

The Epistle of Saint Paul the Apostle unto the Galatians

To Whom Was the Epistle Written?

Though there is some difference of opinion among the learned as to which part of Galatia Saint Paul the Apostle addressed, yet the most widely received view is this—that the epistle was written unto the churches of *Southern Galatia*. These were the regions where Saint Paul had ministered during his *first missionary journey*.

Distinctive Character of the Epistle

A Contrast of Covenants

The Epistle to the Galatians manifested the superiority of the *New Covenant* over the *Old*.

The New Covenant	The Old Covenant
Gospel	Judaism
Spirit	Flesh
Faith	Works
Promise (through Abraham)	Curse (through Moses)
Maturity	Childhood
Son	Servant
Liberty	Bondage

The Unique Tone of Saint Paul

In this epistle, Saint Paul opened not with thanksgiving nor with words of commendation, as his custom was in other letters. His tone is earnest and severe, for his heart was deeply grieved. Neither doth he here request prayer on his behalf, as oft he did elsewhere. Moreover, he himself wrote the whole letter with his own hand, as it is written: “*Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand*” (Galatians 6:11).

The Historical Background

The First Missionary Journey of Saint Paul

Saint Paul and Barnabas were sent forth by the *Church of Antioch*. They would first preach in the *synagogues of the Jews*, as it is written, “*To the Jew first, and also to the Greek*” (Romans 1:16). And when there was no synagogue, they proclaimed the Gospel in the streets and marketplaces. The Lord wrought *miracles* by their hands, that the people might be gathered and hear the word of salvation.

During this journey, about *five churches* were established. Upon their return, they came again unto *Antioch*.

The Council at Jerusalem

(Acts 15:2–35)

1. The Controversy (Acts 15:1–5)

Certain believing Jews were troubled because of Paul’s ministry among the Gentiles, thinking that he preached but *half of the Gospel*. They desired that the Gentile believers also should be *circumcised* and *keep the Law of Moses*, saying that without it, none could be saved.

2. The Gathering of the Council (Acts 15:6–18)

Therefore Paul and Barnabas went up to *Jerusalem* to confer with the apostles and

elders concerning this matter. There arose much disputing. Then Peter stood up and testified of his experience with *Cornelius*, how God had given the Holy Ghost unto the Gentiles also. Afterward Paul and Barnabas declared the wonders that God had wrought among the nations by their hands.

Thus the Council confirmed that salvation is by *grace through faith*, not by the works of the law; and they sent their decision unto the churches, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with them.

Guidance from the Holy Scriptures

Saint James, being guided by the Word of God, gave counsel and resolved the matter.

The Decision at Jerusalem

(Acts 15:19–25, 3)

It was determined that circumcision should not be required of the Gentiles. The Church at Jerusalem wrote an official letter, which was sent by the hands of trusted elders unto Antioch.

The Judaizers (Yehood-Parast)

Yet not all the Jewish believers received this decision. Some still held that Saint Paul was not declaring the full message. The Judaizers taught that obedience to the Law was necessary for salvation. They said, “Faith bringeth entrance into the Kingdom, but perfection is attained by the Law.”

They also claimed that circumcision was the essential act of initiation into Christianity. These men followed Saint Paul from church to church, saying they had been sent by the Apostles at Jerusalem, and thus they troubled the believers and sought to weaken the ministry of Paul.

The Concern of Saint Paul

the churches which Saint Paul had himself established were now endangered by false teachings. Therefore, the Apostle severely condemned those who perverted the Gospel (Galatians 1:7–17; 5:10–13; 6:13).

Saint Paul was also grieved with the Galatian believers for their simplicity, that they were so soon removed from the truth (Galatians 3:1–5). He even rebuked Saint Peter when he showed weakness in dealing with the Gentiles (Galatians 2:11–14).

Date of Writing

it is believed that this Epistle may have been the earliest of Saint Paul’s letters, written between the years 49 and 55 A.D.

Summary of the Epistle to the Galatians

Saint Paul defends his apostleship (Chapters 1–2). He expounds the doctrine of justification by faith (Chapters 3–4), declaring that the entire work of salvation was accomplished by Christ upon the Cross.

In the latter part (Chapters 5–6), he instructs the believers in practical Christian living, showing the liberty that is found in Christ.

Principal Themes

The contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16–26).

A thorough discourse on the Law (Galatians 3:19–25): that it was given to restrain sin and to

serve as a tutor to bring us unto the Truth.

Justification by faith (Galatians 2:16–17; 3:11): “For the just shall live by faith.”