

GALATIANS 1-6

Galatia, known as a Roman province in Asia Minor, is part of present-day Turkey. Since the territories included in this province varied according to the prevailing political circumstances, the “churches of Galatia” mentioned in the Letter could refer either to the churches in **Northern Galatia** or to those in **Southern Galatia**. According to the testimony of the Acts of the Apostles, the Apostle visited Southern Galatia during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:14, 51; 14:16). During his second missionary journey, he passed through Northern Galatia (Acts 16:6), and he appears to have passed through it again during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23). The majority of the members of the churches he established were **Gentile Christians** (Gal 4:8; 5:2, 3, 6, 12, 13). It is generally thought that this Letter was written from **Ephesus around A.D. 54–55**, after his second visit to Northern Galatia (Acts 18:23; Gal 4:1).

As a result of proclaiming to the Galatian communities the Gospel of salvation that God had offered to all through Christ (Gal 1:11–12), churches were established among them (Gal 3:1–5). Later, however, **Jewish Christians** visited them and proclaimed to them **another gospel** (Gal 1:7). According to the position of those who advocated circumcision, Paul had proclaimed only a **partial gospel** in Galatia (Gal 3:1–5)—that is, a Gospel that did not require, as a condition for salvation, observance of the Mosaic Law, the celebration of the Jewish festivals, or the observance of the dietary regulations prescribed by the Law. It is against this background that Paul presents, through a series of arguments, the deeper meaning and implications of the **true Gospel** (Gal 1:1, 11–12; 4:1–7) to the communities in which Gentile Christians constituted the majority.

Paul is deeply disturbed because the Galatian community has deviated from the true Gospel. Therefore, unlike his usual letters, this Letter contains **no expression of thanksgiving**. Instead, he gives glory to God in a single statement (Gal 1:5).

Analysis

Galatians 1:1 “Not from human beings”: Paul’s ministry was not a human calling conferred by any community or individual (Phil 2:25; 2 Cor 8:23). This is Paul’s justification in response to the fact that his apostolic authority was being questioned by many.

“Being an apostle”: The Greek word *apostolos* means “one who is sent.” Paul has been “sent” according to the commission of God and the risen Christ.

Galatians 1:2 “To the churches of Galatia”: The Greek word used here is *ekklesiai*, meaning an “assembly” or “community of the Church.” Paul is writing to the communities of believers in the regions of Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, and Derbe, which belonged to the Roman province of Galatia.

Galatians 1:3 “Grace and peace”: This is a characteristic greeting of Paul (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2). The Greek word *charis* means “grace” and refers to the salvation given by God through Christ. The state that comes about in the relationship between God and humanity through this grace is called peace (*eirēnē*). Cf. 1 Cor 1:3.

Galatians 1:5 “Amen”: In Hebrew, this liturgical response means “Let it be so” or “So be it.”

Galatians 1:6 “I am astonished”: The Greek verb *thaumazō*, meaning “to marvel” or “to be astonished,” expresses Paul’s sense of amazement. It conveys Paul’s distress, pain, and indignation at the fact that the believers of the Galatian churches had been led astray by false teachers into distorted forms of teaching.

Galatians 1:8 “Even if an angel”: This is a deliberate hyperbole used by Paul to establish the authenticity and authority of the Gospel.

“Let him be accursed”: The Greek word *anathema* (“accursed”) expresses the apostle’s intense emotional reaction concerning the word of God and the true Gospel.

Galatians 1:13 “To destroy”: The Greek word *portheō* means “to destroy,” “to devastate,” or “to annihilate.” Because of his excessive zeal for the traditions of Jewish society, Paul had attempted to destroy the early Christian community (Acts 8:1–3; 9:1, 22; 26:9–11). The early Christian community is described here as the **“Church of God”**, *ekklesia* (Eph 1:22).

Galatians 1:14 “The traditions of my ancestors”: Paul, who had studied under Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law (Acts 22:3), had also followed this same path (Phil 3:6).

Galatians 1:15 “He set me apart”: The Greek word used here is *aphorizō*, meaning “to set apart,” “to separate,” or “to appoint specially.” Paul places himself within the prophetic tradition in which God sets apart and appoints his messengers even before their birth (cf. Isa 49:1; Jer 1:5).

Galatians 1:16 “Flesh and blood”: This is a Semitic expression referring to a human being (Sir 14:18; Matt 16:17).

Galatians 1:17 “To Arabia”: Arabia refers here to the Nabataean kingdom extending from Damascus in the north of Palestine to the Red Sea in the south. According to traditional understanding, Paul may have travelled to the mountainous region of Sinai, called Horeb. It was there that Moses and Elijah had profound encounters with God (Exod 19:2–3; 1 Kgs 19:8–18).

Galatians 1:18 “After three years”: This refers to a period of preparation in Paul’s life. After his stay in Arabia, Paul returned to Damascus and then travelled to Jerusalem.

“Cephas”: This name for Simon Peter means “rock” (Matt 16:18). Paul uses this name more frequently in his letters (1 Cor 1:12; 9:5; 15:5).

“To visit”: The Greek word *historeō* means “to see personally,” “to become acquainted with,” or “to inquire about.” During this time Paul must have sought to learn personally about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:19 “Except James, the Lord’s brother”: The word *adelphos* (“brother”) is also used in Semitic usage to refer to persons who are closely related (Mark 6:3). James, who was related to Jesus and who held an important position in the Church of Jerusalem (Gal 2:9), was not one of the Twelve Apostles.

Galatians 1:21 “Syria and Cilicia”: Paul’s birthplace, Tarsus, was in Cilicia, while Antioch in Syria, an important centre for missionary work among the Gentiles, was located in Syria (cf. Acts 22:3; 13:1–3).

Galatians 2:1–10 This is an account of Paul’s second journey to Jerusalem (cf. Gal 1:18). There is an opinion that this journey was made when Paul and Barnabas went to Judea with assistance for the Church (Acts 11:28–30), while another view is that they went to Jerusalem to participate in the **Council of Jerusalem** (Acts 15:1–29).

Galatians 2:1 “After fourteen years”: This may mean fourteen years after Paul’s conversion in Damascus. However, it may also refer to the period following his first journey to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18, 21).

“Titus”: Titus was Paul’s co-worker (2 Cor 2:13; 7:6, 13–15; 8:6, 16), a Gentile Christian and the leader of the Christian community in Crete (Titus 1:4).

“With Barnabas”: Barnabas was an apostolic co-worker of Paul in proclaiming the Gospel (Acts 4:36–37; 11:22–25, 30; 12:25; 13:1–3; 15:2). The name Barnabas means **“son of encouragement.”** He was a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36).

Galatians 2:2 “According to a revelation”: The Greek word *apokalypsis*, used here, refers to divine intervention or revelation (cf. Gal 1:12). Paul’s journey to Jerusalem was not undertaken at the command of human authorities but according to the will of God.

“I presented”: Although Paul had received the Gospel he proclaimed directly from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:2), he nevertheless presented it before the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2).

Galatians 2:3 “Was not compelled to be circumcised”: Circumcision was one of the means adopted for incorporating Gentiles into the Jewish community. Even when uncircumcised Gentiles entered the Christian community, Jewish Christians continued to demand circumcision from them. The Council of Jerusalem decided that this practice was not necessary (Acts 15). Therefore, Titus, who was a Gentile, was not compelled to undergo circumcision.

Galatians 2:4 “Our freedom in Christ Jesus”: This is one of the celebrated statements of the Letter to the Galatians. It refers to the freedom of those who, through faith in Jesus Christ, have been liberated from the Law of Moses and its ritual requirements.

“False brothers”: This may refer to Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to receive salvation (cf. Acts 15:1).

Galatians 2:7 “To the circumcised ...”: Peter proclaimed Jesus more extensively among the Jews, while Paul proclaimed the Gospel among the Gentiles. However, this does not mean that the missionary activities of Peter and Paul were geographically separated into completely distinct territories.

Galatians 2:9 “James, Cephas, and John”: James, the Lord’s brother (1:19), Peter (John 1:42), and John were regarded as leading figures among the apostolic community.

The order of names here differs from the usual New Testament practice of placing Peter’s name first when the apostles are listed (Matt 10:2; Mark 3:16; John 21:2). After Peter left Jerusalem (Acts 12:17), James became the spiritual leader of the Church of Jerusalem.

“The right hand of fellowship”: The Greek word *koinōnia* is used to indicate the unity of the Church. The expression “they extended the right hand” means that they offered every kind of support and cooperation to one another as fellow workers in the apostolic mission.

Galatians 2:10 “To remember the poor”: The Greek word *ptōchos*, used here, refers to those who are economically disadvantaged. The people of the Church of Jerusalem may be intended here. Paul is reminded to provide them with whatever assistance is possible (Rom 15:25–33; 2 Cor 8–9).

Galatians 2:11 “In Antioch”: Antioch was the capital of Syria, under Roman rule, situated north of Palestine. Paul began his missionary journey for the proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentiles from Antioch (Acts 13:1–3). The Church of Antioch was the first Christian community to bring Jews and Gentiles who had accepted the Christian faith together into one community (Acts 11:19–26). **“Because he was at fault”:** The Greek verb *kataginōskō* means “to judge as guilty” or “to find fault with” (cf. 1 John 3:20–21). According to Paul, Peter’s conduct was an offense deserving correction.

Galatians 2:12 “He drew back”: The Greek word *hypostellō*, used here, means “to withdraw,” “to hold oneself back,” or “to retreat out of fear.”

Galatians 2:13 “Because of their hypocrisy”: The Greek word *hypokrisis* means “to put on a mask and conceal one’s true identity by acting as someone else.” Paul describes the conduct of Peter, the other observant Jews, and Barnabas as hypocritical behavior.

Galatians 2:16 The Greek word *dikaioō* refers to being saved or justified in Christ. It includes liberation from sin, participation in divine life, and adoption into the family of God through Baptism (1 Cor 6:11; Titus 3:5).

Galatians 2:18 “The things I destroyed”: The Greek verb *kataluō*, meaning “to abolish” or “to tear down,” is used here. The Torah had been a wall that protected Israel from the idolatry of the Gentiles. Christ destroyed the wall that separated them (Eph 2:14) and united them in the new covenant (3:8).

Galatians 2:19 “I died to the Law through the Law”: The Greek word *apothnēskō*, meaning “to die,” also has the symbolic meaning “to become free” or “to be liberated.”

Galatians 3:1 “Foolish”: The Greek word *anoētos* refers to people who are lacking in understanding or discernment. It does not mean physical intellectual deficiency or stupidity; rather, it refers to the lack of understanding of those who have failed to become completely united with Christ through faith. The Greek word *baskainō*, meaning “to bewitch,” “to cast an evil eye,” or “to use sorcery with malicious intent,” is used here. It refers to the pressure tactics employed by those advocating the Jewish position in accordance with their established interests.

Galatians 3:2 “Hearing”: The Greek word *akoē*, meaning “hearing,” can also be understood as “hearing and obeying.” Here it means following or obeying faith in Christ received through Baptism (Acts 2:38).

Galatians 3:4 “The things you have suffered”: The Greek verb *paschō* refers to the religious oppression, persecution, or painful experiences that Christians had to endure.

Galatians 3:11 “The righteous shall live...”: Habakkuk 2:4 states that, amid the attacks of the Babylonians, the Israelites who firmly trusted in God would receive salvation through divine grace and deliverance from great calamities. Through this quotation, Paul makes clear that steadfast faith in God is the basis of justification.

Galatians 3:13 “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree...”: This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 21:23. It refers to the practice of hanging executed criminals on a tree in order to remove or avert divine wrath (Num 25:4; 2 Sam 21:9). For Paul, by dying on the cross Christ became a curse for our sake and redeemed us from the curse of the Law.

Galatians 3:14 The Greek word *epangelia* (“promise”) used here occurs repeatedly in the subsequent passages (3:16–18, 21, 22, 29; 4:23, 28). The gift of the Holy Spirit given through Christ becomes available to everyone through faith.

Galatians 3:15 “A covenant of a person”: *Diathekē* in ordinary Greek can mean a “testament,” “last will,” or “will,” whereas in the Septuagint it means “covenant.”

Galatians 3:16 By using the singular form *sperma*, meaning “offspring” or “seed,” Paul implies that God’s choice of Isaac rather than Ishmael (Gal 4:28–31; Rom 9:7–8) and the understanding of Isaac as a foreshadowing or type of Christ are intended here.

Galatians 3:17 “Four hundred and thirty years later”: This refers to the period during which Israel lived in Egypt (Exod 12:40). The covenant made with Abraham was renewed with Jacob (Gen 28:14) and, four centuries later, confirmed through the covenant with Moses (Exod 19–24).

Galatians 3:18 “Inheritance”: The Greek word *klēronomia* refers to the promised Spirit mentioned in 3:14. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not a reward for observance of the Law but the result of God’s promise (Eph 1:13–14).

Galatians 3:19 “Because of transgressions”: The Greek word *charin* can mean both “for the sake of” or “for the purpose of” and “because of.” Paul may have both meanings in mind here. **“Through angels”:** According to a Jewish tradition based on Deuteronomy 33:2 in the Septuagint, Moses received the Law through the hands of angels (Acts 7:53; Heb 2:2).

Galatians 3:21 “A law that gives life”: Although Paul states that the Law is not contrary to the promises of God, he argues that the Law itself does not give life. The Greek word *zōopoiēō*, used here, does not refer merely to physical life but to resurrected or new life.

Galatians 3:23 “Were kept under the custody of the Law”: The Greek word *phroureō*, meaning “to guard” or “to protect,” indicates that the Israelites were kept under the “custody” or “guard” of the Law.

Galatians 3:27 “You have clothed yourselves with Christ”: The Greek word *endyō*, meaning “to put on clothing” or “to clothe oneself,” is used here. The expression means that they have received or put on Christ.

Galatians 4:3 “The elemental principles”: The Greek word *stoicheia* has several possible meanings in Greek culture: 1. The basic elements believed to constitute the world—earth, air, fire, and water (2 Pet 3:10); 2. Spiritual beings believed to control cosmic powers and worshipped by Gentiles (Wis 13:2); 3. The

heavenly bodies to which the Gentiles attributed divinity (Deut 4:10); 4. The elementary principles of instruction (Heb 5:12).

Here, “**under the elemental principles**” refers to living under the Law (Gal 3:23–25). The Torah is associated with the elemental principles because it teaches the basic principles of religion.

Galatians 4:9 The Greek word *epistrepho* used here is also employed by Paul to refer to conversion and turning back to God, as well as to the Gentiles’ conversion to the true faith (1 Thess 1:9). In contrast, what the Galatians desire is to return to slavery.

Galatians 4:13 “Because of a physical illness”: The Greek word *astheneia* is used with the meanings “human weakness” and “illness.” Some have suggested that this may refer to an eye disease (4:15; 6:11), epilepsy, or some other physical ailment (2 Cor 12:7–9).

Galatians 4:23 “According to the promise”: The Greek expression *epangelia* indicates that Isaac was born according to the promise God had given to Abraham and through divine intervention (Gen 15:2–4; 17:15–19). Ishmael, on the other hand, was born according to the natural course of events (Gen 16:3–4).

Galatians 4:30 “Drive out the son”: This is a quotation from Genesis 21:10. By reminding his readers that Ishmael did not receive the inheritance even though, like Isaac, he had been circumcised, Paul refutes the claim of the Jewish advocates that circumcision was the sign by which one participated in the promise.

Galatians 5:1 “For freedom”: The Greek word *eleutheria* refers to liberation from the Law. “**The yoke of slavery**”: This symbolically refers to the Jewish laws and the religious ritual requirements contained in them.

Galatians 5:15 “Bite and devour one another”: The Greek words *daknō*, meaning “to bite,” and *katesthiō*, meaning “to devour,” are used here in a figurative sense. They respectively convey the meanings “to harm” or “to wound,” and “to destroy.” Paul is referring here to the factionalism and conflicts within the Galatian community.

Galatians 5:19 “The works of the flesh”: This is an expression similar to “**the works of darkness**” in Romans 13:12.

Galatians 6:1 “Restore him”: The Greek word *katartizō* means “to put in order,” “to restore,” or “to mend.” The Greek word *paraptōma*, meaning “a false step,” “transgression,” or “wrongdoing,” is also used here. Paul’s instruction is to restore those who have gone astray to the proper path. This is an exhortation to bring back a person who is supposed to live according to the Spirit (5:16, 18) when that person is seen to have deviated from the right path.

Galatians 6:4 “Let him examine”: The Greek verb *dokimazō* means to examine the quality or worth of one’s own life and to subject oneself to critical self-examination (cf. 1 Cor 3:10–15; 11:28; 2 Cor 13:5; 1 Thess 5:21).