

BACKGROUND OF GALATIANS

In the course of about thirty years between his conversion outside Damascus and his imprisonment in Rome, the apostle Paul traveled widely through the empire as an ambassador of Jesus. On his three famous missionary journeys he preached the gospel and planted churches in the provinces of Galatia. After founding churches, Paul would often write letters to help guide them.

In AD 50, the churches of Galatia were facing a choice between two “gospels” – two ways of living, of thinking, of viewing how to be right with God. On the one side were the teachers who told these young Christians that their performance mattered. Of course they needed to trust Christ and his death; but then if they wanted to truly be acceptable to God, they needed to get circumcised and get on with keeping the Old Covenant laws. Their efforts were what counted most.

On the other side was Paul, and he said they were “foolish” and “bewitched” to believe such things. He claimed the gospel they were turning to was actually “no gospel at all.” Paul boldly declared that the only performance that mattered was Christ’s: His life, death, and resurrection. Faith in Him was all that anyone needed to be acceptable to God. Their efforts counted for nothing, and relying on them would bring them under God’s “curse.” Which “gospel” they followed mattered. The choice between the gospel of Christ-alone and the false gospel of Christ-plus something else, is still one which Christians face today. Christ-plus may not look the same in our culture as it did in Galatia, but it is still a deadly reversal of the truth. Paul wants Christians to view the gospel not just as a way to enter the Christian life, but the way to live the Christian life. He wants Gospel-rooted living. Galatians is all about the gospel, which all of us need, throughout all of our lives.

The book of Galatians was most likely written to the churches in southern Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) which Paul evangelized during his first missionary journey. Those important church-planting visits can be read about in Acts 13-14. Luke summarizes Paul’s historic preaching to those churches in a striking way, worth noting as we begin our study (Acts 13:38-39), “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man [Jesus] forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Gospel-rooted living frees us. May the Lord guide us into truth as we study the book of Galatians.

References:

- John Stott, Galatians; Experiencing the Grace of Christ (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press: 1998) p. 5.
- Timothy Keller, Galatians; Gospel Matters (www.thegoodbook.com The Good Book Company: 2013) p. 5.
- Timothy Keller, Galatians For You (www.thegoodbook.com The Good Book Company: 2013) p. 10.



BIBLE TIMELINE

Where does Galatians fit into the whole story of God’s word?

GALATIANS

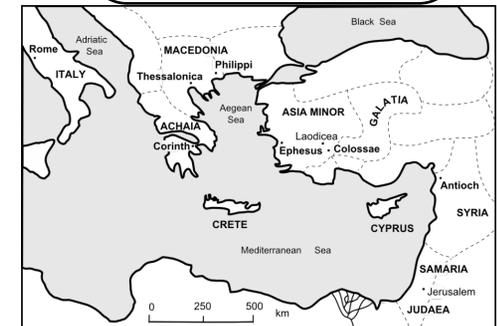
cAD50

AD48

Paul’s first missionary journey takes him through southern Galatia

cAD50

Paul writes his letter to the Galatians, possibly from Syria or Corinth (Greece)



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