

Paul's Letter to the Galatians
Lesson 1

[Galatians 1:1](#) Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), [2](#) and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia:



As Paul opens this letter it is addressed to the churches of Galatia. What were the churches of Galatia?

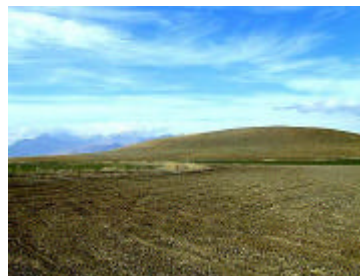
Paul established congregations in the southern Galatian cities on his first missionary journey. Both Jews and Gentiles became believers according to Acts 14. Paul with Barnabas preached and established churches in Iconium, Lystra and Derbe in southern Galatia.



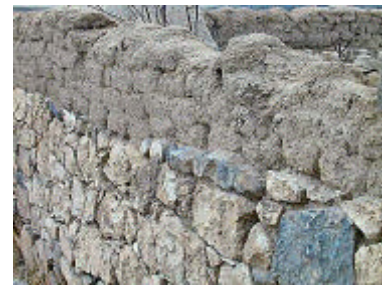
Iconium today is Konya
Pop, 1,412,000+



Lystra today is Gokyurt. Pop. Just a tiny farming village. This is a picture of the ancient Christian carved rock churches in Lystra.



Derby is just a field today. Some research has been done to uncover mud brick walls.



[Galatians 1:3](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, [4](#) who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, [5](#) to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

Paul assures the readers that Jesus Christ died for our sins, but more than that, it was God's will that He died to deliver us from this present evil age. He was speaking of this literal evil world, and it would be done without any merit within or from us.

Notice also that Paul does not use the word “thankful” in any form in this opening. Every other letter he opens with some thought of thankfulness, but not this one. Why? We will see the reason as the letter unfolds.

Galatians 1:6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; **7** which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

The congregations are being led astray by men who were preaching a gospel that was not the same as that which Paul preached. It was not a gospel at all according to Paul. It is a fake. It is a fraud. This false gospel was causing church members to desert Jesus Christ Himself, rather than stay true to the true God.

Galatians 1:8 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. **9** As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. **10** For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

What kind of gospel was circulating? What kind of gospel was contrary to the true gospel in that day? Today preachers have turned away from Christ and preached “humanism” or some other new-fangled notion. In Paul’s day, the Jews termed Paul as a renegade for leaving Judaism for Christianity. Early in Paul’s life, before Christ, Paul had clung to the law. Paul is dogmatic and positive here, for he knows that he is standing upon solid ground. He stands on the fact that Christ died for us and rose again. He had seen the risen Jesus Christ. No angel can change Paul now.

Galatians 1:11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. **12** For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ. **13** For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; **14** and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.

Paul recalls how he was a Jew of the Jews. He was a brilliant man and student in Judaism. He was a student of Gamaliel, either in Jerusalem or Tarsus. He personally persecuted the church. He was on his way up the ladder of success in Judaism, yet that all came to an end on the Damascus Road.

Galatians 1:15 But when He who had set me apart, *even* from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace, was pleased **16** to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, **17** nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus.

By Dr. Jim Hastings

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But God had a plan for Paul, even from the very beginning of his life. Once he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, he did not immediately go to the apostles who were headquartered in Jerusalem. The text in Acts 9 is a far better commentary than I could ever write. Let's look at that text.

Acts 9: ³And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; ⁴and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ⁵And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, ⁶but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." ⁷And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. ⁸And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. ⁹And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

¹⁰Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Behold, here am I, Lord." ¹¹And the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, ¹²and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight." ¹³But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; ¹⁴and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name." ¹⁵But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." ¹⁷And Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he arose and was baptized; ¹⁹and he took food and was strengthened.

Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus, ²⁰and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God." ²¹And all those hearing him continued to be amazed, and were saying, "Is this not he who in Jerusalem destroyed those who called on this name, and who had come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" ²²But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.

²³And when many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, ²⁴but their plot became known to Saul. And they were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; ²⁵but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.

[Galatians 1:18](#) Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. [19](#) But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother. [20](#) (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)

Paul was in Damascus or the surrounding area for three years after that Damascus Road experience. Finally he went to Jerusalem for 15 days, trying to introduce himself, but with little success. He did, however, make contact with Peter and James. If we were to continue reading in Acts 9 we would see that it was at this time that Barnabas connected with Paul and they began their long association together.

[Galatians 1:21](#) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. [22](#) And I was *still* unknown by sight to the churches of Judea which were in Christ; [23](#) but only, they kept hearing, "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith which he once tried to destroy." [24](#) And they were glorifying God because of me. [Galatians 2:1](#) Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

It took 14 years for Paul to return to Jerusalem after spending time in Arabia. We see Barnabas still with Paul but now Titus has joined the ticket.

[Galatians 2:2](#) And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. [3](#) But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. [4](#) But *it was* because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

An issue had arisen that was causing a problem. It was 17 years since his Damascus Road experience with the Lord. During those years he had studied the Scriptures, prayed earnestly, and most of all, listened to the revelation of the Lord. The issue he was compelled to address in Jerusalem during these days concerned Jews who had tried to infiltrate the Church and turn it back to Judaism and the Law. He calls these spies "false brethren." It is interesting that he used this term. Throughout the scripture "brethren" refers to those of Jewish descent and faith. This gives us a clue that Paul was speaking of Jews. When he called them "False" he was telling us that they were Jews who were masquerading as Christians. Christ liberated those who trusted in Him from the restrictions of the Law. Salvation was no longer through the "works of the Law" but it was a free gift of God. The Jews wanted to steal that gift and return them into the bondage of the Law.

[Galatians 2:5](#) But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. [6](#) But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)--well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. [7](#) But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised [8](#) (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his*

apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),⁹ and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *might go* to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.¹⁰ They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do.

The Jewish spies made no inroads with Paul and those around him. There in that 17th year since his Damascus Road experience with the Lord he traveled to Jerusalem to proclaim his call to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. Peter, John, and James were called by the Lord to take the Gospel to the Jews. Barnabas would join Paul and they would spread the gospel of the Lord to many nations. Peter, John, and James gave their full approval to Paul and Barnabas. But notice their only request, a request about the poor, a request that was near to Paul's heart anyway and something he was eager to do.

Galatians 2:¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.¹² For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.¹³ And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"¹⁵ "We *are* Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles;¹⁶ nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.¹⁷ "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!¹⁸ "For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.¹⁹ "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God.²⁰ "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.²¹ "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Paul showed that he was not inferior to any apostle, and especially not to Peter himself. He caught Peter in hypocrisy and corrected him as well as others. Peter had been haunted by ceremonial law and it caused him to waver in his walk. This dishonored Christ. The law had been done away with by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

For Paul, the old man is crucified but the new man is living; sin is mortified, and grace is quickened. The Christian has the comforts of grace. He has the triumphs of grace. But that grace is from God and God alone. Believers live in a state of dependence on Christ. Though he lives in the flesh he is not to live after the flesh.

God's grace cannot stand with man's merit. Grace is no grace unless it is freely given every way. The more simply the believer relies on Christ for every thing, the more devotedly does he walk before Him in all His ordinances and commandments. Christ lives and reigns in him, and he lives here on earth by faith in the Son of God, which works by love, causes obedience, and changes into his holy image. Thus he neither abuses the grace of God, nor makes it in vain.