objections whatsoever (v.18).

STUDY 8 - Galatians 4:21-5:1

- 1 Vv. 21-31. Paul uses Gn 16 as an allegory, In this picture, what is the position of those 'under Law'm and what, in contrast, that of believers? What is the point of Paul's quotation of (a) Is 54:1, and (b) Gn 21:10-12?
- 2 In what ways is Paul's reaction to the Galatians' condition indicative, and illustrative, of his pastoral concern? What other, spiritual concern, have we felt for the spiritual well-being of others?

Note Scholars debate whether or not Paul is actually using allegory here, and whether the Greek word translated "allegory" here should be more accurately translated "figuratively". As Timothy George explains, "Allegorical interpretation seeks to discern a hidden meaning in a given story or text, a meaning that may be entirely divorced from the historical referent alluded to in the narrative itself. A good example of an allegory in English literature is John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. This famous story is a Christian fantasy that Bunyan said came to him "under the similitude of a dream" and in which he depicted the various stages of the Christian life through a series of 'coded' characters, events, and places—Pliable, Faithful, Hopeful, Giant Despair, Doubting-Castle, Hill Difficulty, City Beautiful, and so on...Clearly Paul was not advocating the evaporation of biblical events or a departure from the basic meaning of Scripture as found in its natural and literal sense. What he here called allegory might be better termed typology: a narrative from Old Testament history interpreted in terms of new covenant realities."

STUDY 9 - Galatians 5:2-12

Spiritual freedom may be lost by false teaching, in this case the necessity of submission to the Law's insisting upon circumcision for males. The secret of victory is to give to the Spirit full sway within us, by obeying His promptings. He will subdue sinful desire and bring forth in us the fruit of Christ-like living (vv. 16-25).

1 To be circumcised meant taking the way of the Law. What four results would follow if the Galatians did so? What, instead, is the way of the Gospel?

2 What do you think Paul means by "This persuasion" in Galatians 5:8? (eg. what idea(s) in 5:2-12 is "This persuasion" referring to?). Who is Paul referring to when he references 'him who calls you' in 5:8? What is the message of 'him who calls you' according to 1:6?

Note Vv.5,6. 'The hope of righteousness': ie. the hope of future glory that springs from justification through believing on Jesus Christ. Cf. Rom 5.1,2; 1Pet 1.3, and notice the gathering here of 'faith, hope and love.'

STUDY 10 - Galatians 5:13-26

1 Vv. 13-15. How should the Christian use his freedom?

2 Vv. 16-26. Seek to grasp the antithesis between 'flesh' and 'spirit'. What should be the attitude of the Christian towards each? Note that the right attitude *demands* expression in positive action.

Notes

1 V. 18. The Christian is free from the Law as a rule to be obeyed in order to gain life (cf. 3.12), yet, when led 'by the Spirit' can do all that the Law demands (see vv. 24,25; cf. Rom 8.4).

3 V. 24. Cf. 2.20; Rom 6.6

STUDY 11 - Galatians 5:26 - 6:18

1 5:25-6:10. What is the effect of 'walking by the Spirit' in the realm of social relationships? Name them one by one; how do your own relationships with fellow-Christians compare?

2 What, according to 6:11-16, is the 'core' of Christianity? What must be given up to embrace it fully? How did the false teachers treat the Cross of Christ? How does Paul view the Cross? How can we be 'ashamed of the cross' - or any other aspect of the Gospel? What does it mean to openly 'boast in what Jesus has done for us'?

Notes

1 6:2. 'The law of Christ': cf. Jn 13:34; 1Jn 4:21

2 6:11: 'Large letters': These are *not* due to Paul's poor eyesight, nor from hands that are deformed, (nor to a crucifixion!), as some scholars have suggested. They signify the importance of the conclusion, provoking the readers to pay special heed to Paul's final thoughts, which the Apostle writes in his own hand; the rest of the Epistle was written by an amanuensis, likely one of his mission team.