

Galatians 1:1-2

An introduction to Paul's letter to the Galatian congregations

Introduction: Today we begin Paul's letter to primarily Gentile congregations concerning their salvation and sanctification. It is a letter both **negative** (the dangers of unsound doctrine) and **positive** (benefits of sound doctrine).

1) The writer—1:1-2a

a) The primary author was the apostle Paul—1:1 But just who was this man?

i) His Roman nickname—1:1a ¹ *Paul* (“small, little”),

(1) His original Jewish name was Saul/Shaul (“desired, requested”)

(2) He was born in Tarsus, 115-200 miles east of the congregations to whom he writes, including: Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe
(a) From the Jewish tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5)

(3) He was nurtured in Jerusalem under Gamaliel's teaching (Acts 22:3)

(4) After his salvation (summer of 35; Acts 9), he seems to have returned from Damascus of Syria (summers of 35-37) to spend another 5½ years in his hometown of Tarsus (autumn of 37 through the spring of 43), and then moves to Antioch of Syria for another 5 years before beginning his church planting journeys (43-48).

(5) His first church planting journey lasted from spring 48-fall of 49 (Acts 13-14)

(a) After Paul had been a Christian for about 13-14 years.

(6) He then writes this letter from Antioch in Syria in autumn of 49.

ii) His official, delegated authority—1:1b-1c *an apostle* [ἀπόστολος] (an envoy, emissary, ambassador)

- He normally emphasizes this in his letters, but not always (Philippians 1:1; Philemon 1:1)

- He was an apostle specifically to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; 13:46-47; 14:27; 18:6; 22:21; 28:28; Romans 11:13; 15:16; Galatians 2:9)

- But some critics are quick to point out that Paul was not one of the original 12 disciples. He was a latecomer, who had not been commissioned directly by Christ himself. Therefore, he was only a second-rate apostle—his Gospel was just hearsay.

(1) Negatively—1:1b no primary or intermediary human source

(a) No **collective** human source—*not from* [ἀπό] *people* ...

(i) Like he had been sent from the high priest in Acts 9:1-2

(b) No **individual** human channel—*or through* [διὰ] *a person*,

(i) Perhaps a reference to Ananias (Acts 9:10-18)

(2) Positively—1:1c *but* [ἀλλά] ... ultimately by the triune God

- Paul is quick to maintain the Creator-creature distinction

(a) God the **Son**—*through* [διὰ] *Jesus Christ* (cf. Acts 9:1-7, 15)

(i) Recognizing the full deity of Jesus; Jesus is the sending God

(ii) Recognizing the full agreement between Jesus and the Father

- (b) God the **Father**—*and* (through) *God the Father*
(i) *who raised* [aor. act. ptc. ἐγείρω] *Him* (Jesus) *out from* [ἐκ] *the dead* (ones),
1. This is a crucial part of Paul's later argument. Because Jesus is raised from the dead, believers are no longer under the covenant given through Moses.
2. Jesus also was raised by the Spirit, and also by Himself.
(c) Cf. God the **Spirit's** role in this matter—Acts 13:2

- b) Plus his ministry support team—² *and all the brothers who are with me*,
i) Including Barnabas, perhaps some of the congregation in Antioch in Syria
ii) Paul is emphasizing that he is not a lone ranger, isolated from others.
This was not merely his idiosyncratic, private opinion. However, Paul is still the main writer (as evidenced by the singular personal pronouns and references throughout the book).
c) Paul uses @ 150 verses to accomplish his purpose (cf. using 433 for Romans)

- 2) The readers—1:2b *to the congregations* (NB ἐκκλησία plural) *of Galatia*;
• Cf. 1st Corinthians 16:1;
a) Geographically—south-central modern Turkey
b) Ethnically—mostly Gentiles
i) How else to explain the attempt to have them circumcised (5:2; 6:12)?
c) Spiritually
i) Previously—worshippers of Zeus/Jupiter & Hermes/Mercury (Acts 14:12; Galatians 4:8)
ii) Currently—genuine believers in local congregations, perhaps converted on the first church planting journey (Acts 13:14-14:28) (esp. 13:48-52), including: Iconium, Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Derbe
(1) Galatian men like Timothy (Acts 16:1) and Gaius of Derbe (Acts 20:4)
d) This is his only letter to be written to a **group** of congregations. He does not, however, write to a regional, national, or universal church.
i) Although these churches were autonomous units, they were, in a way, interdependent. Believers need spiritual strength from other Christians within a local church, but churches controlled by scriptural principles will also sense the need of cooperation with other churches. [Gromacki]
e) It was evidently a circular letter, designed to be carried by a messenger to one of the Galatian churches, then to the next on his itinerary, and so on until each church had heard its contents. If some of the churches wished to make a copy, that could no doubt be done. But Paul apparently did not send several copies, one for each church (cf. 6:11). [Bruce]

- 3) **Take-home truth:** worship the God who alone can transform our lives

Next time: We will look at Galatians 1:3-5