

GALATIANS

(All quotes from Richard Hayes in New Interpreters' Bible unless otherwise noted.)

- 1) Galatia was settled by a tribe called Galatians of Celtic origin. They settled in and around Ancyra (Ankara). It was designated a Roman province by Augustus in 25 BCE. Written between 50-55 CE, probably closer to 55. The lack of a formal thanksgiving or blessing, and closing greetings to individuals, is an indication of the strained relationship between Paul and the Galatian churches. /// Martyn claims that the letter is an "argumentative sermon" to be delivered in a service of worship.
- 2) 1:2 – In contrast to other letters, we don't know the name of a single Galatian Christian. Also in contrast, Paul doesn't laud the Galatians as "saints."
- 3) 1:4 – Probably quoting an earlier non-Christian christological confession, perhaps Isaiah 53:12b: "Because he surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses.
- 4) 1:6 – The "one who called you" is God (or Christ), not Paul.
- 5) 1:7 – Murphy-O'Connor: Probably Judaizers from the church in Antioch. Not the local pagan philosophers or Jews. The Antioch church at this time had opted for a completely Judaized Christianity under pressure from Jerusalem. Many believed they had an obligation to the new churches under the aegis of Antioch to force a return to those practices. They may not have had any personal animosity towards Paul, just sad that such a wonderful missionary could go so far astray. Paul's letter, filled with references to Jewish tradition, would not be grasped by the formerly pagan Galatians. The letter was directed at the Judaizers. These "intruders" saw the Messiah as affirming and interpreting the Law of Moses. Paul saw the Law as subsumed in Christ. The perfection of his love was all that the Law could possibly demand.
Hayes: The term "Judaizers" has fallen into disfavor, because:
 - 1) It wrongly implies that the conflict in Galatia was between Jewish and anti-Jewish factions.
 - 2) It means "to adopt Jewish practices," so it does not describe the rival Missionaries but rather those Gentiles who had accepted the circumcision gospel. (In the NIB, Hayes capitalizes Missionaries, to indicate that Paul is referring to a specific group of adversaries.)

The basic elements of what the Missionaries preached:

- 1) Jesus was the Messiah
- 2) Necessity of circumcision
- 3) Observance of Jewish Sabbaths and feast days
- 4) Obedience to everything in the Law (Torah)
- 5) The Law was divinely ordained to provide moral order
- 6) They claimed to represent more faithfully than Paul the teachings of the mother church in Jerusalem
- 7) They based their message on Scripture, particularly the story of Abraham as the father of proselytes

Why did Paul object so fiercely to this message?

- 1) Deficient christology: emphasis on circumcision and the Law negates the sufficiency of God's grace
- 2) Deficient pneumatology: underrates the power of the Spirit to guide the church without the Law

3) Deficient ecclesiology: denying the truth of the Gospel undermines the unity of Jews and Gentiles

4) Deficient eschatology: acting as if Jesus's death on the cross had not changed the world irrevocably

Taken together these four deficiencies constitute a fundamental betrayal of the Gospel.

- 6) 1:13 – The word “Judaism” is found only here in the entire New Testament.
- 7) 1:14 – “...even more a zealot for my ancestors' traditions” Among many others, Phinehas (Numbers 25:6ff), Mattathias (1 Maccabees 2:15ff), Elijah (1 Kings 18:40).
- 8) 1:17ff – Paul is forcefully denying that his apostleship is the work of anyone or anything other than God, his gospel dependent on no human source. /// Why Arabia? 1) To preach to the Nabateans at Petra – no extant evidence of this, or 2) to follow in the footsteps of Elijah by going to Mt. Sinai/Horeb (1 Kings 19:8: “...he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.”) Petra is 150 air miles from Jerusalem and it isn't really mountainous country, so Mt. Horeb couldn't be there. The Land of Midian is about 150 air miles south of Petra, is mountainous near the Red Sea, and some scholars think Horeb was (is) there. If Horeb is on the Sinai Peninsula, that's 250 air miles from Jerusalem.
- 9) 1:19 – This James was not one of the twelve original disciples and apostles. He is the brother of Jesus, who turned away from Jesus in John 7:5, but was with Mary when Jesus appeared after the resurrection (Acts 1:14, 1 Cor 15:7). Whenever James is mentioned and not qualified, it is taken to mean Jesus' younger (?) brother.
- 10) – 2:2 – Gary Wills believes that Jesus appeared to Paul more than just on the road to Damascus. The “revelation” here is one of those times. (JB: But why didn't Paul make more of this if Jesus appeared to him, rather than just saying “in accord with a revelation”?)
- 11) 2:4 – “Freedom” of association between Jewish and Gentile Christians. “Slavery” of Gentiles forced to be circumcised.
- 12) 2:6 – In Acts 15:28-29 Luke claims that Paul received instructions from the Jerusalem church to require his new Gentile converts to “abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and what is strangled and from fornication.” Luke probably retrojected a later church agreement when he wrote a generation later, because Paul says here that the “leaders contributed nothing.”
- 13) 2:12 -14 – There was no law in the Torah that forbade Jews and Gentiles from eating together. Although it does say in Jubilee 22:16 “eat not with them...for their acts are unclean.” But it might have been perceived by the James/Peter faction (a group of Christians from Jerusalem trying to convince Peter to eschew fraternization with the Gentiles) as being impolitic at a time when the Zealots were advocating radical separation from the Gentiles. Josephus noted that the synagogues were attracting “multitudes” of Greeks, that is, Greek-speaking Syrian Gentiles. Gary Wills (*What Paul Meant*) notes that the word “Gentiles” in v. 14 is actually in the Greek a “brand-new” word, coined by Paul, a contemptuous word “ἰουαῖζειν” meaning “playing being a Jew.”
- 14) 2:15-21 – Paul is still talking to Peter “in front of them all.” /// Vs. 15 – “Gentile sinners” – probably said with much irony, though still a serious point /// Vs. 16 – Text used by Wesley at Oxford on 6/1/1738, and then became the keynote of his ministry. “The heart of the message to the Galatians, the gospel in a nutshell.” See also Romans 3:31ff. As in other places where “justified” is used, it means that the individual has been accepted by God as if he had not sinned. Vs. 18 – What he had built up was the practice of Jews and Gentiles eating together. /// Vs. 20a – No good explanation of what Paul meant (several ideas on p. 243 of the NIB). But the point is that Paul **has** passed through this death, leaving the law behind. /// Vs. 20b –

Both “has loved” and “given” are aorist participles, indicating an **enacted** love, manifested in action and suffering.

- 15) 3:1a – Walter Wangerin in *Paul* translates “foolish” as “brainless.”
- 16) 3:1b – Paul told the story of Jesus’ death so compellingly that it was as though the Galatians **had** seen it with their own eyes.
- 17) 3:2 – A far better rendering of “by believing what you heard,” is “the message that elicits faith.” The former **implies** that **we** take the initiative, which is incorrect. The latter **states** that it is **God’s** doing.
- 18) 3:6 – Paul uses this quote from Genesis 15:6 to show that Abraham was reckoned by God to be righteous **before** he was circumcised. So, he says in effect, “The story of Abraham is not fundamentally about circumcision and obeying the Law; it is about trusting God’s promise. The quote in v. 8 is from Gen 12:3, where it reads “all the families of the earth...”
- 19) 3:10-12 – Paul is warning the Galatians that those whose identity is grounded in the Law (the Missionaries) are under a curse. He quotes Deut 27:26 only to show that it is an empty promise – that it is an ineffectual scheme of salvation now rendered inoperative by the death of Jesus – that the curse now hangs over Israel.
- 20) 3:13-14 – The word “redeemed” is the word used to describe the emancipation of a slave. The “curse of the Law” does not mean that the Torah is a curse; it is the curse **pronounced** by the Law, a curse that Jesus has nullified by his sacrificial death. /// Jesus entered so fully into Israel’s enslaved condition that he absorbed and exhausted the curse fully in his own innocent death. Parallel passage in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”
- 21) 3:16 – The Greek word translated as “offspring” (“seed” in NIV) is **sperma**, literally “seed,” which is a plural noun. Paul knows this: Genesis 15:5, Galatians 3:7, but argues anyway that Jesus is that seed (singular).
- 22) 3:19-20 – “Why then the Law?” Paul’s answer is “notoriously obscure.” Five options in NIB, p.266. Hayes thinks only two are credible:
 - 1) “...to identify humanity’s inchoate sinfulness as conscious transgression, explicit violation of the resolved divine will.”
 - 2) “...to restrain transgressions, to pose a constraint on human sin.”Both or either acts as a temporary expedient until the coming of Christ, when the Law becomes superfluous. /// The mediator was Moses. The rest of the sentence is “another maddeningly opaque sentence,” argued over by scholars. The consensus: because the Law was delivered through an intermediary, it does not convey God’s grace directly, as did the promise to Abraham. On the other hand, the Law functions to define man’s sinfulness, forecloses man’s attempt to save himself, a necessary step in God’s design to rectify the world through Jesus Christ.
- 23) 3:23-25 – The word in Greek for “disciplinarian” is “paidagogos,” a house slave who supervised and guarded the children of his master – especially in escorting them safely to school – and whose functions ceased when the children grew up. Paul likens the Law and the Israelites to this concept. /// “Faith” in vs. 23 is the faith of Jesus, confirmed by vs 24, “until Christ came.”
- 24) 3:26-27 – Paul recognizes that the OT Israelites also considered themselves “sons of God” (modernized to “children” in this bible): Deuteronomy 14:1 – “You are the sons of the Lord your God.” Jubilees 1:25 – “And every angel and spirit will know and acknowledge that they are my sons and I am their father.” Paul now tells the Galatians that the Israelites are

not the only chosen ones. /// The reference to being “clothed with Christ” is probably an allusion to the baptismal practice of immersion of the naked convert and putting new white robes on him/her.

- 25) 4:5 – v.4 --“born of woman” – very first mention, chronologically in the NT. V.5a-- refers to Christ’s redemption of Israel from the Law’s curse; 5b to the rectification of Gentiles, now adopted into God’s family. (This is “eloquently articulated” in Ephesians 2:11-13.) Augustine considered Jesus to be **unique** in that he was God’s only “natural” Son, whereas everyone else were sons of God through “the condescension of his mercy.”
- 26) 4:9,10 – “...perhaps the most stunning sentence in this entire confrontational scene.” Paul suggests that Judaism is no different from pagan worship of earthy elements (and idols?). Saying that the elements are weak is a paradox because he also attributes to them the power to enslave. He probably means that although they can enslave, they do not have the power to save, to give life. /// The Jewish liturgical calendar was calibrated to the motions of the heavenly bodies: sabbath, new moon festival, Day of Atonement, Passover, etc. (See Jubilees 2:9 and 1 Enoch 82:7-9.) (See also 1 Cor 8:2-3.)
- 27) 4:12 – Not immodest for the times. Philosophers and moral teachers expected to be models of thought and behavior. /// “...become as you are” refers to Paul’s rejection of the Torah and live like a Gentile.
- 28) 4:13 – See note #28 in 2 Corinthians for theories of what was Paul’s “thorn in the flesh.”
- 29) 4:23-26 – Literally, the passage reads “according to the flesh.” Omitting this, as does the NAB, loses the key word that allows Paul to link Ishmael with the fleshly rite of circumcision. It is of “utmost importance” to understand that the two covenants do **not** represent Judaism and Christianity, but that one bears children for slavery, the other for freedom. Hagar represents the Law to Paul, but he fails to complete the comparison with Sarah. /// Many interpretations by baffled interpreters (see pp 302-304 NIB). The verb “corresponds” in vs. 25 literally means “to stand in line with” something. Many commentators have recognized that this term recalls the Pythagorean tables of opposites. In an analogous way Paul lines up the symbolic elements of the Genesis story:

slave	free
Hagar	Sarah
Ishmael	Isaac
flesh	promise/spirit
Mt. Sinai	-----
Present Jerusalem	Jerusalem above

In the light of this pattern, a new translation by Hayes clears the air:

vv24-26 – These things are to be interpreted allegorically, for these two women are two covenants. One covenant is from Mt. Sinai, bearing children into slavery. This is Hagar. Now “Hagar” is Mt. Sinai in Arabia, but she/it stands in the same column with the present Jerusalem, for (Jerusalem) is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is the free woman (Sarah); this our mother.

The “Jerusalem above” is apocalyptic, with roots in Isaiah 54, Ezekiel 40-48 and in many later texts, 2 Esdras 7:20, 1 Enoch 90:28-29. Jerusalem as a mother is found in, e.g., Psalm 6:5 (LXX, not in this Bible), 2 Esdras 10:7.

- 30) 4:27 – The “barren woman” is Sarah before Isaac’s birth, metaphorically Jerusalem during the Exile. Sarah’s pregnancy and Isaac’s birth are the restoration of Zion, Jerusalem filled with

people. This increase in Zion's children is used by Paul to correspond to the gathering of the Gentiles to the God of Israel: the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and Sarah and the central theme of God's restoration of Israel and "a universal embrace of the nations."

- 31) 4:29-5:1 – Genesis says only that Ishmael was "playing" with Isaac. Jewish tradition interpreted that as mocking or even molestation. Paul equates this to the Missionaries' threats of God's curse on the un-circumcised Galation Christians. He quotes Genesis 21:10 as scripture's directive to throw out the Missionaries and their converts.
- 32) 5:7 – The Greek says, "Who cut in on you?" The runners are thrown off stride by another runner cutting into their path. Paul's use of this verb may be a double entendre: the Missionaries may have "cut in" on them by demanding circumcision.
- 33) 5:9-10 – Referring to the subtle corrupting power of false teaching. Paul uses the same proverb in 1 Corinthians 5:6 concerning a flagrant sex offender.
- 34) 5:12 – The debate turns ugly. Reminiscent of psalms asking the Lord to harm his enemies, especially 137:8-9: "Happy those who seize your children and smash them against a rock."
- 35) 5:16 – Literally, the Greek says, "If you **walk** by the Spirit, you will never carry out the desires of the flesh." "Desire" is singular, probably referring to the evil impulse that underlies sin, and not only sexual, see vv 20-21. See also 1 John 2:15.
- 36) 6:1-2 – "You who are spiritual" refers to **all** members of the community. /// To fulfill the Law of Christ is to play out over and over the pattern of self-sacrificial love that he revealed by his death; simply daily acts of assuming responsibility for each other. Compare with v. 6
- 37) 6:5 – Compare with 6:2. Hays: v 2 calls on the community to exercise mutual responsibility. V5 advises each person to examine his/her actions because when God judges, each will be responsible for those actions.
- 38) 6:7-8 – "God is not mocked," scornfully disregarded, because his judgement of the world is just. /// "Sow to the flesh": placing one's hope for the future in the mundane expedient of cutting the flesh, i.e. circumcision. A paraphrase of Prov 22:8
- 39) 6:12-13 – The persecution would be by Jews or Jewish Christians. Rome had not yet begun persecution of Christians and certainly would not persecute anyone for **not** being circumcised.
- 40) 6:14 – The entire universe has been overthrown and abolished by Christ's death. A new reality has been brought into being that determines the destiny of the whole creation. Recalls Isaiah 65:17: "For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth..."