

Introduction to Galatians

Where is it in the Bible?

Galatians is the ninth book in the New Testament and is found between 2 Corinthians and Ephesians.

Who wrote it?

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul (1:1) to a number of churches he had founded in Asia Minor during one of his missionary trips. The meaning of "Galatia" is not clear. It could be a reference to the Roman province of Galatia; in this case, the letter may be addressed to churches in southern Asia Minor that Paul founded during his first missionary trip. However, it could also be addressed to a specific group of people who called themselves "Galatians" and lived in the northern part of the province; churches in that area would have been founded during one of Paul's later trips.

When was it written?

The dating of this epistle depends on where churches it was addressed to were located. If the assumption is that they were in southern Asia Minor, the epistle could have been written as early as 48. However, if the letter was written to churches in the northern part of the province of Galatia, it would have to have been written later, possibly as late as the mid-50's.

What is it about?

Most of the Galatians were Gentiles. Paul heard that they had been influenced by some outsiders who told them that they needed to become Jews and follow Jewish laws and practices, including circumcision, in order to be Christians. Because of this, the Galatians were beginning to doubt Paul's message and authority. However, Paul insists that justification comes through faith and not by keeping the Law. His anger and passion are evident in the letter, but so are his care and concern for the Galatians.

How is it structured?

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
 - a. Salutation (1:1-5)
 - b. Paul's Astonishment (1:6-9)
- II. Paul's Call to Preach the Gospel (1:10-2:21)
 - a. Paul's Apostleship (1:10-24)
 - b. Paul and the Other Apostles (2:1-14)
- III. Justification by Faith in Christ (2:15-21)
- IV. Arguments Supporting Justification by Faith (3:1-4:31)
 - a. The Galatians' experience of the Gospel (3:1-5)
 - b. The experience of Abraham (3:6-9)
 - c. The curse of the Law (3:10-14)
 - d. The priority of the promise (3:15-18)
 - e. The purpose of the Law (3:19-25)
 - f. Sons, not slaves (3:26-4:11)
 - g. Appeal to enter into freedom from Law (4:12-20)
 - h. The allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31)

- V. Practical Application (5:1-6:10)
 - a. Exhortation to Freedom (5:1-12)
 - b. Life by the Spirit, not by the flesh (5:13-26)
 - c. Call for mutual help (6:1-10)
- VI. Closing (6:11-18)

What are some things to look for?

- **Authority as an Apostle:** It appears that Paul's opponents had attacked him personally, so he must reestablish his credentials as an apostle before he can deal with the doctrinal issues that they raised. Paul argues that he received the message he preaches directly from Jesus Christ (1:12) and that it has been approved by Peter, James, and John (2:6-9).
- **Christ and the Law:** The main issue in this epistle is the relationship between Christ and the Law. Paul makes four points to refute what his opponents have said.
 - Justification comes through faith and not by doing works of the Law (2:16-17). Paul says that having a right relationship with God depends on trusting that God's grace in Christ is sufficient.
 - God's grace is available to everyone, both Jew and Gentile (3:26-29). "Paul's opponents claim that the good news is that Gentiles can become part of the favored group, whereas Paul claims that the good news is that there is no favored group."¹
 - The coming of Christ was the beginning of a new phase in salvation history, and the covenant that was given to Abraham and his descendants is obsolete. This means that it is no longer necessary or appropriate to follow Jewish practices including circumcision and the dietary restrictions.
 - The freedom from the Law means that Christians are able to live lives of faith that are characterized by love for one another and for the neighbor. This is the fulfillment of what the Law demands. In order to do this, believers receive the Holy Spirit to guide their lives and produce the fruit of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (5:22-23).

¹ Mark Allen Powell, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 314.