

# INTRODUCTION AND GAL. 1:1 - 2:14

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## Introduction to Galatians

### I. Probable partial chronology of Paul's life

conversion (Acts 9:1-7)	33/34
Damascus & Arabia (Acts 9:8-25)	33/34 - 36/37
1st Jerusalem visit (Acts 9:26-29)	36/37
Tarsus (Cilicia) (Acts 9:30)	36/37 - 43/45
Peter's Gentile ministry (Acts 10 - 11)	40/41
Antioch (Syria) (Acts 11:25-26)	43/45
2d Jerusalem visit (famine) (Acts 11:30)	46/47
1st missionary journey (Acts 13 - 14)	47/48
Peter visits Antioch (Gal. 2:11-16)	48/49
<i>Galatians</i>	48/49
Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)	49

### II. Destination of Letter

A. The southern part of the Roman province of Galatia included the Phrygian cities of Pisidian Antioch and Iconium and the Lycaonion cities of Lystra and Derbe, cities visited by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13 - 14). The northern part of this province was the home of the ethnic Galatians. Although Paul is never explicitly said to have visited the northern area, some think such a visit is implied in Acts 16:6 and 18:23.

B. There is a debate about whether the letter is addressed to the ethnic Galatians in the north or to the political Galatians in the south, but most modern scholars subscribe to the southern Galatian theory. I won't go through all the arguments, but it seems that Galatians was written before Paul's second missionary journey, which means it was written before Paul is thought to have visited the northern regions. The evidence that it was written before Paul's second missionary journey includes:

1. The personal history Paul recounts in Galatians 1 - 2 ends with the visit he made to Jerusalem with Barnabas in accordance with an unidentified revelation. This best corresponds to Acts 11:27-30, where the church in Antioch sent Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem in response to Agabus's prophecy of a famine. The fact Luke doesn't mention Titus need not mean that Titus wasn't in the group. It's possible Luke mentioned only Barnabas and Paul because they were charged with the responsibility of delivering the gift. If one equates this visit by Barnabas and Paul to the later Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, then Paul has skipped over his visit to Jerusalem recorded

in Acts 11:30. Since in Galatians 1 - 2 he's correcting errors the Judaizers had told about his history, skipping over the Jerusalem visit of Acts 11 would leave him open to the charge that he was hiding something by not telling the whole story.

2. It wasn't long after the famine visit to Jerusalem of Acts 11 that he went on his first missionary journey, during which he met the southern Galatians. If Paul had been to Jerusalem a third time or had gone on other mission trips, his failure to include that information in the autobiographical material in Galatians 1 -2 likewise would leave him open to the charge that he was hiding something by not telling the whole story. (He wouldn't need to mention his first missionary journey because the Galatians were well aware of it, it being where he met them.) So it seems most likely that Galatians was written before Paul's third visit to Jerusalem, the visit in Acts 15, which was before his second missionary journey.

3. This is supported by the near certainty that Paul would have used the Jerusalem Council's decision in his attack on the Judaizers if it had already been given. In a contest for the hearts of the Galatians, why would he fail to mention that the Council in Jerusalem had rejected the Judaizers' claims if the Council had already taken place?

4. As a footnote, N.T. scholar Ben Witherington argues in his commentary on Acts that the decree of the Jerusalem Council that Gentiles are to keep away from meat sacrificed to ("pollutions of") idols, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood was a decree that they not attend temple feasts of pagan gods.

a. His argument in brief is that each of these four things was known or believed to accompany the rites and feasts in pagan temples. Those feasts involved meat that was sacrificed and eaten in the presence of an idol, so-called sacred prostitution, strangling of sacrifices, and drinking or tasting blood. Regarding the latter two, Witherington states (p. 464):

Also relevant to our discussion is the evidence that the choking of the sacrifice, strangling it, and drinking or tasting of blood transpired in pagan temples. In regard to the former, we have evidence from the magical papyri of the attempt to choke the sacrifice and in essence transfer its life breath or spiritual vitality into the idol, and in regard to the latter R. M. Oglivie points to the practice, mentioned occasionally in the literature, of the priest tasting the blood of the sacrifice. The singular reference to blood at the end of the decree would be superfluous after the reference to abstaining from things strangled or choked if the meaning was to avoid meat with the blood still in it. It is more likely that each item in the decree should be taken separately and all be seen as referring to four different activities that were known or believed to transpire in pagan temples.

b. Because the Mosaic law, with its prohibition against idolatry and immorality, had been proclaimed throughout the Empire, Gentile Christians were told not to attend pagan temple feasts so as not to give Jews the opportunity to complain that the Gentile Christians were still practicing idolatry and immorality.

c. If Witherington is correct, the Jerusalem Council was saying what Paul later said in 1 Corinthians 8 - 10. The difference being that the Council noted in 15:21 the practice's negative impact on evangelism among the Jews, whereas Paul focused both on the practice's negative impact on immature Gentile Christians and on the practice's outright incompatibility with Christian discipleship.

### III. Date

A. Accepting the southern Galatia destination, A.D. 48/49 is the probable date. This makes it the oldest known writing of the Apostle. Paul has completed his first missionary journey, that included southern Galatia, returned to Antioch, and been visited there by Peter. He writes the letter shortly before the Jerusalem Council.

B. Those who accept a northern Galatia destination must have a later date because Paul had not visited northern Galatia this early.

### IV. Occasion

A. Paul and Barnabas had made converts among the Gentiles in the southern part of the province of Galatia during their first missionary journey. After they left, some Jewish Christians entered the area and taught, with some success, that those who become Christians must submit to the Jewish law in order to be saved (see, Acts 15:1, 5).

1. Part of what led the Judaizers to their view was that some within Judaism gave the Mosaic covenant priority over the Abrahamic covenant and exalted it to the point that works of the law, the commands of the Mosaic covenant, became the basis of one's relationship with God and thus the basis of one's inheritance (Lk. 18:9-14; Rom. 3:27 - 4:8, 9:30 - 10:8; Gal. 2:16, 3:2, 5, 10; Phil. 3:2-11). Such an interpretation impermissibly changed the prior Abrahamic covenant by canceling out its promissory character (Rom. 4:13-17; Gal. 3:15-18).

2. This exaltation of the Mosaic covenant made them resistant to the fact it had been rendered obsolete. They clung to it as an indispensable aspect of salvation.

a. This clinging was reinforced by their sense of nationalism. Since the Mosaic law was tied to the Jewish nation and Jewish identity, salvation apart from the law diminished their significance. Salvation was not tied to Jewishness in the same way it had been.

b. This clinging was also reinforced by some political realities. From the late forties until the outbreak of the Jewish war in A.D. 66, the Zealots sought to purge Israel of all Gentile elements in the hope that God would then bring in the Messianic Age. Their activities were directed against all who had Gentile sympathies. This created pressure on Jewish Christians to want the church to be as Jewish as possible.

B. It seems that these Judaizers had painted Paul as a disciple of deviant or lesser apostle(s), one who watered down the true gospel to make it pleasing to Gentiles (but who in other circumstances preaches circumcision). In support of this claim, they apparently misrepresented Paul's background.

C. Paul wrote the letter to reverse and to prevent the Galatians' defection to the Judaizers' false doctrine.

### **Gal. 1:1 - 2:14**

#### I. Greeting (1:1-5)

##### A. An apostle of God, not men

1. Paul immediately denies the claim that his apostleship, and hence his gospel, is of human origin. He was not sent by men or made an apostle through the desires or actions of a man but through the desires and actions of Jesus Christ and God the Father.

2. We must remember this fact when we hear modern attempts to undermine the things Paul taught. Paul did not speak as a representative of chauvinistic males, contrary to the claims of some modern feminists; and he did not speak as a representative of a homophobic society, contrary to the claim of Bishop Spong. He spoke as an ambassador of the living God.

3. Note that this is the only surviving letter of Paul's that does not contain a thanksgiving for the church to which he's writing. Since this is his earliest letter, it's possible that he had not yet developed the practice of thanksgiving that characterizes his later letters, but I think it's probably a deliberate omission caused by the distressing situation in these churches. Because they're deserting the one true gospel, Paul can find no cause for thanksgiving; he can only express astonishment.

##### B. His gospel in a nutshell

1. In the face of a false gospel, Paul includes a summary of his gospel in the greeting. In fulfillment of God's plan, Christ died for our sins and was raised to life by God to rescue us from this present evil age. In Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation, the heavenly state, the age to come, has invaded this present reality. Those who put their trust in Christ, who become Christians, are rescued out of the present age and transferred into a new age, a new order of existence. In the language of Col. 1:13, we're transferred from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's Son.

2. Though this new order will not be fully realized or consummated until Christ's return, it is a present reality. In Christ, the page of salvation history has turned; we've entered a new and final stage of God's redemptive work. The implication of this shift is that the old cannot be forced onto the new. This was Jesus' point in Mk. 2:21-22 (Mat. 9:16-17; Lk. 5:36-37), where he

said that no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment or pours new wine into old wineskins. The Judaizers were trying to force the old covenant onto the new, or put differently, to force the new into the form of the old, the offense of which was compounded by their distortion of the old into a program of self righteousness.

3. As commentator Scot McKnight puts it (p. 51): "If we use the categories of 3:19-25, [the Galatians'] departure was a decision to live in B.C. days when the A.D. days had arrived. It was a decision to recede back into the days of Moses and to reject the epoch-altering revelation of Christ."

## II. The Crisis Identified (1:6-9)

### A. Shock at their turning to Judaizer's "gospel"

1. Paul is amazed that the Galatians are so quickly abandoning God, the one who (through Paul) called them to salvation by the grace manifested in the gift of Christ. The so-called "gospel" to which they were turning was not some acceptable variation of what Paul had preached to them; it was a perversion and contradiction of what he had preached.

2. Not every message of salvation that includes faith in Christ is acceptable to God. Even a message that includes faith in Christ can be damning if it includes as essential to salvation elements that are not. By insisting that submission to the Mosaic law was necessary for salvation, the Judaizers denied that Christ had provided salvation for mankind apart from the Mosaic law and thus denied the magnitude and sufficiency of his work.

3. The Judaizers were persuading these recent Gentile converts by "confusing" them. That is how false teachers succeed. They prey on the ignorance and spiritual immaturity of people.

a. That is why, as Paul said in Tit. 1:9, elders must hold firmly to the faithful word, according to the teaching, that they may be able both to exhort with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it. As Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-31 (NIV):

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

b. You owe it to yourself to increase your protection against this danger by studying the Bible. And we who teach need to recall the words of Jas. 3:1, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

## B. Seriousness of perverting his gospel

1. Paul makes clear that, contrary to whatever may have been said by the Judaizers, his gospel was authentic. That is why he can say that if anyone, human or even angel, preached a contrary gospel, they are to be cursed by God.

2. Though Paul is dealing with those adding to the message of salvation, I think the same principle would apply to those subtracting from message of salvation. I mean, if subtracting from the Book of Revelation has the same kind of dire consequences as adding to it (22:18-19), it seems that subtracting from the message of salvation would have the same kind of dire consequences as adding to it. To change the message preached by the Apostles is to reject the authority of Christ who is the source of that message, and to reject the authority of Christ is to incur a divine curse.

## III. Refutation of Judaizer's Slander of His Gospel (1:10 - 2:14)

A. Direct denial that his gospel was a humanly devised doctrine designed to please men (1:10-12)

1. Paul's rhetorical questions are aimed at what the Judaizers had said about him. Is he doing the bidding of men or God? Is he seeking to please men?

2. One cannot be a slave of Christ and also a pleaser of men. There are times when Christ's truth is not what people want to hear. In those times, one must either speak the truth or speak what people want to hear. The slave of Christ speaks what Christ wants spoken; the slave of men speaks what they want spoken.

3. Paul's gospel is divine revelation! His background, his culture, his training, his personality, his biases - none of that has anything to do with his gospel. God chose Paul and others, as he chose prophets in earlier days, to be his spokesmen.

## B. Correcting the false history re his gospel (1:13 - 2:10)

1. Did not consult anyone after converted (1:13-17)

a. They knew of Paul's zealous Jewish background. Implied in this is the idea that he would be the last of all people to avoid binding the law of Moses if it was to be bound.

b. Contrary to what the Judaizers said, after Paul's Damascus experience, he did not go to humans for training in the gospel. He did not become a disciple of any man. Rather, he went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus. "Arabia" refers to Nabataea, the area next to Damascus (in Syria) that was ruled by King Aretas IV. At the time to which Paul refers, Aretas also may have controlled Damascus itself, but even if he didn't, he exercised strong political influence in the city (see Keener, *Bible Background Commentary*). Recall that in 2 Cor. 11:32 Paul writes, "In

Damascus the governor under King Aretas had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me."

## 2. First trip to Jerusalem (1:18-20)

a. It wasn't until three years later that he returned to Jerusalem, a fact that confirms he already had his gospel. And then he only stayed fifteen days. That is hardly consistent with his having become some person's disciple during that visit.

b. In addition, he did not see any apostles other than Peter and James, both of whom were by respected by the Judaizers. So if the Judaizers' claim is that he learned his gospel from some lesser or deviant apostle, it's a blatant lie. That might explain why he breaks his sentence with the impassioned "Listen! In the presence of God, I am not lying." If the claim is that he was subordinate to the Jerusalem leaders (whose gospel he had warped), that hardly fits with the brevity of his visit and the fact he saw only two of the leaders.

## 3. Did not preach in Judean churches (1:21-24)

a. Paul declares that when he went to Syria and Cilicia, which was after his brief Jerusalem visit, he had not personally visited the congregations in Judea. He obviously is excluding his visit to the Jerusalem church, presumably because Jerusalem often was distinguished from Judea, though geographically and politically a part of it. (See, Cole, p. 97, fn.2.) Perhaps the Judaizers claimed that Paul's doctrine had gotten him in trouble in churches in Judea, that it wouldn't fly with people well grounded in the truth. Or maybe Paul is emphasizing his lack of contact with churches in Judea to cast doubt on the claim that he was an underling of the Jerusalem leaders.

b. Paul notes that, though the Judean churches did not know him personally, they glorified God because of his conversion, which is not how the Judaizers were reacting to him!

c. There is a question as to how what Paul says here fits with what he told King Agrippa in Acts 26:20. He said in Acts 26:20 that he had "declared both to them of Damascus first and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, doing works worthy of repentance." In comparing these texts, two things must be kept in mind.

(1) The statement in Acts 26:20 was made about 10 years after Galatians was written, so what wasn't true when Paul wrote Galatians could have been true when he spoke with Agrippa.

(2) Declaring the message of repentance throughout the land of Judea is not the same as meeting personally with the churches in the region. Paul may have evangelized at times in Judea that are not recorded in Acts, or he may have had in mind how he spread his message throughout the region by preaching to pilgrims who were in Jerusalem when he was arrested (speech in Acts 22) or by teaching Judean Christians who may have visited during his years in

prison in Caesarea (Acts 24:23 notes he was given some freedom and friends were allowed to care for his needs).

#### 4. Second trip to Jerusalem (2:1-10)

a. He did not go to Jerusalem again until fourteen years after his conversion (46/47). That is very odd behavior if he was subordinate to the Jerusalem leaders, if he had received the gospel from them and been sent out by them. And even that visit was in accordance with a revelation from God (about the coming famine).

b. At that time he privately presented his gospel to those reputed to be important, to those promoted by the Judaizers as bastions of the true gospel. As 2:9 makes clear, this included James, Peter, and John.

(1) Paul presented his gospel to them "lest somehow I should run or did run in vain." This does not mean that he doubted the authenticity of his gospel and was having it checked for correctness; that would be contrary to everything he has said. Rather, his labor was to extend the one church, a church of both Jews and Gentiles. If the Jerusalem church (wrongly) rejected fellowship with the Gentiles, Christ would be divided and the goal of his efforts frustrated.

(2) The fact the "pillars" added nothing to Paul's message (v. 6) and gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship (v. 9) proves that the Judaizers were lying or misinformed about the correctness of Paul's gospel. The very apostles they regarded as bastions of the true gospel had approved the gospel Paul preaches! How then could his gospel be deviant?

c. The fact Titus was not compelled to be circumcised during that visit further proves the correctness of Paul's gospel.

(1) The fact those "infiltrating false brothers" sought to compel Titus, a Gentile Christian, to be circumcised shows that they were Judaizers. This was something they deemed essential for salvation (see, Acts 15:1). This distinguishes the case from that of Timothy in Acts 16:1-3. Paul circumcised Timothy as a matter of evangelistic strategy, not as a requirement of salvation.

(2) Note Paul's strong language toward the Judaizers: they are infiltrating false brothers who slipped in among them with ulterior motives (to spy on their freedom) and for the ultimate purpose of enslaving them (by binding the law on them). This will continue throughout much of the letter.

(3) The importance of the issue in Paul's mind is again suggested by 2:5. To have accepted the necessity of submission to the law would have been to pervert the truth of the gospel. The Judaizers' doctrine is incompatible with the gospel.

### C. His gospel applied to rebuke a pillar (2:11-14)

1. Regarding Paul's confrontation of Peter at Antioch recounted in Gal. 2:11-14, there are a number of things about which we cannot be certain. We cannot be certain how long before Paul wrote Galatians that the incident occurred. Obviously, it happened *after* Paul arrived in Antioch, which was likely between A.D. 43-45, and *before* he wrote Galatians, which under the southern Galatia theory may have been as early as A.D. 48-49. But we cannot be more precise.

2. Some notable scholars are convinced that what happened with Paul and Peter in Antioch is that certain men sent by James informed Peter that his table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch was endangering the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and elsewhere in Judea by agitating the non-Christian Jews and thus increasing the risk of persecution. In other words, they understand "certain men from James" to mean men who came with a message from James, and they understand "the circumcision" to mean non-Christian Jews rather than Judaizers (Christian Jews who sought to impose the Mosaic law). Peter's fear of what those non-Christian Jews may do to Jewish Christians prompted him to separate from the Gentile Christians.

2. Others think that the men who came "from James" were Judaizers, representatives of "the circumcision [group]." They came "from James" only in the sense that (a) the Jerusalem congregation was identified with James (perhaps because he was the leader who spent the most time there) or (b) the more conservative or law-conscious element of the Jerusalem congregation was identified with James (perhaps because of his strong personal choice to observe of the law). In other words, they were not actually sent by James; they simply came from a group that was identified in some way with James.

a. This would fit with Acts 15:1, where Luke writes, "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'" Acts 15:24 makes clear that, though these men went out from the Jerusalem congregation, they did not have any authorization or commission to spread their views among the Gentiles.

b. If the men who came from James were Judaizers, then Peter's fear may have been more personal. It's possible that they personally intimidated him into pulling back from the Gentiles. That is hard to believe, however, given Peter's courage before the Jewish authorities recorded in Acts, given that seven or eight years earlier Peter, at God's direction, had preached the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius and defended that action before Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and given that two or three years earlier he had heard Paul's gospel and extended to him the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:6-9). Then again, the pressure may have been heightened by the growing influence of the Zealot movement within Judaism.

c. If the men who came "from James" were Judaizers, maybe Peter did not fear them personally but feared the trouble they could cause for the Jewish Christians in Judea by stirring up and enlisting in their cause non-Christian Jews. There are just a lot of questions that cannot be answered with any certainty.

3. What is certain, however, is that Peter's conduct was *hypocritical*. He did not act from his convictions about what was right; rather, he deviated from what he knew was right out of fear of the circumcision group. Whatever the precise pressure point and however Peter may have rationalized it, the fact is that he compromised on the truth. What also is certain is that Paul used the truth of the gospel he preached, the truth that Christ provided salvation for mankind apart from the Mosaic law, to rebuke Peter for acting as though salvation required submission to the Mosaic law.

4. Peter's hypocrisy adversely influenced some of the other Jews, including Barnabas. We need to understand that what we do influences others, especially if we are in a position of leadership. That makes it all the more important that we have courage to hold to our convictions in the face of our fears. The fact a spiritual giant like Peter can be pressured into hypocrisy is sobering.

5. If this is the incident reported in Acts 15:1-2, Barnabas initially sided with Paul on the matter. But when Peter succumbed to the pressure, even Barnabas defected. Maybe Paul's rebuke of Peter brought Barnabas back in line with the truth. (In Acts 15:3 Barnabas is sent with Paul to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question. If Barnabas recovered from his "slip," maybe Luke saw no need to report the episode.) Some have speculated that Barnabas' defection in this regard may have contributed to Paul and Barnabas going their separate ways over whether to take John Mark on their second missionary journey.

6. Paul opposed Peter to his face because Peter was "under condemnation."

a. Some take this to mean that Peter was self-condemned, meaning condemned by his own heart, which is how the NRSV translates it. But Richard Longenecker claims forcefully in his commentary (in agreement with TDNT) that the verb here "means 'be condemned before God' and not just 'be blamed' (KJV), 'in the wrong' (JB, NEB, NIV), or even 'self-condemned by the inconsistency of his own actions' (as Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 111; Burton, *Galatians*, 10-3, Bruce, *Galatians*, 129; et al.)." He notes that "Josephus regularly used *katagino*, „sko,, to mean 'condemned to death' before God or a tribunal" [cites omitted]. And this is how the Ebionites, the theological heirs of the Judaizers, later understood the word when they used Gal. 2:11 in attacking Paul.

b. I think Paul is saying that even Peter was in jeopardy of denying the gospel! Paul was concerned for Peter and also for the church in Antioch. That's why he rebuked him publicly. The truth of the gospel was at stake. We must be willing to correct one another in love and for the sake of the truth. I imagine Paul would sooner have taken another beating than rebuke Peter publicly, but the welfare of others is more important than our own comfort.

c. The Apostles certainly were Spirit-filled men, but they were not sinless, just as we have God's Spirit but are not sinless. There is no contradiction between the Apostles being capable of sin and their being incapable of error when used by the Spirit to write Scripture.

For example, Moses sinned at Meribah (Num. 20), and yet Jesus made clear that the Scripture written by the Spirit through Moses was inerrant.

7. The fact Paul's gospel was used to rebuke a "pillar" demonstrates the validity of that gospel, contrary to how the Judaizers portrayed it. If Paul's gospel was some watered-down version of the truth, he wouldn't have dared to rebuke Peter publicly for violating it. Prov. 28:1 says "the righteous are as bold as a lion." Paul's boldness testified to the fact he was right.

8. Paul doesn't say how Peter responded to his rebuke. Perhaps the situation was still fluid when Paul wrote. If the episode occurred prior to Paul's first missionary journey, the Galatians may have known how it turned out, in which case Paul may have felt it was sufficient simply to remind them of the episode. As F. F. Bruce states in *Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (p. 178), "Such information as we can glean about Peter after this does not suggest that he persisted for long in this charade of 'separate tables'." Peter clearly sided with Paul at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, and years later he referred to Paul affectionately in 2 Pet. 3:15 as "our dear brother."