

GALATIANS

CHAPTER ONE

1. Who wrote this epistle? Who is the Author?

“Paul” identified himself as the sender in the first word of the first verse (Galatians 1:1).

Of course, Jesus is the *“Author”* of salvation (Hebrews 5:9) and of our faith (12:2). He sent the Holy Spirit to guide apostles into *“all truth”* (John 16:13), so He is credited, always, as the source of inspiration.

2. What is the writer’s role and how did he obtain that position?

Paul is quick to describe himself as *“an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)”* (Galatians 1:1).

An apostle is, by definition, one sent out. There were apostles from men, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14), who was sent out by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3). Paul was more than that. His apostleship was an appointment by Christ the Lord (Acts 22:21; 26:17). The defense of his apostleship will be prominent in this letter, as it was in 2nd Corinthians.

3. Who joined the writer in sending this message?

Paul included *“all the brethren who are with me”* (Galatians 1:2), by which it would be clear that any refutation of his doctrine herein, or of him, personally, would be a rejection of them, as well. He could have been including whichever traveling

companions were with him at the time, or even the church where he was writing from; it is not certain whom they were, but the implication is clear.

4. Who were the recipients?

He was writing *"To the churches of Galatia"* (Galatians 1:2).

Some epistles were sent to individuals (Philemon; 1st Timothy; 2nd Timothy; Titus; 2nd John; 3rd John), some to generalized audiences (Hebrews; James; 1st Peter; 2nd Peter; 1st John), and others to single churches (Romans; 1st Corinthians; 2nd Corinthians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; 1st Thessalonians; 2nd Thessalonians); yet, only two letters were written to multiple churches (Revelation; Galatians).

That several congregations were the intended recipients of this message necessarily implies that the letter would be circulated immediately, an action expressly commanded with at least one other epistle (Colossians 4:16). Hardly any lag existed between the establishment of the New Testament and the ability of Christians to read it.

5. Locate the province on a map and identify the cities therein where Paul had preached. Describe what happened in those places.

The province of Galatia included the regions of Pamphylia, where the city of Perga was, the region of Pisidia, where there was another Antioch, not to be confused with the one in Syria, and the region of Lycaonia, where the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe were located.

Perga is where John Mark abandoned Paul and Barnabas on the first major preaching tour (Acts 13:13).

In Antioch, Paul preached in the synagogue and drew a great deal of attention, winning both Jew and Gentiles, but the Jews resented the Gentiles and persecuted Paul and Barnabas, so they had to shake the dust off themselves and move along (Acts 13:14-52).

A similar occurrence transpired in Iconium as had happened in Antioch (Acts 13:51; 14:1-6).

They preached in Lystra (Acts 14:6-7), and Paul healed a cripple there (8-10), but the idolaters of that place mistook Paul and Barnabas for gods and tried to worship them, which they refused (11-18). Then, persecutors from Antioch and Iconium followed them and actually stoned Paul, who survived the ordeal (19-20).

They preached in Derbe, evidently without opposition (Acts 14:6-7, 20-21).

Afterward, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, encouraging them and establishing elderships (Acts 14:21-23).

Finally, they revisited Perga, and, apparently for the first time, preached there (Acts 14:24-25). Whether they were fruitful is not specified.

Later, in a second major tour, Paul was joined by Silas instead of Barnabas (Acts 15:36-41), and they brought the circumcision decision from Jerusalem to Galatia (Acts 16:1-6), where they met Timothy and Paul had him circumcised.

On a third major tour, Paul revisited Galatia (Acts 18:23).

6. Compare the introductory greeting to those Paul sent to other churches.

He included the standard *“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Galatians 1:3).

Ordinarily, though, he called his recipients *“faithful”* or *“sanctified”* or *“saints,”* but he glaringly omitted such qualifiers here. It would seem their faithfulness and holiness were in doubt. Even the Corinthians were regarded in better spiritual condition!

Also, he elaborated on the standard greeting, saying of Christ, *“who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen”* (Galatians 1:4-5). Paul wasted no time in dealing with sin, telling his readers that it cost the Son of God His very life! There is nothing trivial about sin. He contrasted the work of the glorious God against a present age that is decidedly evil! More to the point of this letter as whole, the salvation here described had nothing to do with the Law of Moses – just Jesus.

7. What did Paul find so surprising?

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon” (Galatians 1:6). He was astonished both by their apostasy and by the swiftness of it.

This *“so soon”* likely does not refer to it happening quickly after their obedience to the gospel, but rather to it happening so quickly after the error was introduced. He and Barnabas had converted the Galatians (Acts 13), and then they returned to strengthen them (Acts 14:21-23), and then Paul revisited them with Silas (Acts 16:1-5). Apparently, they were well and strong during all three visits, so they did not fall away immediately after being converted.

Thus, it seems the departure from truth occurred rapidly after the falsehood was introduced. Generally, such departures happen gradually, with one compromise leading to another. The Galatians were different.

8. How was their departure personal?

“From Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6). Their error distanced themselves from Christ Himself. The gospel and Christ cannot be separated.

9. How many gospels are there?

“Which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:7). It was a **“different gospel,”** not **“another.”** The good news is a singular message, without need of accompaniment (Ephesians 4:4-6).

10. Is anyone authorized to alter what God has revealed?

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8). Paul excludes himself and all fellow apostles, as well as, even, heavenly angels from being permitted to preach a gospel that varies at all from the one originally preached!

Angels can sin (2nd Peter 2:4). Apostles can sin (Acts 1:25). Prophets can sin (2nd Peter 2:15-16). Elders can sin (1st Timothy 5:19-20). Therefore, no one is authorized to alter the word of God! Jesus said His words would never pass away (Luke 21:33). It will never be honest to augment divine revelation (Proverbs 30:6).

11. Cite historical examples of angels allegedly preaching a different gospel.

Muhammed alleged that Gabriel, who is an authentic angel from Scripture (Daniel 8:16; 9:21; Luke 1:19, 26), revealed Islam to him. It didn't actually happen, but if it did, Gabriel would go to hell.

Joseph Smith alleged that Moroni, who sounds more like a pasta than an actual angel, revealed the Book of Mormon to him. That never happened, but if it did, Moroni would face unending torture from God.

12. How emphatic was Paul about the singular gospel?

"As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:9). He repeated himself, which he only ever did it again in a much more pleasant way (Philippians 4:4).

13. What is Christ's bondservant obliged to do to men and to God, respectively?

"For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

We please God by persuading men. We don't persuade God, that is change His mind, and we don't please men, that is seek their satisfaction over the Lord's.

14. Where did the gospel preached by Paul originate?

"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12).

Eleven verses in, and Paul considered it necessary to defend the source of his material a second time!

15. What did misplaced zeal motivate Paul to do?

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Galatians 1:13).

His antagonism toward Christians is thoroughly documented (Acts 7:57-8:3; 9:1-2; 22:3-5; 26:9-11).

The apostle recounts his violent opposition to the gospel to verify he didn't get the gospel from the usual sources. Moreover, he impresses his audience with the fact that they were never going to find someone more fond of the Law of Moses than Paul had been.

16. Where was his zeal placed previously?

“I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers” (Galatians 1:14).

He was zealous about tradition, family, and the Jewish religion. Zeal is not always a good thing (Romans 10:2). Tradition can be dangerous (Mark 7:9; Colossians 2:8; 1st Peter 1:18). Family is not the highest priority (Luke 8:21). And the religion of the Jews was no longer relevant (Hebrews 7:12).

17. Whose choice was it that Paul became an apostle?

“It pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him” (Galatians 1:15-16).

The Lord chose the first twelve apostles (Luke 6:13), as well as Judas’s replacement Matthias (Acts 1:24), and He chose Paul, too (1st Corinthians 9:16-17). It was a divine act. The same one who gave him life, bestowed apostleship on him, as well.

Paul didn’t claim to be an apostle on his own and he wasn’t just sent by a local church.

18. When God *“called [Paul] through His grace,”* was the calling irresistible?

No, the call had to be answered and could have been disregarded, but Paul obeyed (Acts 26:19)!

19. Who were the primary recipients of Paul’s preaching?

“To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles” (Galatians 1:16).

Gentiles were the target audience from the get-go (Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17-18). He even identified himself as *“an apostle to the gentiles”* (Romans 11:13; cf. 15:16; Galatians 2:7; Ephesians 3:1; Colossians 1:27; 1st Timothy 2:7; 2nd Timothy 1:11). As such, he would resent any effort to impose Judaism on the disciples he was making.

20. Did Paul rely on man’s advice to carry out his apostolic commission?

“I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus” (Galatians 1:16-17).

No, he did not. He even seemed to be avoiding the other apostles!

Yes, human agency was required for him to obey the gospel (Acts 9:10-18; 22:12-16), but not to obey his calling as an apostle.

21. Where did Paul spend his first three years as a Christian?

“Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem” (Galatians 1:17-18).

Contrary to expectation, he didn't go straight to Jerusalem, where the apostles stayed (Acts 8:1). He was converted in Damascus (Acts 9:2-3, 6). From there, he went to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus. He never needed to consult with apostles to confirm his apostleship, nor to learn the gospel from them.

This passage proves the need to cross-reference in our study of Scripture. Readings Acts in isolation would suggest that Paul went straight from Damascus (Acts 9:18-25) to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26). Luke did not err in his documentation; he simply did not include the details that Paul here elucidates: namely, that three years transpired between Acts 9:25 and Acts 9:26.

22. How did he regard the twelve?

He identified them as *“those who were apostles before me”* (Galatians 1:17). By defending his apostleship, he did disparage or undermine the apostleship of the twelve, but acknowledged them for what Christ made them, while still upholding his divine authority.

23. When Paul eventually got to Jerusalem following his conversion, what was his purpose?

“I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter” (Galatians 1:18). He didn’t go to be ordained, anointed, appointed, or commissioned by Peter, nor even to be educated or trained by Peter. He just went to see him. He wanted to meet a fellow apostle. That was all. It was a visit.

24. How long did that visit last?

“I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days” (Galatians 1:18). The effort undertaken by Barnabas to vouch for Paul and get the church to receive him (Acts 9:26-30) was for a visit lasting barely two weeks. Granted, it was a visit cut short by persecution (Acts 9:29-30), but this demonstrates that brethren don’t need to spend months figuring out whether to enter fellowship.

25. How is James identified?

He was one *“of the other apostles”* (Galatians 1:19), as opposed to *“those who were apostles before me”* (Galatians 1:17). He contrasted the twelve specific apostles with the generic apostles, those sent by churches, rather than directly by Christ.

Two among the twelve were named James (Luke 6:13-16), but this one was neither of them; rather, he was *“the Lord’s brother”* (Galatians 1:19). One of Jesus’s four

brothers was named James (Mark 6:3), and his brothers lacked faith in Him during his life, so much so they encouraged Him to endanger His life (John 7:1-5). However, James witnessed the resurrection (1st Corinthians 15:7) and the brothers became disciples even before Pentecost (Acts 1:14). James especially became highly regarded in the church of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18), one of its “pillars” even (Galatians 2:9).

This James was the only notable figure Paul encountered besides the apostle Peter during his 15-day stay in Jerusalem, three years after his conversion. He still had not met the rest of the twelve apostles. That would have been nice, but he didn’t need them to carry out his heavenly assignment.

26. How serious was Paul about his independence from his predecessor apostles?

“Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie” (Galatians 1:20). He called God as his witness. This was no jest.

27. Where did Paul spend his time following that initial Jerusalem visit?

“Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia” (Galatians 1:21). Luke did chronicle some of this (Acts 9:30; 11:25-26). He really had no need to remain in Jerusalem, around his fellow apostles. They had their work and he had his. Granted, he left earlier than anticipated because of persecution (Acts 9:29-30), but he didn’t feel compelled to get back as soon as possible either.

28. How were the churches of Judea generally aware of his work?

“And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he

once tried to destroy” (Galatians 1:22-23). Word of mouth got back to them about his preaching, but he wasn’t personally acquainted with any of them besides the one in Jerusalem, and that only briefly.

29. What did those Christians who knew Paul’s reputation do about him?

“And they glorified God in me” (Galatians 1:24). Paul’s example, as a persecutor turned Christian, preacher, and apostle is meant to prove salvation is intended for every sinner (1st Timothy 1:15-16).