

# Study 1: Introduction to the book of Galatians

*Where was Galatia?*

*What was Paul's association with the churches?*

*What is unique about the Galatian letter?*

*What are some of the churches?*

*What was the main purpose of the letter?*

*Who wrote the letter?*

*What is the main content of the letter?*

*Homework and preparation for next week:*

Read the whole book in a single sitting, and a few days later read again chapter 1

## Notes for study 1: Introduction to the book of Galatians

Galatians stands alone in the New Testament for several reasons. Firstly, it is the only letter in the New Testament that is addressed to a **specific** group of churches. The character of the letter is also unique in the way that Paul addresses them “...*You stupid idiots...*” and “...*what were you thinking...*”

### ***Where was Galatia?***

Galatia was a provincial region in the central area of Asia Minor. The name came from the Gauls (French people) who inhabited the region. They were part of the Celtic race (which includes the French, Irish, Welsh, and Scots). Tending to stay in their own clusters, they kept their own language (as well as speaking Greek), and very much their own culture. Although Celtic, they Gauls were very much French. Jerome suggests that a Galatian and a Frenchman could have conversed with ease as late as the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.

Julius Caesar described their nature as “...fickle in their resolve and fond of change, and not to be trusted...” Thierry describes them as “Frank, impetuous, impressible, eminently intelligent, but at the same time extremely changeable, inconstant, fond of show, perpetually quarrelling, the fruit of excessive vanity.”

### ***What was Paul’s association with the churches?***

Paul had passed through the southern region of Galatia twice on the first journey. He came in from the South West from Pamphylia (Perga, where John Mark left Paul and Barnabas Acts 13:13) and then travelled through the region, and came back out essentially the same way. The first journey (Acts 13 & 14) is often referred to as “The mission to the Galatians”.

On the second journey, Paul goes through the region again with Silas on his way to Europe (Acts 16: 1-6).

On the third journey, Paul goes through again “...*over all the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening the disciples.*” (Acts 18:23 NKJV)



### ***What is unique about the Galatian letter?***

Galatians is the only letter in the New Testament (I'm ignoring Revelation) that is written for a specific group of churches.

- Specific letters: Romans, Corinthians, Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Thessalonians
- General letters: James, Peter, John, Hebrews, Jude
- Letters to individuals: Timothy, Titus, Philemon
- Galatians is the only letter written to a ***specific group*** of churches.

### ***What are some of the churches?***

The order that Paul went to the churches was Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. All of these churches are in the Southern area of Galatia. We know that Paul visited these churches at least three times. We do not know exactly where he went on his third journey, and there is much speculation as to whether he went to the Northern regions of Galatia.

Some evidence in the letter would suggest that he was not known by all of the churches (1:13), but if Paul only went confirming the Southern churches (and it would seem that he certainly did visit them) then he had visited most of them on four occasions.

On the other hand there is evidence that the letter was written just to the Southern churches. In 2:5 Paul writes concerning his visit to Jerusalem for the “conference” (Acts 15). He says that there was absolutely no requirement for circumcision amongst Gentiles, and “...*therefore the truth of the gospel might continue in you...*” Now, the only churches in Galatia that Paul had visited were those in Southern Galatia on the first journey. Any visit to the Northern area would have happened on the second and third journeys. Therefore, it seems more likely that the Galatian letter was written to the churches of Southern Galatia: - Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

There are two notable people in the New Testament who came from the Galatian region. Timothy came from Lystra (Acts 16:1), and Gaius from Derbe (Acts 20:4).

The characteristics of the churches can be found in Luke's record in Acts. On the first journey at Pisidian Antioch, the Jews were at first really interested in Paul's preaching in the synagogue, and the Gentiles are begging for more (13:42). Next week “...*the whole city has turned out to hear the gospel...*” The Jews became jealous of what Paul was able to do and rebelled and rejected Paul & Barnabas (as they did in most places), and then stirred up the rest of the people against them. The result was that Paul & Barnabas were forced to leave (13:50).

In Iconium, “...*a great multitude of both Jews and Greeks believed...*” and they stayed there “...*a long time...*” but eventually the division between the Jews and the Greeks came up again. The Jews make a violent attempt to abuse and stone them, and Paul & Barnabas flee to Lystra.

In Lystra, Paul heals a man who had been lame from birth and Paul & Barnabas are held up “...*as gods come down in the form of men...*” (for further discussion on this, refer to my notes on Acts chapter 14 in the study of the book of Acts). They are held in such esteem in the city that “...*they could hardly restrain the people from offering sacrifices to them...*” (14:18). But soon after, the Jews come down from Antioch and Iconium and

persuade the multitudes to turn against them. Paul is taken out of the city and stoned – being *left for dead*.

Paul is miraculously healed, and the next day, he and Barnabas head to Derbe. There “...*they preached the gospel and made many disciples...*” and then head back through the region again “...*strengthening the disciples...and appointing elders in every church...*” (14:21-23).

The fickleness of the churches can be seen in the above passages. They overwhelmingly embraced the gospel at first, but are soon turned right around against Paul & Barnabas as soon as the Jews arrive and speak against them. This sets the *character and background* to the letter to the Galatians, and it is because of exactly such a fickleness of character that the letter is written.

### ***What was the main purpose of the letter?***

Soon after Paul had visited there (on the third journey – his fourth visit) they have fallen to the prey of the Judaisers. These people had come and discredited Paul (*he isn't a real apostle – he isn't one of the twelve*) and almost certainly claiming to have the authority of the apostles in Jerusalem. They were commanding that in order to be a christian it was necessary to become a Jew – *to keep the Law of Moses* – particularly the requirements of circumcision.

On the second journey, Paul had come from the Jerusalem conference with a letter “*decree*” that emphatically stated that keeping the Law was **not** necessary for the Gentiles who believed, and a copy of that letter was left with the churches wherever they went (16:4).

It is not long after Paul's fourth visit with them (in AD 54), that he learns that the Judaisers have come and they have *turned around!* He then writes the Galatian letter from Thessalonica or Philippi in late AD 57. This is around the same time that he wrote the second letter to the Corinthians (the two have many similarities). He soon comes to Corinth, and from there writes the letter to the church at Rome (which also has many similarities with Galatians).

The main issues of the Galatian letter:

- Establishes the basis of OT Law & NT covenant
- Justification is by faith (even in the OT case with Abraham)
- If we embrace the Law, where does it lead us?
- Jewish religion has nothing to offer, compared to christianity!!!

### ***Who wrote the letter?***

Paul, without dispute!!! There are many letters in the New Testament with questionable authorship, but Galatians is not one of them.

- Pens his authorship 1:1
- Describes his visits with them (4:13)
- Describes his conversion & revelation & his visits to Jerusalem (1:11 – 2:21)
- Explicitly defends his apostleship (chapt 1&2)

***What is the main content of the letter?***

The letter can be broken into three groups of two chapters each. Paul's apostleship had been questioned by the Judaisers, and he spends about 1/3 of the letter establishing his authority for the things he said and did. (ch 1 & 2)

One of the characteristics of the letter is Paul's outright criticism of the Galatians for their fickleness: *You stupid idiots!* (3:1), *What were you thinking of!* (3:3)

He then makes a discussion on the purpose of the Law (ch 3 & 4), and the relationship between the covenants (4:22 – 31).

Finally, he instructs them on what they need to do to get their act together with exhortations to faithfulness (ch 5 & 6), the relationship between spirit & flesh (5:16-26), the practicalities of bearing one another's burdens (6:1-6), and doing good to all (6:10).

He finally closes with greetings & exhortations (6:11-18).