

#10. THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

1. **PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS** is one of the earliest portions of the New Testament scripture, perhaps the first of the writings outside the Gospel accounts. The name is based on the region of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) in which several congregations were located.

2. **Author and date** - Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians (1:1; 5:2) shortly after the Jerusalem Council (chapter 2), which occurred in about 49AD. Paul's authorship of the Galatian letter is well established in church literature and the testimonies of the Church Fathers.
 - It should be noted that Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia, not far from Galatia. Though as a young man Paul received intensive training in the Scriptures and Jewish traditions in Jerusalem (Acts 23:3-6; Philippians 3:5, 6).

 - He founded churches in southern Galatia on his First Missionary Journey (13:14-14:23). The churches were located in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.

 - Galatians provides additional biographical material about Paul that is not included in the Book of Acts. In Galatians we learn of Paul's stay in Arabia (1:17, 18) and of his visit with Peter shortly thereafter (1:18, 19). In chapter 2 he refers to the Jerusalem Council, and mentions a confrontation he had with Peter over issues of Christian liberty.

 - Galatians is so similar to Romans that the two epistles are usually taught together in seminary settings. Here are some examples:
 - Sin is universally present. (Galatians 3:22; Romans 11:32)

 - The Law is powerless to justify sinners. (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:2)

 - We are not saved by the Law. (Galatians 2:19; Romans 7:4)

 - The Law brings God's wrath. (Galatians 3:10; Romans 4:15)

 - The just shall live by faith. (Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:17)

- We are crucified with Christ, and therefore dead to the Law. (Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6)
- Like Abraham, we are justified by faith. (Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:3)
- Believers are Abraham's true children. (Galatians 3:7; Romans 4:10,11)
- Christians live, therefore, under Abraham's blessing. (Galatians 3:9; Romans 4:23, 24)
- We are baptized into the life and death of The Lord Jesus Christ. (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3)
- We have been placed into God's family (the image of adoption). (Galatians 4:5-7; Romans 8:14-17)
- Love fulfills the Law. (Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:8-10)
- We are to walk in the Spirit. (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:4)
- Our fleshly nature will resist our new spiritual nature. (Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:23-25)
- We must love our brothers and sisters and help bear their burdens. (Galatians 5:2; Romans 15:1)

3. Paul's emphasis centers on *justification by faith*. The letter was written to churches Paul feared were drifting from the truth of that doctrine because of the influence of Judaizers (men teaching that salvation came from complete conversion to Judaism, and not from grace and faith alone).

4. Key Chapters

- Galatians 1 and 2 are Paul's assessment of the Galatian problem and a recounting of his own apostolic journey.
- Galatians 3 and 4 are Paul's teaching about the Law and its relationship to Believers.

- Galatians 5 and 6 contain four Pauline statements about spiritual freedom.

5. Key Verses

- **Galatians 3:3 NASB** Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- **Galatians 5: 1 NIV** It is for freedom that Christ has set us free, stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.
- **Galatians 2:20, 21 ESV** 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. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.
- **Galatians 5:25 ESV** If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

6. Key People

- **Paul** - the founding pastor of the churches in southern Galatia. The story of Paul's ministry there is found in Acts 13 and 14. Under the tutelage of Rabbi Gamaliel, a young Paul had received intensive training in the Scriptures and Jewish traditions while living in Jerusalem (Acts 23:3-6; Philippians 3:5, 6).
- **Peter** - one of the leaders of the original twelve apostles. Peter apparently slipped into some form of legalism when pressured by Judaizers. Paul confronted him over this inconsistency.
- **The Judaizers** - a group of teachers from Jerusalem who wanted to bring Gentile converts under the discipline of Judaism before admitting them to the Church.

7. Key Places

- **Southern Galatia** - an area located in the highlands of what is modern day Turkey. The name is derived from the Celts or Gauls, who settled the area in the second century BC (circa 270BC). It was incorporated into the Roman Empire under Augustus in 25BC. The Galatian churches Paul founded were in this southern region.

- **Jerusalem** - the capital of Israel and location of the large and influential Jerusalem church. Many of the Judaizers had their roots in this highly Hebraic congregation.

8. Key Themes

- **The Old Testament Law** - the Old Testament is presented as a servant whose responsibility it was to bring the young heir into the school setting in order that the heir could be taught by the Master. The Law was therefore, a *school master* and not the end of all things.
- **Judaism** - Judaism is the term used to describe Jewish life in the days of Jesus. With its origins in the post-exilic era of the Second Temple, the true religion of the Old Testament had been compromised into what Jesus called *the vain traditions of men*.
- **Grace and Faith** - are the conduits of salvation. Paul taught Believers that we are not saved by the Law, or by works of self-righteousness, but by grace, and through faith (Ephesians 2:8-10).
- **Freedom** - the essence of Pauline theology on this matter is that we are not “free to live as we want”; but rather that we are “free to live as we ought.”

9. The Contents of Galatians

- **Paul’s Personal Matters (1:1-2:21)**
 - Greetings and Introduction (1:1-5)
 - Paul’s harsh words challenging the Galatian churches (1:6-9)
 - Paul’s apostolic credentials (1:10-2:10)
 - Paul’s conflict with Peter (2:11-21)
- **Paul’s Discussion of The Law (3:1-4:31)**
 - The Galatian problem (3:1-5)
 - The Blessing of Abraham (3:6-9)

- The Curse of the Law (3:10-14)
- The New Covenant (3:15-18)
- The Purpose of the Law (3:19-29)
- The Sonship of Believers (4:1-7)
- The Futility of Ritualism (4:8-20)
- The Comparison of Isaac and Ishmael (4:21-31)
- **Paul's Discussion of Freedom (5:1-6:10)**
 - Freedom from Ritual (5:1-6)
 - Freedom from Legalists (5:7-12)
 - Freedom in The Spirit (5:13-26)
 - Freedom from Bondage (6:1-10)
- **Paul's Final Words (6:11-18)**

Worth noting about Galatians

- There is laxity in the *give-and-take* style of the Galatian letter. It generally takes the form of an informal (and intense) town hall meeting. Paul even brings a curse to the table against the agitators who have caused such distress and trouble for the Galatians.
- Some have wondered why Paul didn't simply point the Galatians back to the Gospel story. Why get involved in an argument about Abraham? Paul did anchor in the Gospel, first by invoking a curse on those who tainted the message, and secondly by pointing out that only the Holy Spirit is sufficiently powerful to produce Christ-likeness in us. Paul goes back to Abraham's story because this was no doubt the approach the Judaizers had taken in their attempt to bring the Galatian Believers into bondage to Judaism.

When reading Galatians:

- As in Romans, a central argument centers around the identity of the true Children of Abraham.
- Remember that freedom from the Law does not justify careless and irresponsible living. In fact, grace and liberty call us to a higher standard of love, service, and responsibility. We will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ to face the evaluation of how we lived and served in the Christian journey.