

# INTRODUCTION TO 48<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS (autumn of A.D. 50)

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### **A. A SUMMARY OF THE BEGINNING OF GENTILE CHRISTIANITY.**

#### **1. The first Jewish churches (A.D. 30-44).**

The events in Acts 1-7 took place in the period A.D. 30-33. The Jerusalem church was the very first local church in the Christian era. The events in Acts 8-12 took place in the period A.D. 33/34-44. Jewish Christian congregations were founded in Judea, Galilee and Samaria<sup>1</sup>.

#### **2. The first Gentile churches (A.D. 34-50).**

Besides the occasional Gentile convert in the period of the ministry of Jesus and Philip, the earliest Gentile ministries were that of the apostles Paul and Peter.

#### **3. The Gentile ministry of Paul: Syria and Cilicia (A.D. 34-50).**

Saul/Paul the persecutor of Hellenists. The high priest as president of the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem was head of the Jewish State as far as internal affairs were concerned. His decrees were even binding to Jews outside Palestine, e.g. Damascus. Damascus is a very ancient city and besides many Syrians living there, there was a large Jewish community with many synagogues, a Nabatean Arab community and a Jewish Christian refugee community who had fled from persecution in Palestine to Damascus.

Paul grew up in Tarsus (modern Turkey), a city thousands of years old. It is a free city since the time of Antiochus IV (171 B.C.) and the centre of schools devoted to philosophy, rhetoric and law. It is the chief city of the province Cilicia. Paul grew up in Tarsus, but also lived in Jerusalem<sup>2</sup>. He was educated in Jewish theology, Hellenistic culture and possessed the coveted Roman citizenship.

*Hellenists were Gentiles that were attracted by the monotheism of the Jews and had become God-fearing Jews (worshippers of God)<sup>3</sup> or proselytes to Judaism<sup>4</sup>.* They spoke Greek and were the main target of persecution by the Hebrew speaking Jews in Jerusalem. One of the seven deacons in Jerusalem, Stephen, had been a leader among the Hellenists<sup>5</sup>. Due to persecution, they were compelled to leave Jerusalem. From then on the Jerusalem church consisted almost entirely of 'Hebrews' (Hebrew speaking Jews). The apostles remained witnessing in Jerusalem<sup>6</sup>.

Saul (Paul)<sup>7</sup> was "still breathing murderous threats" against the people of 'the Way' (Christians) and asked the high priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that he could arrest and haul renegade Jews who had become Christians back<sup>8</sup>.

Paul's calling and commission as apostle among Gentiles (A.D. 34). Paul was converted on the road to Damascus in A.D. 34, where Jesus personally called and commissioned him in this informal way to preach the gospel among the Gentiles (1:16)<sup>9</sup>. Paul "did not consult any man nor did he go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before him, but went immediately into Nabatean Arabia (close to Damascus) and later returned to Damascus (1:16-17).

Paul's ministry in Damascus (A.D. 34-36). "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. He baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ (the expected Messiah). After many days (about 3 years) had gone by, the Jews conspired to kill him. Saul learned about their plan and his followers<sup>10</sup> lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall"<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 9:31

<sup>2</sup> Acts 26:4-5

<sup>3</sup> God-fearing Gentiles (ανδρες ευλαβεις)(Acts 2:5) or worshippers of God (σεβομενοι)(Acts 13:50; 16:14; 17:4,17; 18:7)Acts 2:5; 16:14.

<sup>4</sup> Proselytes to Judaism (προσηλυτου)(Acts 2:11; cf.:13 43; Matthew 23:15)

<sup>5</sup> Acts 6

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>7</sup> His Jewish and his Roman names

<sup>8</sup> Acts 9:1-2

<sup>9</sup> Acts 26:17-18

<sup>10</sup> His ministry was fruitful

<sup>11</sup> Acts 9:19-25

Paul's ministry in Jerusalem (A.D. 37). After his escape, Paul returned to Jerusalem in A.D. 37. This was Paul's first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. He tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and did not believe that he really was a disciple. He wanted to get acquainted with the apostle Peter. So Barnabas brought him to 'the apostles' (a generalizing plural) and told them that Paul preached fearlessly and spoke boldly in the name of Jesus<sup>12</sup>. He stayed 15 days with Peter and also saw James, the Lord's brother (whom Paul probably regarded as 'an apostle') (1:18-20). For these two weeks he took up the work which Stephen had laid down when he was stoned to death. He engaged in debates with the Greek speaking Jews (Hellenists) in Judea, i.e. Jerusalem. But Jesus appeared to him when he was praying in the temple and told him to leave Jerusalem<sup>13</sup>. These Jews tried to kill him and therefore the brothers took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus in Cilicia (A.D. 40). In Galatians Paul says the same: "he went to *Syria and Cilicia*" (2:18-23)<sup>14</sup>, because Syria and Cilicia formed one imperial province of Rome at that time. However, Paul was personally unknown to the churches of Judea, i.e. "to the rest of Judea" (besides Jerusalem). They only heard the report that the man who formerly persecuted the church is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy (1:17-23). The persecution that followed Stephen's death died out with the conversion and departure of the chief persecutor.

Paul's ministry in Tarsus (A.D. 37-44/45). Paul ministered about 8 years in Cilicia. Paul's method was to begin his ministry in Jewish synagogues where there were many Jewish Hellenists (God-fearing men and proselytes)<sup>15</sup>. Many of them became Christians.

Paul's ministry in Antioch (A.D. 44/45-46). Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to help him in Antioch and together they ministered a year long. It was in Antioch that it had been most clearly discerned that the followers of Jesus Christ (*those who belonged to the Way*)<sup>16</sup> were not just another Jewish sect, but had a faith that was completely unique among all the religions in the Roman Empire. It was at Antioch that the followers of Jesus Christ were first called *Christians*<sup>17</sup>. '*Christians*' were in fact the continuation of God's Old Testament people, but now on the higher plan of the new covenant and the enlargement of God's Old Testament people by believers from all the other nations!

A severe famine spread over the entire Roman world during the reign of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (A.D.41-54). The church of Antioch sent support to the elders (in Jerusalem) by Barnabas and Saul<sup>18</sup>. King Herod Agrippa<sup>19</sup> reigned in Judea from A.D. 41 until his death in A.D. 44. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch after Agrippa's death, probably in A.D. 46. This was Paul's second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion<sup>20</sup>. They took Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, along with them.

Paul's ministry with Barnabas in Galatia (A.D. 47-48). This was Paul's first missionary journey; together with Barnabas and Mark. They went to Cyprus<sup>21</sup> and Pamphilia (in modern Turkey): to the cities Pisidian Antioch<sup>22</sup>, Iconium<sup>23</sup>, Lycaonian Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding country<sup>24</sup>. In Antioch Paul said to the Jews, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life we now turn to the Gentiles"<sup>25</sup>.

Recognizing Paul's Gentile ministry (A.D. 50). Paul went up to Jerusalem "14 years later" (2:1), in A.D. 50. This was Paul's third visit to Jerusalem after his conversion. He was accompanied by his co-worker, Barnabas and they took Titus, a Greek (Gentile) along with them. Privately he set before the Jewish leaders of the Church ("those reputed to be pillars") the gospel he preached among the Gentiles. They did not compel Titus to be circumcised! Peter, John and James, saw that Paul had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. So they gave Barnabas and Paul the right hand of fellowship. God worked in the ministry of Paul as 'an apostle of the Gentiles' just as He worked in the ministry of Peter as 'an apostle of the Jews'. Therefore they decided that Paul and Barnabas should go to the Gentiles and Peter and John to the Jews (2:7-10).

#### 4. The Gentile ministry of Peter: Caesarea (A.D. 40).

Peter's ministry in Joppa (before A.D. 40). After Peter returned from Samaria<sup>26</sup> he travelled about the country, visited the saints, healed the paralytic Aeneas, raised Tabitha (Dorcas, meaning: Gazelle) from the dead and stayed in the house of the tanner Simon in Joppa (Jaffa).

<sup>12</sup> Acts 9:26-29

<sup>13</sup> Acts 22: 8,21.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 9:31

<sup>15</sup> Romans 1:16

<sup>16</sup> Acts 9:2

<sup>17</sup> Acts 11:25-26

<sup>18</sup> Acts 11:27-30

<sup>19</sup> Also called Herod 2 or Agrippa 1

<sup>20</sup> Agrippa died in A.D. 44

<sup>21</sup> Acts 13:4-12

<sup>22</sup> Acts 13:13-50

<sup>23</sup> Acts 13:51

<sup>24</sup> Acts 14:6

<sup>25</sup> Acts 13:45-48

<sup>26</sup> Acts chapter 8

Peter's ministry in Caesarea (about A.D. 40). God gave a Roman centurion, Cornelius, a vision and he sent for the apostle Peter. Through a revelation to the apostle Peter, Peter went to Caesarea, entered the house of this God-fearing Gentile and preached the gospel to him, his family and friends.

Peter clearly proclaimed the impartiality of God with respect to race<sup>27</sup>. Acts 10:43, 11:17 and 15:7 mention faith. The Holy Spirit fell on the hearers (the Pentecost of the Gentiles) just as on the disciples in the beginning (the Pentecost of the Jews). The baptism with water is the visible sign and seal of the baptism with the Spirit<sup>28</sup>.

Recognizing Peter's Gentile ministry (A.D. 50). At the Jerusalem Conference in A.D. 50 Peter said, "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe"<sup>29</sup>.

Peter's deviation from the gospel is opposed by Paul (A.D. 50). *At the conference or consultation of Jerusalem* the apostles and elders of Jerusalem decided to send a letter containing the decision of the consultation with Paul and Barnabas, accompanied by Judas and Silas (leaders among the brothers) to Antioch<sup>30</sup>. We are not told why Peter visited Antioch at this time, but when certain men from the circumcision party "came from James" (better: came from Jerusalem where James was a leader), he drew back and separated himself from eating with the Gentiles. His hypocrisy caused the other Jews and even Barnabas to also withdraw from eating 'the love feast'<sup>31</sup> with the Gentile Christians. This behaviour was against what Peter had learned 10 years before in A.D. 40 with regard to the enquirers, the Gentile Cornelius and his family and friends<sup>32</sup>, against the spirit of the decision made at the Jerusalem consultation in A.D. 50 and against the gospel<sup>33</sup>. Therefore Paul opposed Peter to his face (openly in the presence of the other people present) (2:11-16).

Peter had heard the teachings from Jesus whereby he "declared all foods 'clean'"<sup>34</sup>. He had seen how the Master welcomed all weary and burdened people to come to him<sup>35</sup>. He knew Jesus welcomed non-Israelites<sup>36</sup>. Jesus had emphasized the oneness of all believers worldwide<sup>37</sup>.

#### 5. The Gentile ministries of Philip and Barnabas (before A.D. 40 - 46).

Philip's ministry to a city in Samaria (before A.D. 40). Philip, one of the seven deacons in Jerusalem, was also one of the Hellenistic leaders. As one of those scattered in the persecution in Jerusalem, he preached the gospel in a Samaritan city, performed exorcisms and healings. Samaritans (half-Jews) believed the gospel and were baptised with water<sup>38</sup>. Because the door had not been opened by apostles<sup>39</sup>, these Samaritans had to wait for the apostles Peter and John to lay hands on them and pray for them for their baptism with the Spirit<sup>40</sup> (this is the Pentecost of the Samaritans/half-Jews).

Philip's ministry on the road to Gaza (before A.D. 40). An angel guided Philip to the desert road between Jerusalem and Gaza where he came across an Ethiopian eunuch, a treasurer of the Ethiopian court. This man had been worshipping in Jerusalem during one of the great pilgrimage-festivals. and was on his way home to Kush or Upper Nubia. At that time it lay between south Egypt (second cataract of the Nile) and later Ethiopia and was called Ethiopia by the ancient Greeks. *This chamberlain was probably a God-fearing Gentile*<sup>41</sup>, because it is questionable whether a eunuch could have been admitted to the commonwealth of Israel as a full proselyte (Deuteronomy 23:1; Isaiah 56:3). He was reading/studying Isaiah 53:7-8. Philip used this passage to explain the good news about Jesus to him. He believed and when they passed 'some water', he asked to be baptised. They both went down (the road) into the water. Philip baptised him while they both stood<sup>42</sup> in the water. The chamberlain must have received the Spirit, because he went on his way rejoicing (5:22)<sup>43</sup>. Philip preached the gospel in all the cities through which he passed until he reached Caesarea, where he probably settled<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> Acts 10:1-48

<sup>28</sup> Acts 11:44-48; 15:5-11

<sup>29</sup> Acts 15:7

<sup>30</sup> Acts 15:22-35

<sup>31</sup> Greek: agape. It seems that originally the Lord's Supper took place at the conclusion of such a get-together. Cf 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 where the rich Christians separated themselves socially from the poor. In Antioch the Jewish Christians separated themselves racially from the Gentile Christians.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 10:15, 27-28,34 -35

<sup>33</sup> Romans 10:12

<sup>34</sup> Mark 7:19

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 11:28

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 8:11; 28:18-20; Mark 12:9; Luke 4:16-30; 17:11-19

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 13:31-32; Luke 14:23; 19:10; John 3:16; 4:42; 10:16; 12:32; 17:19-20

<sup>38</sup> Acts 8:1-11

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 16:18-19

<sup>40</sup> Acts 8:14-17

<sup>41</sup> Acts 2:5 εὐλαβῆς = God-fearer.

<sup>42</sup> See Acts 22:16 and the ancient pictures of baptisms in the catacombs of Rome.

<sup>43</sup> Ephesians 1:13

<sup>44</sup> Acts 21:8

### Barnabas' ministry in Antioch (about A.D. 40 – 46).

While the apostles remained in Jerusalem, the Greek speaking Jews, who had become believers in Jesus Christ, were scattered because of the great persecution by the Hebrew speaking Jews against them. They first proclaimed the gospel only to Jews, but men from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch in Syria and began to tell the good news to Gentiles. A great number of people turned and believed<sup>45</sup>. The church at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

By the year A.D. 44 they had founded the congregation in Antioch of Syria. In A.D. 44/45 Barnabas went to Tarsus and brought Paul to help him in Antioch and together they ministered a year long.

There was a severe famine which spread over the entire Roman world during the reign of Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (A.D. 41-54). King Herod Agrippa<sup>46</sup> was king of Judea from A.D. 41-44. The church of Antioch sent support to the elders (in Jerusalem) by Barnabas and Saul<sup>47</sup>. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch after Agrippa died in A.D. 44., probably in A.D. 46. This was Paul's second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion<sup>48</sup>. They took Mark, the cousin of Barnabas along with them.

## **B. THE WRITER OF GALATIANS.**

The author is the apostle Paul. He is an apostle, because he was not sent by any man, but by the God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. He wrote the letter in the first person singular (1:6,10-17). But before sending the letter, he had discussed the contents of the letter with "all the brothers with him". This was Paul's first visit to Corinth. Silas and Timothy joined Paul after he had written the letter<sup>49</sup>. Even though the church at Corinth may not yet have been organised as a church, these brothers were the first group of believers in Corinth. Some of them were Jewish converts, like Priscilla and Aquila, who had come from Rome.

Because the letter was a sharp reproof against false Jewish Christian teachers that had come from Jerusalem in Israel, Paul regarded it necessary to discuss the letter's contents with others who had the welfare of Israel on their hearts. Paul did not want to violate the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 about reproof.

## **C. THE RECIPIENTS OF GALATIANS.**

All the evidence shows that Paul wrote this letter, not to some unknown churches in northern Galatia, but to the known churches in southern Galatia. During the first missionary journey from A.D. 47-49, Paul and his team had established churches in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which were in the region called southern Galatia. The gospel spread throughout that whole region<sup>50</sup>.

Soon thereafter false Jewish teachers came from Judea to Galatia and taught the Christians that unless they were circumcised and kept the Jewish law they could not be saved. Jesus said about them, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are"<sup>51</sup>.

At the beginning of the second missionary journey in A.D. 50, Paul and his team travelled to the cities in southern Galatia, called Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. Then they continued to travel, not towards northern Galatia, but "throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia" which consisted of the cities north of Antioch and its region towards Asia in the west. Acts 16:6 mentions that they were travelling, but does not mention that they were preaching the gospel or establishing churches at that time.

The Holy Spirit led them to Troas and from there to Macedonia and Achaia in Europe. It is clear that Paul's second missionary journey did not go through northern Galatia, but through southern Galatia, where he delivered the decisions of the Jerusalem Conference to the existing churches in southern Galatia and strengthened the churches there that were attacked by the false Jewish teachers<sup>52</sup>.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul especially contends against these false Jewish teachers who tried to turn Christians into Jews by teaching that Christians should keep the Jewish law, especially physical circumcision. These false teachers would not bypass the churches in southern Galatia on their way to northern Galatia.

Moreover, Barnabas, who had worked with Paul in these southern Galatian churches, is mentioned three times in the letter to the Galatians (2:1,9,13).

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<sup>45</sup> Acts 11:19-21

<sup>46</sup> Also called Herod 2 or Agrippa 1

<sup>47</sup> Acts 11:27-30

<sup>48</sup> Agrippa died in A.D. 44

<sup>49</sup> Acts 18:1-5

<sup>50</sup> Acts 13:49

<sup>51</sup> Matthew 23:15; Acts 15:1

<sup>52</sup> Acts 16:1-5

Finally, it is only with respect to these southern Galatian churches that Paul could say at the Jerusalem Conference or Consultation that he had not for a moment given in to these false teachers who had infiltrated the Christian churches, so that the truth of the gospel might continue with the Christian churches (2:4-5)! The conclusion is that Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians not to the Gauls in northern Galatia but to the churches in southern Galatia.

#### **D. THE DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING OF GALATIANS.**

There are several good reasons to believe that Galatians was written in the autumn A.D. 50 from Corinth.

##### **1. Galatians was written after the Jerusalem Council.**

Against the theory that Galatians mentions all Paul's visits to Jerusalem, is the fact that the words in Galatians 2:1, "Fourteen years later I went up *again* to Jerusalem" does not necessarily mean "for the second time"<sup>53</sup>. It simply mentions a particular visit to Jerusalem in which the issue of the false teachers, who infiltrated the churches and the issue of the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians were discussed and decided. Therefore, the visit mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10 must be identified with the third visit of Paul to Jerusalem in A.D. 50, fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem which he mentioned in Galatians 1:18. This third visit was during *the Jerusalem Conference or Consultation*, where Paul's relation to the other great leaders, James, Peter and John was officially established.

##### **2. Galatians was written after two previous visits to Galatia.**

In Galatians 4:13 Paul implied that he had visited the Galatian churches *twice* before he wrote this letter. The first visit was during his first missionary journey recorded in Acts 13-14, and the second visit was during the beginning of his second missionary journey in A.D. 50, recorded in Acts 15:36 to 16:5. Paul mentioned that during the former of these two visits, he was forced to continue his ministry there for a longer period than he had at first contemplated, because of some unexplained sickness.

##### **3. Galatians was written not long after the conversion of the Galatians.**

According to Galatians 1:6, Paul was amazed that the Galatians had so quickly deserted God, who had graciously called them in Christ, and had turned towards 'a different gospel' that was a false gospel. The letter to the Galatians must therefore have been written very soon after his second visit to them in A.D. 50.

##### **4. Galatians may well have been written in A.D. 50 from Corinth.**

This was before the arrival of Timothy and Silas from Thessalonica<sup>54</sup>. This would explain why Paul omits greetings from these two fellow workers in his letter to the Galatians. After Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul also wrote 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians from Corinth in A.D. 50. Galatians was therefore the very first and oldest of all the letters of Paul that have been preserved!

#### **E. THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE OR CONSULTATION**

##### **1. The Judaist party.**

In about A.D. 49/50, certain Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem to Antioch, saying that unless Gentile Christians were circumcised, they could not be saved. They became known as "*the Judaist party*", a *Christian sect which tried to turn Gentile Christians into Jews*. They believed that all Christians should keep the Old Testament ceremonial law, especially circumcision, the Sabbath days and the food rules. They immediately plotted revenge. Their plan seemed to have been to follow the missionaries everywhere and oppose "the gospel of justification by faith alone". They came to Antioch, but Paul vigorously opposed them. They also came to the South Galatian churches in Asia Minor and succeeded to pull new believers into their legalism. Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians especially to counter the false teaching of the Judaist party.

Thus, when nominal Jewish Christian converts from the sect of the Pharisees<sup>55</sup> heard that the Gentiles were being saved by faith apart from keeping the law and particularly apart from being physically circumcised they immediately launched a campaign against the apostle Paul and his message. They sent some of their people without authorisation of the church at Jerusalem<sup>56</sup> to the church at Antioch to teach the Gentile Christians that unless they kept the law and particularly circumcision, they could not be saved<sup>57</sup>.

The Jewish false teachers, however, followed Paul everywhere and tried to destroy the results of his work among the Gentiles. They were partly to blame for Peter's reprehensible conduct at Antioch, when he refused to associate with Gentiles (2:11-12). They also travelled throughout Galatia, insisting that the Gentile Christians be circumcised as a means unto salvation (5:2-3; 6:12). These false teachers did not deny that faith in Jesus Christ was necessary, but they loudly proclaimed that certain requirements of the Jewish ceremonial law were equally necessary for salvation (4:9-10). These

<sup>53</sup> Paul's second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion was in A.D. 46

<sup>54</sup> Acts 19:1-8

<sup>55</sup> Acts 15:5

<sup>56</sup> Acts 15:24

<sup>57</sup> Acts 15:1

false teachers preached a different gospel than Paul. They preached a gospel about 'Christ plus' the law, which consisted of faith in Jesus Christ *plus* obedience to the Old Testament law as necessary for salvation. In order to bolster their own cause they cast suspicion on Paul. They tried to discredit Paul by claiming that his apostleship was not from God but from men, and that therefore his gospel was second-hand (1:1)<sup>58</sup>.

Paul knew that these Jewish false teachers were troublemakers and Christians in name only. They were insincere and inconsistent, because while trying to force others to observe the law, they themselves failed to keep it (6:13).

Their aim was to alienate the Christian *Gentiles* from the apostle Paul, to escape persecution from other *Jews* and to boast that they had convinced *Gentiles* to receive the *Jewish* physical circumcision. In contrast to these false teachers, Paul preached only the gospel about 'Christ crucified' (4:17; 6:12-14).

## 2. The delegation from Antioch.

The Antioch church sent a delegation to Jerusalem to meet with the other apostles and the elders of the church at Jerusalem in order to *discuss and decide the relationship of the Old Testament law to the New Testament gospel as well as the relationship between the Jewish and Gentile Christians*. The Gentile Christian, Titus, was sent along as a test case and a challenge to the Jewish Christians (2:3). There were two important meetings in Jerusalem:

## 3. A private meeting of leaders in Jerusalem (A.D. 50).

This private meeting is described in Galatians 2:2-10. There was evidently complete agreement on every point. They agreed that Titus must not receive circumcision. They agreed that the basic doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ apart from the works of the law must be upheld for both Jews and Gentiles. They decided to make a division, probably a geographical division of labour, so that James, Peter and John would preach the gospel to Jews and Paul and Barnabas to Gentiles. And they agreed that the needy Christians in Jerusalem must be remembered. At the end of this interview, the Jerusalem leaders, called 'pillars', gave Paul and Barnabas 'the right hand of fellowship.'

## 4. The defence.

As a result of the attack by Judaists, a *conference or consultation* was held in Jerusalem to speak about the relationship between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. This conference is described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2. At this meeting of only two local churches, the Jewish Christians received a severe blow.

At the meeting, the Jewish Christian converts from the sect of the Pharisees, that were falsely teaching that Christians had to keep the Jewish law, were given an opportunity to defend their position<sup>59</sup>.

Then the apostle Peter reminded everyone how God himself made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles with respect to the way of salvation<sup>60</sup>.

The apostle Paul reported about the miraculous signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles.

James concluded that what was happening in the Gentile world was clearly a fulfilment of prophecy in the Old Testament<sup>61</sup> and that they should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who were turning to God. Being a practical man, James suggested *the adoption of certain 'requirements'<sup>62</sup> in the sense of 'necessary things' for loving brothers or in the sense of 'decisions'<sup>63</sup> in the form of 'advice' that would make it possible for Jewish and Gentile Christians to live together in peace and harmony in this period of transition<sup>64</sup>. See Paul's teaching in Romans 14.*

## 5. The decision.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Jerusalem Council decided that everybody is saved only by grace apart from the works of the law, and that especially physical circumcision was not necessary to be saved. The apostles, elders and the whole church reached a consensus, they recorded their decisions and made it known to all the Christian churches<sup>65</sup>. However, this does not turn the Jerusalem Conference or Consultation into a worldwide Council or Synod!

## **F. THE PURPOSE OF WRITING GALATIANS.**

Because many Galatian Christians had listened to these false teachers who had infiltrated into the church, Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians with two purposes:

**His first purpose was to defend the doctrine of salvation.**

Some Christians fell into the false extreme of thinking that they would be *saved by doing the works of the law*. Paul answered this perversion of the doctrine of salvation by teaching that whoever tries to be saved by keeping the law, must keep the law 100%. But because nobody has kept the law perfectly or can keep the law perfectly, no one will be

<sup>58</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:1 ff.

<sup>59</sup> Acts 15:5

<sup>60</sup> Acts 15:7-11; cf. Romans 10:12-13

<sup>61</sup> Amos 9:11-12

<sup>62</sup> Acts 15:28. των επαναγκης

<sup>63</sup> Acts 16:4. τα δογματα κεκριμενα

<sup>64</sup> Acts 15:20-21

<sup>65</sup> Acts 15:22-29; John 16:13

saved by keeping the law! *Whoever tries to keep the law, but does not keep it absolutely perfectly, is accursed (3:10-11). And whoever tries to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ and have fallen away from grace (5:4).*

He also taught that both Jews and Gentiles are only saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from keeping the law. Whoever puts his trust in Jesus Christ is saved, because Christ fulfilled the law in his place<sup>66</sup> and carried the curse of all his sins in his place (3:10-14).

**His second purpose was to defend the doctrine of grace.**

Other Christians fell into the other extreme of thinking that they had been *set free from doing the works of the law*. They thought that they may sin as much as they like, because they had already been saved by grace. Paul answered this perversion of the doctrine of grace by teaching that a Christian who walks by the Holy Spirit of freedom will not fulfil the desires of the flesh: he will not sin as he likes. Instead he will bear the fruit of the Spirit, which automatically fulfils the requirements of the moral law: to love God, your neighbour and yourself (5:13-26). God's grace enables Christians to live the moral life.

## **G. THE DIVISION OF GALATIANS.**

The letter of Paul to the Galatians may be given **the title: "Galatians - the gospel of justification by faith apart from the works of the law."** The letter portrays Jesus Christ crucified for our justification, which results in true freedom.

**The theme** of Galatians is written in Galatians 2:16,20-21, "A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. ... Righteous is not gained through the law, but by the grace of God."

The letter to the Galatians may be divided into three parts:

### **1. Part one. Galatians 1-2. The origin of the gospel.**

The gospel, which Paul preached, was not made up by man, but by God. Paul did not receive it from any man, but by revelation from Christ (1:11-12). There is only one gospel and everyone who preaches another gospel is accursed (1:6-9). The apostles in Jerusalem fully agreed with the gospel that Paul preached everywhere (2:7-9).

### **2. Part two. Galatians 3-4. The vindication of the gospel.**

The Old Testament law pronounced a curse on the disobedient. By being crucified, Christ redeemed all who believe in him from this curse (3:10-14). This promise or covenant is superior to the law and is still in force. The covenant came long before the law and came directly from God, while the law came 645 (215+430)<sup>67</sup> years later through mediation by Moses (3:15-20). The covenant is not annulled by the law, because the purpose of the law is to reveal our sinfulness and to lead us to Christ (3:21-24).

The false teachers, who perverted the true gospel, caused the Galatians *to exchange their former slavery to paganism for slavery to Judaism* (4:8-11). The Old Testament history records the command to get rid of the slave-woman and her son, who will never share in the inheritance of the free-woman and her son. The Galatians are exhorted to cast out "the slave-woman and her son", who *represent bondage to the law*, and hold on to "the free-woman and her son", who *represent freedom in Christ* (4:21-31).

### **3. Part three. Galatians 5-6. The application of the gospel.**

*The false teachers tried to combine justification by the law with justification by faith.* That is absolutely impossible! Whoever tries to be justified by his own works of the law is alienated from Christ and cannot be justified (5:2-4).

When you are justified by faith in Jesus Christ you are set free from trying to be justified by the works of the law. Christ has set Christians free so that they can live in freedom from trying to save themselves (5:1).

When you are justified by faith in Jesus Christ you are not free to live in sin and fulfil the desires of your sinful nature (5:13). Every Christian that lives by the Spirit of Christ will crucify the sinful nature and will bear the fruit of the Spirit (5:16-26). True freedom does not mean disregarding the law, but it means serving one another in love and love sums up the law (5:13-14,23b). True freedom carries other people's burdens, shares all good things with their instructors, does things that please the Holy Spirit and never becomes weary to do good, especially to other Christians (6:1-10).

## **H. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF GALATIANS.**

### **1. Law and grace.**

Paul's mind is so broad that it has room for both *sovereign grace* and *human responsibility*. Paul refuses to set aside the grace of God, as if righteousness could be gained through the law (2:21). The law shows us our need for salvation. God's grace shows us that we are completely saved by Christ's completed work on the cross. We are saved sovereignly by divine grace and we are given the human responsibility to serve one another in love.

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<sup>66</sup> Matthew 5:17

<sup>67</sup> The period from Abraham's arrival in Canaan to Jacob's departure from Canaan to Egypt was 25 (Genesis 12:4; 16:16; 17:17,24; 21:5) + 60 (Genesis 25:26) + 130 (Genesis 47:28) = 215 years (2092-1887 B.C.). + Exodus 12:40 = 430 years (1887-1447 B.C.). Total = 645 years: (2092 – 1447 B.C.) the period of the patriarchs in Canaan.

## **2. Works and faith.**

The false teachers preached a gospel of justification by works of the law besides faith. Paul preached the gospel of justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law (2:16). *Works keep people striving to earn salvation. Faith makes people free to receive salvation.*

## **3. Acts of the sinful nature and the fruit of the Spirit.**

The sinful nature (flesh) makes us prone to sin<sup>68</sup>. The Holy Spirit gives us daily victory over sin and makes us fruitful Christians (5:19-23).

## **4. Circumcision and the cross.**

People who believe that physical circumcision is necessary for salvation are not saved and are not free. Instead they are slaves that have to obey the whole law. They are accursed, because they cannot keep the law (5:3; 3:10). People who undergo circumcision try to avoid persecution by the Jews. And people who promote circumcision boast because they have succeeded to turn a Gentile into a Jew (6:13-14). Only the death of Jesus Christ on the cross saves people from the curse brought about by the law (3:13-14); it rescues people from the present evil age (1:4); and it crucifies the sinful nature in people with its passions and desires (5:24).

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<sup>68</sup> Romans 7