

Introduction to Galatians

NIV Study Bible

AUTHOR

The opening verse identifies the author of Galatians as the apostle Paul. Apart from a few 19th-century interpreters, no one has seriously questioned his authorship.

DATE AND DESTINATION

The date of Galatians depends to a great extent on the destination of the letter. There are two main views:

1. *The North Galatian theory.* This older view holds that the letter was addressed to churches located in north-central Asia Minor (Pessinus, Ancyra and Tavium), where the Gauls had settled when they invaded the area in the third century b.c. It is held that Paul visited this area on his second missionary journey, though Acts contains no reference to such a visit. Galatians, it is maintained, was written between a.d. 53 and 57 from Ephesus or Macedonia.
2. *The South Galatian theory.* According to this view, Galatians was written to churches in the southern area of the Roman province of Galatia (Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) that Paul had founded on his first missionary journey. Some believe that Galatians was written from Syrian Antioch in 48–49 after Paul's first journey and before the Jerusalem council meeting (Ac 15). Others say that Galatians was written in Syrian Antioch or Corinth between 51 and 53 (see chart, pp. 2260–2261).

OCCASION AND PURPOSE

Judaizers were Jewish Christians who believed, among other things, that a number of the ceremonial practices of the OT were still binding on the NT church. Following Paul's successful campaign in Galatia, they insisted that Gentile converts to Christianity abide by certain OT rites, especially circumcision. They may have been motivated by a desire to avoid the persecution of Zealot Jews who objected to their fraternizing with Gentiles (see 6:12). The Judaizers argued that Paul was not an authentic apostle and that out of a desire to make the message more appealing to Gentiles he had removed from the gospel certain legal requirements.

Paul responded by clearly establishing his apostolic authority and thereby substantiating the gospel he preached. By introducing additional requirements for justification (e.g., works of the law) his adversaries had perverted the gospel of grace and, unless prevented, would bring Paul's converts into the bondage of legalism. It is by grace through faith alone that people are justified, and it is by faith alone that they are to live out their new life in the freedom of the Spirit.

THEOLOGICAL TEACHING

Galatians stands as an eloquent and vigorous apologetic for the essential NT truth that people are justified by faith in Jesus Christ—by nothing less and nothing more—and that they are sanctified not by legalistic works but by the obedience that comes from faith in God's work for them, in them and through them by the grace and power of Christ and the Holy Spirit. It was the rediscovery of the basic message of Galatians (and Romans) that brought about the Protestant Reformation. Galatians is often referred to as "Luther's book," because Martin Luther relied so

strongly on this letter in all his preaching, teaching and writing against the prevailing theology of his day. It is also referred to as the “Magna Carta of Christian Liberty.” A key verse is 2:16 (see note there).

OUTLINE

- Introduction (1:1–10)
 - Greetings (1:1–5)
 - Denunciation (1:6–10)
- Personal: Authentication of the Apostle of Liberty and Faith (1:11–2:21)
 - Paul’s Gospel Was Received by Special Revelation (1:11–12)
 - Paul’s Gospel Was Independent of the Jerusalem Apostles and the Judean Churches (1:13–2:21)
 1. Evidenced by his early activities as a Christian (1:13–17)
 2. Evidenced by his first post-Christian visit to Jerusalem (1:18–24)
 3. Evidenced by his second post-Christian visit to Jerusalem (2:1–10)
 4. Evidenced by his rebuke of Peter at Antioch (2:11–21)
- Doctrinal: Justification of the Doctrine of Liberty and Faith (chs. 3–4)
 - The Galatians’ Experience of the Gospel (3:1–5)
 - The Experience of Abraham (3:6–9)
 - The Curse of the Law (3:10–14)
 - The Priority of the Promise (3:15–18)
 - The Purpose of the Law (3:19–25)
 - Sons, Not Slaves (3:26–4:7)
 - The Danger of Turning Back (4:8–11)
 - Appeal to Embrace the Freedom of God’s Children (4:12–20)
 - God’s Children Are Children of the Free Woman (4:21–31)
- Practical: Practice of the Life of Liberty and Faith (5:1–6:10)
 - Exhortation to Freedom (5:1–12)
 - Life by the Spirit, Not by the Flesh (5:13–26)
 - Call for Mutual Help (6:1–10)
- Conclusion and Benediction (6:11–18)

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