

# PAUL'S TRAVEL LETTERS

The letters that Paul wrote before his first Roman imprisonment are commonly called his travel epistles (letters), since, when he wrote them, he was traveling about. These include his Letter to the Galatians, his two letters to the Thessalonians, two of his letters to the Corinthians and his Letter to the Romans.

## THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

### ● 1. *Who wrote the Letter to the Galatians?*

1.1. Based on Gal 1:1-2, who wrote the Letter to the Galatians?

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1.2. What does Gal 6:11 indicate about the process by which Paul's Letter to the Galatians was composed?

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## ● 2. To whom was the Letter to the Galatians written?

2.1. Based on Gal 1:1-2, to whom was the Letter to the Galatians written?

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2.2. Which designation does Paul give to his intended readers in Gal 3:1?

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2.3. The question now to be answered is the identity of the members of the “churches in Galatia” whom Paul calls collectively “Galatians” (see also 1 Cor 16:1: “the churches of Galatia”). From Paul’s description of their religious background, there is no doubt that most of these “Galatians” were gentiles (Gal 3:8-9). The question is whether they were gentiles who were of Galatian ethnic extract, or they were gentiles who lived in the Roman province of Galatia, irrespective of their ethnicity. What Paul says in Gal 3:1-3; 4:13-20 implies that “the churches in Galatia” were founded at the same time, so that he could not be writing to two separate groups of people, both called “Galatians,” who became believers at different times during Paul’s missionary journeys. Corresponding to these two possibilities are two theories: the southern (or provincial) Galatian theory and the northern Galatian theory.

### 2.3.1. Southern Galatian Theory

In 25 BCE, after the death of Amnyntas, the last Galatian king, Augustus organized the former Galatian kingdom into a province, annexing to it territories to the south, the greater part of Pisidia, Isauria, Lycaonia and the easterly most part of Phrygia. During his first missionary journey, Paul visited the southern cities of the Roman province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe); most of the inhabitants of these cities were not ethnic Galatians, who lived in the central and northern regions of the Roman province, in what used to be the independent Galatian kingdom. There is sufficient evidence that in the first century the name Galatia was not confined to the region where ethnic Galatians resided, but was applied to other ethnic regions included within the Roman province of Galatia. As a result, it would not be inappropriate to describe any inhabitant of the province as a Galatian. Pliny (*Nat. Hist.* 5.95, 147) and Tacitus (*Hist.* 2.9; *Ann.* 13.35; 15.6) both use the term “Galatia” to refer to the Roman province by that name. The same is probably true of 1 Pet 1:1. Likewise, later in the second century, Ptolemy describes Asia Minor in accordance with Roman provincial divisions (*Geog.* 5). Finally, inscriptions dating from this period confirm that ethnic regions were included as part of the Roman province of Galatia (*C.I.L.* iii. 249, 291, 312, 318). The Letter to the Galatians, therefore, could have been written to the believers who inhabited these southern cities in the Roman province of Galatia, who would the “Galatians” addressed in the letter.

### 2.3.2. Northern Galatian Theory

A. During the second missionary journey, Luke says that, after visiting Derbe, Lystra and Iconium, as well as other unnamed cities (Acts 16:1-5), Paul (along with Silas and Timothy) traveled through “the Phrygian and Galatian region” (hê Phrugia kai Galatikê chôra) (Acts 16:6). It is clear that Luke intends to denote a single region by this phrase, but the question is in which sense is this *one* region. (The absence of a second definite article before Galatikê implies that the region in question is one.) It has been suggested that the phrase “the Phrygia and Galatia region” means the Phrygic-Galatic region or that part of the Roman province of Galatia inhabited by Phrygians. In this case, Paul would not have traveled to ethnic Galatia. But it is probably more natural to take the terms “Phrygia” and “Galatian” as functioning as adjectives modifying “region,” so that the meaning is “the region consisting of the ethnic regions Phrygia and Galatia,” considered as one region from the point of view of Paul’s journey. (The term “Galatian” [Galatika] is already an adjective, whereas “Phrygia” [Phrugia] is a noun, but can be used as an adjective.) This would imply that Paul and Silas visited one or more of the three Galatian cities: Pessinus, Ancyra and Tavium. It is also possible that in the phrase “the Phrygian and Galatian region” Phrygia is a noun and Galatika is an adjective modifying the noun “region,” in which case Luke’s meaning is “Phrygia and the Galatian region.” On either interpretation, however, Paul would have traveled through the ethnic regions of Phrygia and Galatia. The omission of the article before Galatikê chôra would signify the unity of the two geographical regions under discussion. (In Acts 2:10, Phrygia is used as a noun, as also in Acts 18:23.) Parallels to this type of construction include Acts 19:21 “going through Macedonia and Achaia” (dielhôn tên Makedonian kai Achaian) and Acts 27:5 “as far as Cilicia and Pamphylia” (kata tên Kilikian kai Pamphulian). On this hypothesis, why Luke would write “the Galatian region” and not simply “Galatia” requires explanation; it is possible that he intends to distinguish Paul’s new destination, the ethnic region of Galatia (hê Galatikê chôra), from the Roman province of Galatia, whence Paul and his associates have just departed (see a similar construction in Acts 10:39; 26:20 “the region of Judea” [hê chôra tôn Ioudaias]).

Similarly, Luke also reports that, at the outset of his third missionary journey, Paul traveled through “the Galatian region and Phrygia” (hê Galatikê chôra kai Phrugia) on his way to Ephesus (Acts 18:23). The term “Galatian” (Galatikê) is an adjective modifying the noun “region” (chôra), whereas “Phrygia” (Phrugia) is a noun; the second article “the” (hê) is omitted to signify the unity of the region denoted by the phrase. The meaning of the phrase is probably the ethnic region of Galatia and ethnic Phrygia. On either possible interpretation of it, the phrase “the Phrygian and Galatian region” (hê Phrugia kai Galatikê chôra) in Acts 16:6 is synonymous with the phrase “the Galatian region and Phrygia” in Acts 18:23. Why the terms are reversed in Acts 18:23 is not clear, but it has been suggested that this is the order in which Paul visited the two regions, from east to west, unlike his first journey through this geographical region.

B. Two data further support the hypothesis that Paul traveled through ethnic Galatia during his second and third missionary journeys.

1. Luke tends to use ethnic designations when describing geographical regions, so that, when he says that Paul traveled through Galatia and Phrygia, he probably means the ethnic regions by these names (see Acts 13:13 [Pamphylia]; 13:14 [Pisidia]; 14:6 [Lycaonia]; 16:7-8 [Mysia, Bi-

thynia] for examples of Luke's uses of ethnic geographical designations). Conversely, Luke never uses the term "Galatia" to describe geographically Paul's activities during his first missionary journey in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (Acts 13-14).

2. Acts 16:6-10 seems to require the conclusion that Paul traveled through ethnic Galatia. Paul was forbidden by the Spirit from speaking the word in the Roman province of Asia, but went instead through "the Phrygian and Galatian region," arriving at the border of Mysia (kata Muisian). This seems to mean that Paul and company were prevented from continuing westward into the province of Asia, but turned northward instead, passing through "the Phrygian and Galatian region" or the ethnic regions of Phrygia and Galatia. Being prevented by the spirit of Jesus from entering Bithynia, Paul traveled through Mysia to the city of Troas.

C. In conclusion, if Paul and company traveled through the ethnic region of Galatia, it is possible that he established churches in the region, to whose members, called "Galatians," he later writes. On the assumption that Paul founded churches in ethnic Galatia during his second or third missionary journey, the Letter to the Galatians, therefore, could have been addressed to churches in ethnic Galatia. It must be conceded that in Acts 16:6-10 Luke says nothing about the establishment of churches. Later, in Acts 18:23, however, he does write of how Paul "strengthened all the disciples" when he passed through "the Galatian region and Phrygia," which may imply the existence of churches in the region.

2.3.3. From the examination of the evidence so far, it is still unclear to whom Paul was writing. That is to say, it is still uncertain who the "Galatians" were. It is possible, however, to ascertain the intended readership with reasonable certainty from a determination of *when* Paul wrote the letter. Paul founded the churches in the southern part of Roman province of Galatia during his first missionary journey. If it can be established that the letter must be dated from before the second missionary journey, then the intended readership must be those believers occupying the cities of southern Galatia and not the ethnic Galatians of the central and northern regions, since Paul would not yet have visited this region. The task now is to correlate the events described in Gal 1-2 with the chronology of Paul's career found in the Book of Acts on the assumption that the last event in his autobiography (or at least the last event unknown to his readers) establishes a *terminus ad quem* for the composition of the letter. This assumption is valid because it is unlikely that Paul would relate events from his life beginning with his conversion but not continue his autobiographical account until the present, especially if some of those events would be germane to his goal of defending himself against his critics. Moreover, to omit later events would raise suspicion on the part of his readers that he was concealing relevant facts, which is contrary to Paul's purpose in Gal 1-2. In response to the claim that he was subservient to the Jerusalem church and was therefore to be censured because his "good news" was at variance with that of the Jerusalem church (or so "those from James" claimed) (see Gal 1:10-12; 2:6-7, 12), Paul provides a brief account of his life to prove the contrary. For the purposes of this investigation, the chronology is picked up at Gal 1:18.

A. Summarize the events in his life that Paul describes in the following passages from Gal 1-2 and, when possible, correlate these with the relevant passage from the Book of Acts.



## 3. Gal 2:11-14

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B. Paul's autobiography in Gal 1-2 takes one to a point just prior to Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). The last event in his account of his life also mentioned in the Book of Acts is his famine relief visit to Jerusalem, his second visit to the city after his conversion. It is probable that Paul says nothing about his first missionary journey mentioned in the Book of Acts in his autobiography in Gal 1-2 because the "Galatians" know of this already, since they are the fruit of that missionary undertaking. If so, then this means that Paul must be writing to the Galatians after his first missionary journey but before his third visit to Jerusalem for the so-called Jerusalem council (Acts 15). (Obviously, Paul could not be writing before his first missionary journey, since he would have no one to whom to write.) To terminate the account of his life at Gal 2:1-10, his description of his second journey to Jerusalem, when there were many more events from his life to recount would be arbitrary and would raise the suspicion of his readers that he was intentionally omitting some relevant facts. (Some have argued that, because both accounts describe a meeting in Jerusalem during which the question of gentiles and the Law is considered, Gal 2:1-10 and Acts 15:1-30 should be identified as the same event. But upon closer examination it becomes apparent that these two accounts are different enough that one must conclude that they do not intend the same event in Paul's life.) Peter's visit to Antioch could have occurred after Paul's return to Antioch from his first missionary journey and before he went to Jerusalem for the second time to deliver money for famine relief or even before his first missionary journey. In other words, Paul is writing before he ever travels to ethnic Galatia during his second and third missionary journeys. This means that those belonging to the "churches in Galatia" must be Paul's converts who were inhabitants of the southern Galatian cities that Paul first visited during his first missionary journey, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, and not to the ethnic Galatians. If Paul is writing to ethnic Galatians after his secondary missionary journey or later, one would need to explain why his autobiography is incomplete.

Support for the conclusion that Paul is writing before his third visit to Jerusalem and therefore could only be writing to the "Galatians" who live in cities visited during his first missionary journey is that, if the Jerusalem council has already taken place, Paul would certainly have mentioned the decision of the council in support of his own position, for it would be to his advantage to do so. In fact, Paul and Barnabas are given a letter for that very purpose (Acts 15:22-23, 30-31). (In Acts 16:4, Luke says that Paul communicated "the decisions of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey" as he went from city to city.) That he did not is best explained on the hypothesis that the Jerusalem council has not yet taken place at the time of the writing of the Let-

ter to the Galatians. (Some have argued that Paul's visit to Jerusalem described in Gal 1:21-2:10 is actually his Jerusalem council visit described in Acts 15. This would mean that Paul omits any reference in his letter to his famine visit described in Acts 11:27-30. Such a hypothesis is improbable because, as already stated, Paul inexplicably makes no reference to the decision reached by the council in his letter. Moreover, for him to omit a reference to a Jerusalem visit in his otherwise thorough autobiography would raise suspicion that he is intentionally omitting incriminating evidence.) Further evidence that Paul is writing to the "Galatians" before the Jerusalem council is that he cites a previous, unofficial decision concerning gentile believers made by "those who seemed to be important" during Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, which does not impose any restrictions on gentile converts (Gal 2:6-7), unlike the later, official decree (Acts 15:28-29). It seems that upon further reflection, the leaders of the Jerusalem church decided to require that gentiles refrain from certain practices for the sake of expediency, contrary to their earlier decision. In addition, the incident involving Peter's hypocrisy of no longer eating with gentile believers in Antioch is better explained as occurring before the Jerusalem council than afterwards (Gal 2:11-14). This is because before the Jerusalem council the issue of gentiles and the Law has not yet been formally resolved, which makes Peter's vacillation more understandable. (If Peter's visit to Antioch happened even before Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, then Peter's indecisiveness is even more understandable since not even the informal resolution about the issue of gentiles and the Law has yet been made [Gal 2:1-10].)

2.3.4. Some *qualified* support for the southern Galatian theory is as follows:

A. Paul uses Roman provincial titles when identifying churches that he has founded: Rom 15:19 (Illyricum); Rom 15:26 (Achaia and Macedonia); Rom 16:5 (Asia); 1 Cor 16:5 (Macedonia); 1 Cor 16:15 (Achaia); 1 Cor 16:19 (Asia); 2 Cor 1:1 (Achaia); 2 Cor 1:8 (Asia); 2 Cor 1:16 (Macedonia); 2 Cor 2:13 (Macedonia); 2 Cor 7:5 (Macedonia); 2 Cor 8:1 (Macedonia); 2 Cor 9:2 (Achaia and Macedonia); 2 Cor 11:9-10 (Macedonia and Achaia); Phil 4:15 (Macedonia); 1 Thess 1:7-8 (Macedonia and Achaia); 1 Thess 4:10 (Macedonia); 2 Tim 1:15 (Asia); 2 Tim 4:10 (Dalmatia). Thus, it is probable that, when he uses the term "the churches in Galatia," Paul means the churches in the Roman province of Galatia. But it should be noted that Paul also used non-Roman geographical designations at times: Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 1:16; Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14 (Judea); Gal 1:17 (Arabia); Gal 1:21 (the regions of Syria and Cilicia).

B. Barnabas is mentioned three times in the Letter to the Galatians (Gal 2:1, 9, 13). Since Paul traveled with him only during his first missionary journey, Barnabas would have been unknown to any church that Paul founded during his second or third missionary journey. This suggests that Paul was writing to churches founded during his first missionary journey. But Paul also mentions Barnabas in 1 Cor 9:6, and the Corinthians apparently did not know him.

C. In spite of being a constant companion of Paul after becoming associated with him during the early stages of his second missionary journey, Timothy is *not* mentioned in Galatians (Acts 16:1-3). Timothy is, however, mentioned in most of Paul's letters (1 Thess 1:1; 3:1, 6; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1, 19; Rom 16:21; Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col 1:1; Philem 1). (The only other exceptions are Titus and Ephesians.) The absence of any reference to Timothy in Galatians is cir-

cumstantial evidence that Paul wrote the letter before his second missionary journey, when he could have founded churches in the ethnic region of Galatia.

D. There is no evidence in the Book of Acts that Paul founded any churches in ethnic Galatia; there is only a reference to “disciples” in “the Galatian region and Phrygia” (Acts 18:23). If he did not have much evangelistic success in ethnic Galatia, then it seems unlikely that he would later be writing to his few converts there. But this is an argument from silence, because Luke’s account of Paul’s apostolic career is by no means complete.

2.3.5. The southern Galatian theory has two weaknesses, but these are not sufficient to overturn the southern Galatian hypothesis.

A. One could argue that it would be inappropriate for Paul to call his readers “you foolish Galatians” (Gal 3:1), if he is addressing ethnic Pisidians (Antioch) (Acts 13:4) and Lycaonians (Lystra and Derbe) (Acts 14:6). It is questionable, in other words, whether the inhabitants of these cities would have identified themselves as Galatians, simply because they lived in the Roman province of Galatia. Nevertheless, it is arguable that Paul would call his readers “Galatians” (Gal 3:1), since this would be the only term applicable to the members of the churches in southern Galatia. Moreover, since the Roman province of Galatia has been in existence since 25 BCE, some seventy five years before Paul is writing, it is reasonable to assume that the inhabitants of the province consider themselves “Galatians,” even if they also identify themselves with a particular ethnic group.

B. Paul refers to a serious illness that he suffered during his first missionary journey. The “Galatians” looked after him while he recovered (Gal 4:13-14). (From what he writes in 4:15 “For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me,” it is possible that Paul’s illness may be related to his eyes.) Yet Luke says nothing of this illness in Acts 13-14, his account of Paul’s first missionary journey, which suggests that Paul is not writing to the believers in the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in the Roman province of Galatia. But Luke says nothing about this serious illness anywhere in the Book of Acts. It is arguable that Luke simply omitted this event in his account of the first missionary journey.

2.4. From Acts 13:14-14:24; 15:12; 16:1-5; 20:4; 1 Cor 16:1; 2 Tim 3:11; 4:10 write as far as possible a history of Paul’s relationship with the churches in the southern region of the Roman province of Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe).

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readers of his Letter to the Galatians: “You know that it was on account of an bodily illness that I preached the good news to you the first time.” (It is not clear why an illness would be the occasion for Paul to preach to them for the first time.) This statement could be taken to imply that Paul wrote the letter after his second visit to the Galatian churches, in which case he would be writing after his second missionary journey, when he revisited these churches (The phrase to proteron translated as “first” means in classical Greek the first of two occasions.) But it must not be forgotten that on his first missionary journey Paul actually visited three of the four Galatian cities twice, because he followed the same route on his return to Antioch. Thus, Paul is probably saying in Gal 4:13 that, because of an illness, he preached the good news in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium or Lystra, and preached there again on his return trip. If this is Paul’s meaning, then he could still be writing his letter before his second missionary journey (see Acts 16:6). (It should be noted that the phrase to proteron can also have the less precise meaning of “originally,” in which case nothing is implied by the phrase concerning how many visits Paul had made to the Galatian churches before he wrote his letter.)

3.2. What does Paul’s statement in Gal 1:6 imply about the date of the composition of the Letter to the Galatians? Does this confirm the hypothesis of an early date?

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3.3. The time of the composition of the Letter to the Galatians relative to Paul’s apostolic career has already been determined in the answering the question of the intended readership: it was written between the first missionary journey and the council of Jerusalem. Which *absolute* date would you give to the composition of the Letter to the Galatians? In order to answer this question, it must be remembered that, just before they left on his first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to bring money for famine relief (Acts 11:27-30; Gal 2:1-2). This famine was probably the one described by Josephus in *Ant.* 3. 320; 20. 51, 100, to be dated early in the procuratorship of Tiberius Julius Alexander (46-48), or spanning the procuratorships of Tiberius Julius Alexander (46-48) and Crispus Fadus (44-46).

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#### ● 4. *Where was the Letter to the Galatians written?*

From what is known about Paul's career as an apostle, what is the most likely place of the composition of the Letter to the Galatians? (See Acts 11:22, 25-26; 12:25; 13:1; 15:2.)

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#### ● 5. *What is the Letter to the Galatians?*

##### 5.1. Similarity to Romans

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is the closest in content to his Letter to the Romans. Both letters deal with the theme of being declared righteous apart from obedience to the Law, for which Paul argues using the example of Abraham (Gal. 3:6–9; Rom. 3:31–4:25). In fact, Paul exegetes the same scriptural passage in both letters "And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6) to make the point that the promise of eternal life belongs to those who have Abraham's faith and not to those who seek to obey the Law (Gal 3:6; Rom. 4:3). He also cites Lev 18:5 in both letters as the expression of the Law principle (Gal 3:12; Rom 10:5), which is opposed to the faith principle expressed in Hab 2:4 (Gal 3:11; Rom 1:17). There are other significant agreements between the two letters (see Gal 2:20; 3:27 and Rom 6:3, 6-8; Gal 4:5-7 and Rom 8:14-17; Gal 5:14 and Rom 13:8-10 [Lev 19:18]; Gal 5:16-17 and Rom 8:12-14).

##### 5.2. Outline of the Letter to the Galatians

A. 1:1-5: This represents the introduction of the letter; there is a salutation, but no thanksgiving or prayer. In place of a greeting, Paul gives a benediction; he also describes Christ as giving himself for sins to rescue human beings from the present evil age.

B. 1:6-6:10: This section represents the main body of the letter.

1. 1:6-10: Paul begins by expressing his amazement that the Galatians have so quickly deserted “from the one who called them” to another good news. He then pronounces anathemas against any who would preach another good news.

2. 1:11-2:14: Paul defends his own apostolic status and authority. He does so by explaining how he was called to be an apostle and describing his early missionary activity. He also explains that he is equal to the other apostles and approved by them. (Presumably, those troubling the Galatians are impugning Paul’s right to be an apostle.) In a sense, Paul actually asserts his superiority to Peter, insofar as he has never been inconsistent, unlike Peter (2:11-14).

3. 2:15-21: Following upon his description of his conflict with Peter, Paul refutes a specific charge leveled against him: that his version of the good news makes Christ promote sin. His opponents no doubt were claiming that Paul’s view that the believer is free from the Law implies that the Christ whom he is preaching actually promotes sin, because it encourages believers to do what is contrary to the Law. Paul’s response is to say that he (or anyone else) cannot be a Law-breaker, if the Law has been rendered obsolete. He continues by explaining that he died to the Law, that Christ is living in him and that righteousness does not come from obedience to the Law.

4. 3:1-4:31: In this section, Paul’s attempts to justify his views on righteousness and the Law to his readers.

a. 3:1-5: Paul contrasts two modes of being that are mutually exclusive of each other: Spirit and Law. His purpose is to have his readers realize that submission to the Law is incompatible with the Spirit.

b. 3:6-9: In order to prove that being declared righteous (justification) is apart from the Law, Paul gives the example of Abraham, who, because he believed God, was credited as righteous (Gen 15:6). Paul claims that, because the scripture foresaw that God would justify gentiles by faith, God promised to Abraham that all nations would be blessed in him (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18).

c. 3:10-14: Paul explains that it is impossible to be declared righteous by the Law. Rather it only brings a curse (Deut 27:26). It is God’s intention that no one be declared righteous by obeying the Law, but by faith, as Hab 2:4 explains. What Paul assumes is that all who attempt to gain eternal life by keeping the Law will fail. This is why he says that Christ became a curse for us by being “hung on a tree” (Lev 18:5), i.e., the cross, in order that God’s blessing to the Gentiles through Abraham might be fulfilled. In faith, the gentiles receive the promise of the Spirit.

d. 3:15-18: In this somewhat complicated passage, Paul explains that Christ is actually the recipient of the promises to Abraham and his seed: since the word “seed” is in the singular, according to Paul, the promises to Abraham are actually given to Christ. His point is that God’s promise to bring blessings to the Gentiles in the form of being declared righteous (justification) by faith comes by means of Christ. Since it was made 430 years before the Law was given to Moses, this promise has precedence over the Law and cannot be nullified by it.

e. 3:19-29: Paul says that the function of the Law was not to impart eternal life but only to lead to Christ, in order that the process by which one is declared righteous (justification) would be by faith. As such, it is not opposed to the promise of God to declare righteous by faith. Paul assumes that eternal life can only be granted on the condition of faith, since the whole world is a prisoner of sin, and is, therefore, incapable of achieving a status of being righteous by obedience to the Law. Those who are declared righteous (justified) by faith are no longer under the tutelage of the Law. The one who belongs to Christ is Abraham's seed and heirs according to promise.

f. 4:1-7: Paul explains that the Law functioned like a guardian to whom an underage heir is subject, until the time set by his father. When he comes to maturity, the heir receives the full rights of sonship. Paul says that God sends the Spirit into the heart of his sons.

g. 4:8-11: Paul exhorts his readers to recognize the emptiness and futility of the legalism to which they have become attached. In so doing they are becoming enslaved once again.

h. 4:12-20: On a personal note, Paul pleads with his readers to remember the close relationship between him and his readers that existed before the intrusion of the false teachers.

i. 4:21-31: Paul uses the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, who represent two covenants, in order to express the two mutually exclusive modes of being: Law and Spirit. The slave woman Hagar represents the Mt. Sinai/Mosaic covenant/earthly Jerusalem, i.e., life under the Law, who is rejected in favor of the free woman Sarah, who represents the heavenly Jerusalem/the new covenant, i.e., life in the Spirit. The son of the free woman, Sarah, was born as a result of promise.

4. 5:1-6:10: Typical for Paul, towards the end of his letter, he moves from doctrinal considerations to exhortation.

a. 5:1-6: Paul exhorts his readers not to allow themselves to be circumcised. He explains that to do so means that they have no choice but to be declared righteous by the Law—which is impossible—and that Christ will be of no value to them. One can only assume that the false teachers were encouraging the Gentile believers in Galatia to be circumcised as the first step to becoming subject to the Law. What really matters is faith working itself out through love.

b. 5:7-12: Paul condemns the false teachers who oppose him in Galatia.

c. 5:13-15: Paul exhorts the Galatians to maintain their freedom, but not to use their freedom to indulge the sinful nature ("flesh"). He explains that the entire Law is summarized as loving one's neighbor.

d. 5:16-26: Paul exhorts his readers to live by the Spirit and thereby produce the fruit of the Spirit. They are not to live by the sinful nature ("flesh"), producing the acts of the sinful nature ("flesh"); those who do will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

e. 6:1-10: Paul gives various exhortations. Of significance is his warning that the one who sows according to the Spirit will reap eternal life, but the one who sows according to the sinful nature (“flesh”) will reap destruction.

C. 6:11-18: This represents the conclusion of the letter, including some final remarks about the false teachers and benedictions.

## ● 6. Why was the Letter to the Galatians written?

### 6.1. Righteousness and the Law (Gal 1:6-5:12)

Paul writes his Letter to the Galatians to correct a false understanding of the “good news,” which the Galatians have begun to adopt. Paul forgoes the usual and expected thanksgiving for his readers and instead, after his salutation, immediately expresses his astonishment at the Galatians and then launches into an anathema against those who are proclaiming to them “another gospel” (1:6-9). This indicates just how troubled and annoyed he is at the time of writing. It seems that Paul was not thankful about anything in his Galatian churches.

#### 6.1.1. False Teachers in the Galatian Churches

A. In Gal 1:7, Paul refers to some teachers who are troubling the Galatians by proclaiming to them another “good news” that is really no good news at all. This, of course, means that these men were *false* teachers. He refers to these men as the agitators of the Galatians (1:7). (Paul says that anyone who preaches a good news other than the one that he preached should be cursed.) Paul says that he forewarned the Galatians that such men might come to the Galatian churches and preach “another good news” (1:9). In fact, it seems that there is one particular false teacher of whom Paul has heard, but does not know his identity: “But the man who is agitating you, whoever he is, must bear the judgment of God” (Gal 5:10; see 1:9; 3:1; 5:7). It is Paul’s purpose in his letter to refute the so-called “good news” of these false teachers. It should also be noted that, probably, these false teachers themselves referred to their proclamation as a “good news,” for otherwise Paul’s statement that the Galatians have believed “another good news” would be confusing and misleading (1:7). The fact that these false teachers called their proclamation a “good news” implies that they were Christians, since the terms “good news” (*euaggelion*) and “to proclaim good news” (*euaggelizesthai*) were used by the early church to refer to the kerygma.

Since he feels the need to defend himself on this point, the false teachers probably attacked the legitimacy and authenticity of Paul’s own “good news.” Paul emphasizes that his “good news” came as a direct revelation from Christ and for this reason he was dependent on no one for it. (1:11-12; see 1:1 “apostle not from man or through man but through Jesus Christ”). He says that he did not receive (*parelabon*) his gospel from man, by which he means that he did not receive authoritative tradition from the original apostles (see 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3). (For emphasis Paul adds, “Nor was I taught.”) Likely, he wrote this because the false teachers claimed that Paul was dependent upon the Jerusalem church, so that his “good news” should be the same as their “good news” since they represented the Jerusalem church. (In what sense exactly, Paul received

his gospel “from a revelation of Jesus Christ” is not completely clear.) The false teachers also seem to be accusing Paul of seeking to “please human beings” (1:10). They probably meant that gentiles would be more attracted to a Law-free “good news” than their own “good news.”

From what Paul says in Gal 4:17-18, it seems that these Christian false teachers did not originate from within the Galatian churches, but entered in from without. He implies that these men are to be distinguished from the Galatian believers, whom they are misleading, and from himself, whom they seek to displace. Paul refers to the Galatians in the second person (1:6, 11; 3:1; 4:12-6:18) but uses the third person when speaking about the false teachers (1:7; 3:1; 4:17; 5:7-12; 6:12-13). (In 1:1; 6:17, Paul defends his authority, presumably against these false teachers who seek to discredit him.) Based on what he writes in Gal 3:3 “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being *perfected* by the flesh,” it is possible that the false teachers claim that they can bring Paul’s Galatian converts to spiritual perfection by having them submit to the Law. In other words, they may be criticizing Paul for preaching an imperfect good news. With his letter, Paul hopes to repair the damage to his relationship with the Galatians by explaining that it is not to their benefit to receive these interlopers and reject him. To this end, he points out that the real motive of the false teachers is that the Galatians would become “zealous for them,” by which he means, that they would become subservient to the false teachers in some way (4:17).

B. Some limited information about the nature of the so-called “good news” proclaimed by these false teachers is available from Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, insofar as he refers or alludes to it in his letter. What does Paul say or imply about the “good news” of the false teachers in the following passages and how does he refute it?

#### 1. Gal 2:17 (Christ as Servant of Sin)

The false teachers probably accuse Paul of making Christ “the servant of sin,” insofar as Paul teaches that Gentiles who become Christians do not have to submit themselves to the Mosaic Law. This accusation stands behind Paul’s rhetorical question: “But if, seeking to be declared righteous in Christ, we ourselves are found to be sinners, then also [does this mean that] Christ is a servant of sin?” (2:17). According to his opponents, Paul’s “good news” allows believers to be “sinners,” as defined by the Law, and his opponents cleverly expressed this fact as Christ’s being a servant or promoter of sin. Their view was that gentile converts must agree to obey the Law, for the Law defined what was good and acceptable to God, or else they will be judged to be sinners. Paul’s counters their argument by saying that he (as well as other Jews who support him and his gentile converts) cannot be accused of being sinners insofar as they violate the Law because the Law no longer has validity and therefore cannot be violated. He expresses this by saying, “For if what I have destroyed these things I build up again, then I establish myself as a transgressor.” In other words, Paul’s answers the charges against him by affirming that the Law is now obsolete. His opponents’ charge could only be true on the assumption that a believer is under the Law as a moral standard; thus only if he rebuilds what he has destroyed, that is, the Law, could he then be proven to be a Law breaker.

## 2. Gal 3:1-5, 14 (Spirit and Law)

Paul says that the false teachers have “bewitched” the Galatians by teaching them that Spirit and Law are compatible. Probably, the false teachers believe that the reception and activity of the Spirit are causally connected to obedience to the Law. The false teachers may have teaching the Galatian gentiles that the Spirit would be more greatly manifested in their midst. Paul remarks sarcastically that the Galatians, having begun in the Spirit, which they received by believing what they heard, now think that they can be brought to completion in the flesh (sinful nature). Implicit in Paul’s discussion is the view that to be under the Law is to be in the “flesh,” which is the opposite of being in the Spirit. Contrary to the false teachers, he teaches that the Law and flesh are inseparable and represent a single mode of being, which is to be avoided, since it leads to sin and death. The mode of being of Law or flesh is antithetical to the Spirit. Paul seeks to convince the Galatians that they must not submit themselves to the Law and its demands as a condition of the reception of the Spirit. The Galatians are to remember that by faith did they receive the Spirit not by obedience to the Law.

## 3. Gal 3:6-9 (Abraham as Model)

The false teachers probably appeal to Abraham as a model for the gentile Galatian believers to follow. In their view, Abraham both had faith and obeyed the Law (since he was circumcised), so that, if the Galatians do the same, then they will become “sons of Abraham,” in a soteriological sense (3:7). Against Paul’s teaching, they say that to faith must be added obedience to the Law as a condition of salvation. In other words, these false teachers combine teaching about Jesus as the Christ with obedience to Law and proclaimed this as a “good news” to Paul’s mostly gentiles converts in the Galatian churches. They do not oppose a gentile mission, but seek to bring gentiles under the Law as a condition of salvation, which is consistent with the Jewish view of the purpose of the Law generally. The false teachers may have quoted Gen 12:3 “All nations will be blessed in him [Abraham]” as being fulfilled when gentiles believe in Christ and submit themselves to the Law as a condition of salvation. They probably teach that the Abrahamic covenant is brought to its completion with the Mosaic covenant. Contrary to the false teachers, however, Paul teaches that it is by faith alone that both gentiles and Jews are declared righteous, not by the works of the Law. He uses the example of Abraham against his opponents by pointing out that Gen 15:6 “And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” indicates that Abraham was declared righteous by his faith alone (3:6). Contrary to his opponents, it is “those of faith” who are the true sons of Abraham (3:7). Paul separates the Abrahamic covenant from the Mosaic. In his view, the biblical promise that all nations will be blessed in Abraham is fulfilled when, like Abraham, gentiles are declared righteous by faith. In short, Paul seeks to convince the Galatians that they must not submit themselves to the Law and its demands as a condition of salvation.

## 4. Gal 4:10-11 (Jewish Festival Calendar)

Paul criticizes the Galatians for observing “days, months, seasons and years.” No doubt, he is referring to the fact that the Galatians have begun to observe the Jewish festival calendar, which consists of the observance of Sabbath days, new moon festivals, annual festivals, such as Passov-

er, Shavuot (Pentecost) and Succoth (Tabernacles), as well as Sabbath years and years of jubilee. The false teachers presumably were able to convince the gentile Galatian converts to adopt this part of the Law, probably as a condition of salvation. (As is clear from Gal 5:1-7, the false teachers have not yet convinced the Galatians to submit to circumcision.) Paul's response is to say that he fears that his work among them has been wasted. He means that his "good news" that a person is declared righteous apart from the observance of the Law has been overturned.

#### 5. Gal 5:1-7 (Circumcision and the Whole Law)

In Gal 5:7, Paul asks rhetorically, "You were running well. Who has hindered you from obeying the truth?" Of course, he knows that the answer to this question is those false teachers who have infiltrated the Galatian churches. These false teachers have almost convinced the Galatians that they cannot be declared righteous without obedience to the Law in its entirety. (Paul's statement that circumcision puts a man under the obligation to obey the *whole* Law does not imply that the false teachers have not made this completely clear to the Galatians, perhaps in order not to discourage them. Rather, Paul is simply repeating what the Galatians already know but do not fully appreciate.) The logical first step towards submission to the Law as a means of being declared righteous is circumcision. It is probable that these false teachers believe that Jews and gentiles are declared righteous and thereby qualified for salvation by faith in Christ *and* by obedience to the Law. They recognize that the Galatian converts already have faith but what they are missing is obedience to the Law. Paul is adamant, however, that the Galatians must not allow themselves to be circumcised because they would be putting themselves under the impossible condition of being declared righteous by obedience to the Law. In his view, there are two mutually-exclusive ways of being declared righteous, faith in Christ and obedience to the Law. The latter is impossible, however, because *perfect* obedience is required, but no one can keep the Law perfectly.

#### 6. Gal 6:12-13 (Boasting in the Flesh)

Paul accuses his opponents of wanting to "boast in the flesh" as the motive for requiring the Galatian believers to be circumcised. By such boasting he means taking pride in or taking credit for fulfilling the Law as a condition of being declared righteous, in this case the rite of circumcision. Paul ironically points out, however, that even the "false" teachers, who themselves are circumcised, do not keep the whole Law, which means that their status of being "declared righteous" is threatened because only the perfectly obedient will be declared righteous. It should also be noted that Paul accuses his opponents of teaching that gentiles should be circumcised and become obedient to the Law as being motivated by a desire to avoid persecution. It seems that Paul's opponents hope to protect Jewish and gentile believers from persecution from civil authorities by keeping Christianity within the fold of Judaism, which was a protected religion in the Roman empire.

##### 6.1.2. Jewish Christianity and the Law

A. In the Book of Acts, Luke refers to a group of Jewish believers in the Jerusalem church who believed that the Law must be obeyed in its entirety by both Jews and gentile believers as a condition of obtaining eschatological salvation. He records that there were in the early church believing

Pharisees who held that all gentiles converts must be circumcised and keep the Law as a condition of being “saved.” They even went to Antioch and attempted to convince the gentile converts there of their position (15:1, 5). It is probable that the false teachers who infiltrated the churches in Galatia belonged to this group of Jewish Christians. Luke also reports that there was a group of Jewish believers in Jerusalem who were “zealous for the Law” (21:20) and were, at best, ambivalent towards Paul because it was alleged that he taught Jews outside of Palestine not to observe the Law (21:20-21).

B. In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul makes reference to two incidents outside of the Galatian churches in which Jewish believers sought to compel gentiles and Jews within the church to be obedient to the Law. This is further evidence of the existence of Jewish Christian group in the early church that stressed the necessity of obedience to the Law for *all* believers. In Gal 2:4, Paul relates how, when he was in Jerusalem during his “famine visit” (Acts 11:27-30), certain men, whom he only identifies as “false brothers,” sought to compel Titus, a gentile believer, to be circumcised. Presumably, they did this because they believed that all gentile converts must become obedient to the Law. Paul implies that these “false brothers” intentionally set out to undermine his theological views and apostolic authority; he understands their ultimate aim as destroying their “freedom” from the Law. Similarly, in Gal 2:12, Paul describes an event that occurred in Antioch. Peter was eating with gentiles in Antioch, until “certain men from James” came, presumably from Jerusalem, and convinced him and others no longer to do so. The issue at stake was Peter’s violation of Jewish food laws. Either he was eating unclean food (see Lev 11) or was eating food that was not handled so as to maintain its ritual purity. If the latter, then the problem was the violation of halakah related to the purity of food not the direct violation of biblical law. (The fact that Paul refers to Peter’s “hypocrisy” implies that Peter knew that what he was doing was inconsistent with his own theological beliefs [2:13]; in other words, Peter’s withdrawal from eating with gentiles was not a manifestation of changed theological views.) It is difficult to believe that the false teachers present in Paul’s Galatian churches did not have some connection to these other Jewish Christians involved in these two incidents.

## 6.2. Flesh and Spirit (Gal 5:13-26)

Paul sought to counter a possible distortion of his teaching about freedom from the Law. Some could have argued that to be free from the Law is to be free to sin without consequences. It is possible that Paul’s opponents in Galatia used this false conclusion in order to discredit Paul’s position by demonstrating that it allegedly leads to absurdity. How does Paul refute this false conclusion in Gal 5:13-26?

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