

*i am*  
**FREE**  
*a study in galatians*



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*I Am Free: A Study in Galatians*

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# INTRODUCTION

## HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

Each week of this guide has three sections:

1. An introduction to the bible passage that we will be studying.
2. A devotional guide for you to prepare for the sermon.
3. A small group discussion guide to follow the sermon.

In order to get the most out of this guide, we encourage you to spend time during the week leading up to the sermon working on the personal study and devotions. This will prepare you for the sermon and the insights that you discover will be valuable to your small group discussion time.

Take time to explore the cross-referenced passages, to think through the application questions, and to pray through the prayer points, trusting in God to change your heart through your study of his Word.

# INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS

Galatians has been called the “Magna Carta of Christian Liberty.” In this powerful and passionate letter, Paul pleads with the Galatian churches to turn away from slavery to the Law of Moses and return to the freedom found in the one true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Galatians is crucially important for Christians today because of its message of justification by faith, showing that Christians are made righteous not by works of the Law, but by the grace of God the Father through faith in the promise of Jesus Christ alone.

## AUTHOR, DATE, AND AUDIENCE

The letter to the Galatians was written by the apostle Paul to the churches in Galatia, a region of modern day Turkey.

The term *Galatians* can refer to two groups of people. First is a group of people who settled in modern day Turkey—the Gauls—who would later become known as the Gallo-Graecians, or Galatians. These ethnic Galatians settled the northern part of the region.

As the Rome conquered Asia Minor, they conquered the Galatians and extended their territory south, to include the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe that we read about in the book of Acts. This became the Roman province of

Galatia, referring to geopolitical boundaries, not to the ethnicity of the people living there.

The date of the letter depends on the specific audience to whom Paul was writing. Two theories exist for the intended recipients of Paul's letter: the North Galatian theory and the South Galatian theory.

### **The North Galatian theory**

The North Galatian theory suggests that the letter was sent to the ethnic, or tribal, Galatians in the northern region of the Roman province of Galatia.

Proponents of this view argue that Paul, who most frequently referred to people groups based on their ethnicity rather than geopolitical boundaries, would not have referred to the people in the southern region of the province as Galatians because they were not ethnic Galatians.

The arguments for this theory are weak, and the South Galatian theory better represents the whole of the evidence.

### **The South Galatian theory**

The South Galatian theory suggests that the letter was sent to the churches in the southern region of the Roman province of Galatia.

Proponents of this theory note that that Paul had visited the churches at Galatia in Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe (in South Galatia) twice on his missionary journeys, but there is no record of Paul ever visiting the ethnic Galatians in the northern part of the province. In fact, Paul would need to travel 300 miles out of his way to visit them. Thus, it is unlikely that Paul would have written a letter to North Galatia, particularly when he says he had previously visited his recipients (4:12).<sup>1</sup>

## PURPOSE AND OCCASION

Paul penned his letter to the Galatians to rebuke the Gentile Christians in the churches for departing from the gospel and exhort them to return to its truth.

Paul's language is harsher and more urgent than his other letters. In most of Paul's epistles, Paul includes a prayer of thanksgiving for his hearers; this benediction is conspicuously absent from his letter to the Galatians, pointing the reader to the urgency of his message: return to the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the audience of Galatians, see Boice, James Montgomery, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Romans through Galatians* and Schreiner, Thomas R., *Galatians (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament)*.

# AUDIENCE AND DATE

In light of the evidence, the best argument as to the audience and date of the letter to the Galatians follows the South Galatian theory. Under this view, the letter to the Galatians was probably written in the late 40's or early 50's AD.

It is important to note that the specific recipients of the letter do not substantially affect its interpretation. While it brings up some questions regarding history, these matters don't affect doctrine and shouldn't be overblown.



The purpose and thrust of Paul's message to the churches is found in the closing lines of his epistle:

*“For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon him, and upon the Israel of God.” — Galatians 6:15-16*

We understand from details in Paul's letter that:

1. His authority as an apostle was questioned by some (1:1, 1:15, 2:9).
2. The authenticity of his gospel preaching was called into question (1:9, 1:11).
3. Some troublemakers were tempting the Galatians to turn away from the gospel and back to the Law (1:6-7, 5:1, 5:12, 6:12).
4. The issue in question was whether or not Gentiles needed to accept circumcision for salvation (5:2-3, 5:6, 6:12-13, 6:15).
5. This teaching stirred up division among the Galatians (4:15-16, 5:17, 6:1, 6:10).

Paul urges the Gentile Christians in Galatia to “stand firm” in the gospel (5:1), walk by the Spirit (5:25), and love one another (5:14, 6:2).

## Three charges against Paul refuted in Galatians

Commentator James Boice<sup>2</sup> gives three charges against Paul that are refuted in Galatians:

1. Paul's authority as an apostle
2. The authenticity of Paul's gospel message
3. The charge that Paul's gospel led to loose living

## IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN GALATIANS

### Paul

Paul, originally known as Saul of Tarsus, was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul was considered the apostle to the Gentiles, charged with taking the gospel to Gentile nations surrounding Judea.

During his three missionary journeys, Paul planted churches in Asia Minor and Europe, and many of his letters to these churches and to his disciples are preserved in the New Testament.

In Galatians, Paul appeals to his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:12, c.f. Ac 9:3, Ac 22:6), his

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<sup>2</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 10: Romans through Galatians*

miraculous conversion (Gal 1:23, c.f. Ac 9:21), and his acceptance by James, Peter, and John (Gal 2:9, c.f. Ac 21:17) to defend the authenticity of his gospel message and his call as an apostle.

## **Judaizers**

The word *judaize* is used only in Galatians 2:14, where it means “to live according to Jewish customs,” but individuals who advocated this practice can be found throughout the New Testament.

The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 (which Paul refers to in Gal 2:1-10) was called to settle the relationship between Gentile Christians and adherence to Jewish law and customs.

Following the council, the apostles penned a letter to the Gentile churches, saying that while “some persons [had] gone out and troubled [them] with words,” the only burdens that the council would place on Gentile believers were to abstain from idolatry and from sexual immorality.

Even so, some persisted in maintaining that Gentiles must follow some or all aspects of Jewish law and customs, and these were Paul’s primary opponents in Galatians, who challenged Paul’s authority as an apostle, questioned the authenticity of his gospel, and accused him of promoting loose living.

## **Cephas (Peter)**

Cephas, also named Peter, was one of the Twelve Apostles, one of the “three pillars” (along with James and John), and was considered to be the apostle to the Jews.

Peter wrote the books of 1 Peter and 2 Peter.

Paul visited Peter early in his ministry (1:18, c.f. Ac 9:26-30) and recounts a disagreement with Peter in 2:11 regarding religious hypocrisy.

## **James**

James, and Apostle, was Jesus’ half-brother (Gal 1:19) and one of the “three pillars.” James wrote the New Testament book that bears his name.

## **Barnabas**

Barnabas was a travelling companion with Paul and worked together to defend Gentile converts to Christianity from the Judaizers. Paul mentions that Barnabas was led astray with Peter in his hypocrisy before the circumcision party (Gal 2:13).

## **Abraham**

Much of Paul’s argument in Galatians (3:6-4:31) centers in on the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 15, that through his offspring the nations would be blessed.

According to Genesis, God had promised Abraham a son, though his wife was advanced in years and had been unable to conceive.

With the child born to Abraham and his wife, who would be named Isaac, the LORD promised to establish his covenant.

Paul refers to this promise in his letter to the Galatians, pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise.

### **Hagar and Sarah**

Abraham bore two sons: Ishmael and Isaac. The first he bore to Hagar, his servant. The second he bore according to God's promise through his wife, Sarah.

Paul interprets the birth of Ishmael and Isaac to represent two covenants: a covenant of slavery under the law, and a covenant of freedom under faith in God's promise.





# WEEK 1: FREE IN THE GOSPEL

Galatians 1:1-10

## INTRODUCTION

Christians in Paul's day were being tempted to turn away from the gospel of Jesus Christ that Paul had delivered to them and turning to a false gospel. As you learned in the introduction to the book of Galatians, a group of religious leaders known as the Judaizers were teaching the Galatian Christians that, in order to be saved, they needed to obey the Mosaic Law—namely, that they needed to be circumcised.

In the introduction to his letter to the Galatians, Paul shows his readers the urgency of holding fast to the truth and purity of the gospel that he was given and that he delivered to them.

In this study, you will explore the true gospel and discover some false gospels that are being preached in our culture today.

## PERSONAL STUDY & DEVOTION

*To be completed before the sermon.*

### **Read: Galatians 1:1-10**

1. Make a short list of the key words, phrases, and ideas found in the passage.

2. Summarize the passage in your own words.

3. What does this passage teach you about God? What does this passage teach you about humankind?

### **Examine: The True Gospel (Galatians 1:3-5)**

The word translated “gospel” in your bible is the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning “good news.” Before the New Testament was written, this word was commonly used to

refer to the proclamation of a military or political victory.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of His victory over sin and death when he fulfilled his mission on the cross and brought the promised redemption of sins to all nations.

1. According to this passage, who initiated your salvation?
2. What does this passage teach about your role in your salvation?
3. Why is it important that the gospel come from God and not from man?

### **Examine: False Gospels (Galatians 1:6-10)**

The Judaizers were distorting the free gift of salvation promised by the gospel by adding the requirement of circumcision to faith in Jesus' promises.

1. In light of verses 3 through 5, why would Paul be "astonished" that the Galatians had been so quick to turn to a different gospel?

2. In what ways do we add to the gospel? What are some “Jesus plus something else” messages you hear today?

### **Apply**

1. How has the gospel set you free from your sin?
2. How can you guard yourself against false gospels?

### **Pray**

1. Thank God for sending Jesus to save you from your sin.
2. Pray for God’s grace in helping you to discern false gospels.
3. Pray that your friends and neighbors would hear the good news of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.







## LIFEGROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

*Use the following questions to guide your discussion in your midweek LifeGroup meetings.*

**Opening:** Ask the group what they learned from the sermon this week. Spend a few minutes discussing everyone's thoughts. Then pray and read Galatians 1:1-10 as a group.

### ***Discussion Questions:***

1. What observations from the "Read" section did you make that were the most significant to your understanding of this text?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. If you are a Christian, describe the first time that you heard the gospel. How did you respond to hearing the good news of salvation in Jesus?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How does the gospel affect the way we live?

4. What are some false gospels that we hear today? How do they distort the truth of the true gospel?

5. Break into groups of two or three. Practice sharing the gospel with one another.

## LOOKING AHEAD

*Read Galatians 1:11-24.*

