

Galatians: Gospel of Freedom

Salvation by Grace Through Faith

G*alatians* is a powerful polemic against the Judaizers who were trying to draw the churches of Galatia away from salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. This letter was "the battle cry of the Reformation" under Martin Luther. He claimed it as the best of all the books of the Bible. This letter assaults the bondage of legalism more directly than any other book in the Bible. It has been called the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty."

AUTHOR: Paul the apostle is clearly stated as the author in the very first verse of the letter (1:1; 5:2).

OCCASION: Word had reached Paul that the Galatian Christians were falling away from the true Gospel of grace which he had preached, and were turning to a legalistic system of merit salvation (1:6-9). He wrote to correct this error which was introduced by false teachers.

PURPOSE: Paul wrote to correct two errors: Do you have to become a Jew before you can be saved? The second error was, "If Christ has set us free, then we can live as we please!" (cf. 5:1, 13). He demonstrates clearly the only way sinful man can stand before a holy God is by God's grace made available through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, and we are also sanctified by grace through faith (3:3). The Judaizers taught that works was necessary for salvation and sanctification. It was a religion based on legalism. Someone said, "Judaism was the cradle of Christianity and very nearly its grave."

Galatians answers clearly the question posed in Acts 16:31, "What must I do to be saved?" Are we saved by believing or achieving? Paul declared, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Because Christ has done it all, there remains nothing for us to do except believe in His finished work, and receive the free gift of eternal life. He gives evidences to that declaration in *Galatians*. We are free of the law. Not only is the Christian saved by grace through faith, but the saved sinner lives by grace through faith. "Grace is the way *to* life and the way *of* life."

THEME: Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Salvation by grace sets us free to live the Christian life by daily yielding to the Holy Spirit. *Galatians* is the Christians declaration of freedom.

[CHART OUTLINE OF GALATIANS](#)

KEY VERSE: 5:1; cf. 5:13; Rom. 8:3-9; II Cor. 3:17; John 8:36

KEY WORDS: "law," (29 times), "gospel" (15 times), "Spirit" (10 times).

DATE AND PLACE: Two dates are generally suggested with both depending upon the theory of location for the recipients. An earlier date around A. D. 48-50, and one a little later A. D. 56 or 57, or about the time of the writing of *Romans* are proposed. The answer depends upon what Paul meant by the term "Galatia."

of the writing of *Romans* are proposed. The answer depends upon what Paul meant by the term "Galatia." Does it mean the Roman province as he usually does, or does he mean the ethnographic use of the term and thus the Celts of North Galatia? If he is referring to North Galatia then he is referring to churches he founded on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:6) and the epistle would have been written on his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23), either from Ephesus (A. D. 53) or from Macedonia in (A. D. 55).

However if he is referring to South Galatia in the wider political sense as the Roman Province of Galatia, we know the churches Paul founded on the first missionary journey at Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13:13-14:23). If Southern Galatia then the letter was written after the end of the first journey probably from Syrian Antioch about A. D. 49-50. When Paul uses the phrase "churches of Galatia" he can mean the whole of Galatia or either South or North Galatia.

The letter was written about sixteen years after Paul s'conversion, adding three years of Gal. 1:18 and the fourteen of 2:1. We do not know the precise year of his conversion. It was somewhere between A. D. 31 and 36. The epistle was written after the Jerusalem Conference dealing with the Judaizers (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15), and after the subsequent visit of Peter to Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14). A. T. Robertson writes, "The natural interpretation of Acts 15:1-33 is to understand it as the historical narrative of the public meetings of which Paul gives an inside view in Gal. 2:1-10. . . It was written then after that Conference which took place about A. D. 49."

Robertson suggests that it was written after *Thessalonians* (A. D. 50-51) which was sent from Corinth. Moreover, time is needed for Paul to travel and plant churches in this Roman Province.

The New Testament is silent about Paul s'visit to North Galatia and would therefore favor the southern territory. It mentions only Paul s'visit to the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, important cites in the southern territory (Acts 13:14-14:24). Paul s'reference to Barnabas in 2:1, 9, 13 would suggest the readers knew Barnabas. Barnabas visited with Paul only in the southern territory on the first missionary journey.

Your view of the recipients determines your view of the date. Paul s'visit in Acts 9:26-30 is probably identical with Gal. 1:18. The visit in 2:1 is probably the visit in Acts 15. Both the conferences in Gal. 2:1 and in Acts 15 deal with the subject of Gentile relationship to the law. They both report the result was freedom for the Gentiles in relationship to the law. Leaders decided the Gentiles did not need to conform to Jewish customs to earn their relationship to God. If we identify the conference of Acts 15 with that of Gal. 2, we can date the Galatian Letter sometime around the completion of the conference or even during the conference. Most Bible scholars date the conference around A.D. 49-50. This would be the earliest time for the writing of Galatians.

If the visit referred to in Gal. 4:13 occurred on Paul s'first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) then the writing could have occurred sometime after completing the journey which occurred from A.D. 47-49. Therefore, the date would be at A.D. 49 or 50.

It seems that the arguments for the South Galatian Theory have a slight edge on those for the older theory, therefore, a date between A. D. 48-50 would be very reasonable.

RECIPIENTS: are probably the churches in the Roman province of Galatia (Southern theory) that Paul founded on his first missionary journey, including Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. "Galatia" probably refers to both a geographical area and a Roman province (organized in 25 B. C.). This region is known as modern day Turkey.

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Title: Introduction to Galatians

Series: A Look at the Book

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Wil is a graduate of William Carey University-, B. A.; New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Th. M.; and Azusa Pacific University, M. A. He has pastored in Panama, Ecuador and the U. S, and served for over 20 years as missionary in Ecuador and Honduras. He had a daily expository Bible teaching ministry head in over 100 countries for ten years. He continues to seek opportunities to be personally involved in world missions. Wil and his wife Ann have three grown daughters. He currently serves as a Baptist pastor and teaches seminary extension courses in Honduras.

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