

Paul Rebukes Peter at Syrian Antioch (late 48)

Acts 15:1–2

1 Now some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

2 When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement.

Galatians 2:11–14

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he had clearly done wrong.
 12 Until certain people came from James, he had been eating with the Gentiles.
 But when they arrived,
 he stopped doing this and separated himself because he was afraid of those who were pro-circumcision.
 13 And the rest of the Jews also joined with him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray with them by their hypocrisy.
 14 But when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “If you, although you are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you try to force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

Paul’s Letter to the Galatian Churches – Part 1 (late 48)

Galatians 1:1–4:7

Introduction

1:1 From Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor by human agency, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead)
 2 and all the brothers with me, to the churches of Galatia.
 3 Grace and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,
 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father,
 5 to whom be glory forever and ever! Amen.

Reason for the Letter

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel—
 7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.
 8 But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell!
 9 As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!
 10 Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!

Declaration of the Divine Origin of Paul’s Gospel

11 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin.
 12 For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Autobiographical Detail Supporting Paul’s Declaration

13 For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I was savagely persecuting the church of God and trying to destroy it.
 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my nation, and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.
 15 But when the one who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace was pleased
 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I could preach him among the Gentiles, I did not go to ask advice from any human being,
 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me, but right away I departed to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and get information from him, and I stayed with him fifteen days.
 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.
 20 I assure you that, before God, I am not lying about what I am writing to you!
 21 Afterward I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia.
 22 But I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.
 23 They were only hearing, "The one who once persecuted us is now proclaiming the good news of the faith he once tried to destroy."
 24 So they glorified God because of me.

The Famine Visit (see Acts 11:27–30)

2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking Titus along too.
 2 I went there because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did so only in a private meeting with the influential people, to make sure that I was not running—or had not run—in vain.
 3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek.
 4 Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves.
 5 But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.
 6 But from those who were influential (whatever they were makes no difference to me; God shows no favoritism between people)—those influential leaders added nothing to my message.
 7 On the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was to the circumcised
 8 (for he who empowered Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles)
 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who had a reputation as pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.
 10 They requested only that we remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do.

Paul Opposes Peter at Syrian Antioch

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he had clearly done wrong.
 12 Until certain people came from James, he had been eating with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he stopped doing this and separated himself because he was afraid of those who were pro-circumcision.
 13 And the rest of the Jews also joined with him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray with them by their hypocrisy.
 14 But when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "If you, although you are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you try to force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Justification by Faith Apart from Circumcision

15 We are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,
 16 yet we know that no one is justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.
 17 But if while seeking to be justified in Christ we ourselves have also been found to be sinners, is Christ then one who encourages sin? Absolutely not!
 18 But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God's law.
 19 For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.
 20 I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So the life I now live in the body, I live because of the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
 21 I do not set aside God's grace, because if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing!

The Galatians' Conversion Confirms Justification Apart from Circumcision

3:1 You foolish Galatians! Who has cast a spell on you? Before your eyes Jesus Christ was vividly portrayed as crucified!
 2 The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?
 3 Are you so foolish? Although you began with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort?
 4 Have you suffered so many things for nothing?—if indeed it was for nothing.
 5 Does God then give you the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard?

Abraham's Conversion Confirms Justification Apart from Circumcision

6 Just as Abraham *believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*, [\[Gen 15:6\]](#)
 7 so then, understand that those who believe are the sons of Abraham.

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham ahead of time, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” [Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18]

9 So then those who believe are blessed along with Abraham the believer.

The Unity and Nature of the Law Contradict Justification by Law-keeping

10 For all who rely on doing the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not keep on doing everything written in the book of the law.” [Deut 27:26]

11 Now it is clear no one is justified before God by the law, because *the righteous one will live by faith*. [Hab 2:4]

12 But the law is not based on faith, but *the one who does the works of the law will live by them*. [Lev 18:5]

13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”) [Deut 21:23]

14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we could receive the promise of the Spirit by faith.

The Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant Confirms Justification Apart from Circumcision

15 Brothers and sisters, I offer an example from everyday life: When a covenant has been ratified, even though it is only a human contract, no one can set it aside or add anything to it.

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his descendant. Scripture does not say, “and to the descendants,” referring to many, but “and to your descendant,” referring to one, who is Christ. [Gen 22:18]

17 What I am saying is this: The law that came four hundred thirty years later does not cancel a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to invalidate the promise.

18 For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise, but God graciously gave it to Abraham through the promise.

Digression to Discuss the Purpose of the Law

19 Why then was the law given? It was added because of transgressions, until the arrival of the descendant to whom the promise had been made. It was administered through angels by an intermediary. [cf. Deut 33:2]

20 Now an intermediary is not for one party alone, but God is one.

21 Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that was able to give life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

22 But the scripture imprisoned everything and everyone under sin so that the promise could be given—because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ—to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came we were held in custody under the law, being kept as prisoners until the coming faith would be revealed.

24 Thus the law had become our guardian until Christ, so that we could be declared righteous by faith.

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

Our Spiritual Union with Christ Confirms Justification Apart from Circumcision

26 For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to the promise.

4:1 Now I mean that the heir, as long as he is a minor, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything.

2 But he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father.

3 So also we, when we were minors, were enslaved under the basic forces of the world.

4 But when the appropriate time had come, God sent out his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights.

6 And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, who calls “Abba! Father!”

7 So you are no longer a slave but a son, and if you are a son, then you are also an heir through God.

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Chronological Notes

1) Identity of the Galatians.

- A) Galatians is the only Pauline letter that is not addressed to either an individual or to Christians in a specific city.¹ In the period of late antiquity, “Galatia” was an elastic term reflecting the changing political developments of central Asia Minor (Turkey).²
- B) Galatia became a Roman province in 25 BC, and the province included people from many ethnic groups, including the “Celts” or “Galatians,” who had migrated to Asia Minor by 278 BC. In Paul’s day the province was a large area that reached from the Black Sea in the north to the Mediterranean Sea in the south. As time passed, however, the province was reshaped and much of the territory in the south was removed and formed into the new province of Pisidia with Antioch as its capital.³
- C) Commentators in early church history naturally thought Galatians was written to the province as it existed in later Roman history (to the north). But the work of William Ramsay⁴ and others has led modern scholars to reexamine this position in light of the earlier dimensions of the province in Paul’s day (to the south).⁵ This has led to the development of two theories regarding Paul’s intended audience:

(1) North Galatia.

- (a) Geography: the middle to upper part of central Turkey.
- (b) Cities: unknown cities to the north. Perhaps Ancyra (modern capital of Turkey), Pessinus and Tavium.
- (c) Missionary Journey: churches founded on the second missionary journey and revisited on the third (Acts 16:6; 18:23).

(2) South Galatia.

- (a) Geography: the southern part of central Turkey.
- (b) Cities: Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.
- (c) Missionary Journey: churches founded on the first missionary journey (Acts 13:13–14:23).

- D) While there are strong arguments for both theories, the south Galatia theory is preferable.⁶ Below are some arguments for the south Galatian theory:⁷

- (1) We have clear record of the apostle’s visit to, and establishment of churches in, the cities of the Roman province of southern Galatia, whereas we have no definite record of such in northern Galatia proper.
- (2) Paul repeatedly alludes to Barnabas in Galatians 2 as though he were well known to them. We know Barnabas accompanied Paul on the first missionary journey, but he was not with Paul on his second or any subsequent journey as

¹ The destination of most of Paul’s letters is clear: Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, Philippi, Thessalonica, Timothy, Titus and Philemon.

² Timothy George, “Galatians,” *New American Commentary*, 38.

³ Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 2–5.

⁴ William M. Ramsay, *A Historical Commentary on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*.

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Galatians,” *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 23.

⁶ Older commentators favor the north Galatia theory (Lightfoot), while most modern commentators favor the south Galatia Theory (F. F. Bruce).

⁷ For more arguments see: Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxiii–lxx; Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*, 286–291; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 24–29.

far as is known.

- (3) In Galatians 1, Paul makes a strong case for his independence from the Jerusalem apostles by detailing each visit he made to Jerusalem. If he omitted a visit, he would open himself to the charge that his gospel was influenced by the apostles. Since only two visits are recorded in Galatians (matching Acts 9:26–30 and 11:27–30), the letter must have been written before the Council of Acts 15 and thus must be addressed to the only churches that existed in Galatia at the time (cities in the south).⁸

2) Date.

- A) As can be seen from the third argument in favor of the south Galatia theory, the date of the letter and its destination are linked:
- (1) If addressed to churches in south Galatia, then the letter was written shortly after Paul's first missionary journey and either prior to or just after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. This puts the letter's date at AD 48–50 (Early Date).
 - (2) If addressed to churches in north Galatia, then the letter was written after Paul's second missionary journey and either prior to or during his third missionary journey. This puts the letter's date at AD 53–58 (Late Date).
- B) Another important factor for dating the letter is the correlation of Paul's visits to Jerusalem recorded in Acts and Galatians.
- (1) In Acts, Luke records five visits by Paul to Jerusalem:
 - Conversion visit (Acts 9:26–30).
 - Famine visit (Acts 11:27–30).
 - Jerusalem Council visit (Acts 15:1–29).
 - Hasty visit (Acts 18:22).
 - Collection visit (Acts 21:15–17).
 - (2) In Galatians, Paul records only two visits to Jerusalem:
 - Conversion visit (Gal 1:18–20). This corresponds with the account in Acts 9:26–30.
 - Private Meeting visit (Gal 2:1–10). Now we come to the main difficulty—which visit is this?
 - (3) Proposed Solutions.
 - (a) Solution 1: Galatians 2:1–10 is Luke's third visit (Jerusalem Council) recorded in Acts 15:1–29, with the famine visit of Acts 11:27–30 left unmentioned by Paul in Galatians. This is the traditional view that held sway virtually unchallenged until the early twentieth century. This view allows for either an early or late date.
 - (i) This view has to answer the following questions: Why did Paul fail to mention a visit to Jerusalem in his autobiographical presentation? Why did Paul not mention the decision of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 in his letter to the Galatians? Why did Peter feel so pressured by the Jewish circumcision party at Syrian Antioch after the Council had just ruled on the issue?
 - (b) Solution 2: Galatians 2:1–10 is Luke's second visit (Famine Visit) recorded in Acts 11:27–30, with the Jerusalem Council visit of Acts 15 taking place after Galatians was written. Main proponents include: Ramsay, Bruce, George, Guthrie, Longenecker. This view obviously places an early date on Galatians making it Paul's first epistle (AD 48).
 - (i) In this view the time spans of Galatians 1:18 and 2:1 are understood to be concurrent rather than consecutive (i.e., three years after conversion and fourteen years after conversion). In my opinion, this solution is the better of the two.⁹ See the table below for a summary of the chronology for Galatians:

⁸ Schreiner, 28.

⁹ Stanley D. Toussaint, "The Chronological Problem of Galatians 2:1–10", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 120.480 (1963): 335–340.

Galatians	Event	Acts	Event
1:15–17	Paul's Conversion	9:1–25	Paul's Conversion
1:18–20	First Jerusalem Visit	9:26–30	With Barnabas in Jerusalem
2:1–10	Private Meeting Visit	11:27–30	Famine Visit
2:11–14	Dispute in Antioch	15:1–2	Dispute in Antioch
---	Paul writes Galatians	---	---
---	---	15:3–29	Jerusalem Council Visit
---	---	18:22	Hasty Visit
---	---	21:15–17	Collection Visit