

# Galatians Introduction & Backstory

## Who are the Galatians?

Gal 1:2 NIV ...To the **churches** in Galatia:

- The letter was not written to a specific church [*singular*] in a city (i.e. Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae) but to **the churches** [*plural*] in Galatia
- Galatia is a region located in what would be present day Turkey
  - [Modern Map - Overlaid with Paul's Journeys](#)
- Most of the Galatians were Gentiles, but there is a debate on whether this letter was written to those who were ethnic Galls (Celts) from northern Galatia or Gentiles who simply lived in the Roman province of southern Galatia regardless of ethnicity



## Backstory

### **The church began in Jerusalem with a mandate (geographically and ethnically)**

- Act 1:8 NIV But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in **Jerusalem**, and in all **Judea** and **Samaria**, and to the ends of the earth."
- Mat 28:19-20 NIV Therefore go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

**Yet the church remained centered in Jerusalem and largely made up of Jews until persecution forced them to scatter.**

### **Following the persecution of Stephen we begin to see geographical expansion**

- Act 8:1 NIV And **Saul approved of their killing him**. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were **scattered throughout Judea and Samaria**.

### **We also begin to see the groundwork being laid for expansion ethnically - (i.e. Paul's calling - TO PROCLAIM CHRIST TO THE GENTILES)**

- Act 9:15-16 NIV 15 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! **This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel**. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

### **Many of the Jews had difficulty believing and responding to Paul's message about Jesus**

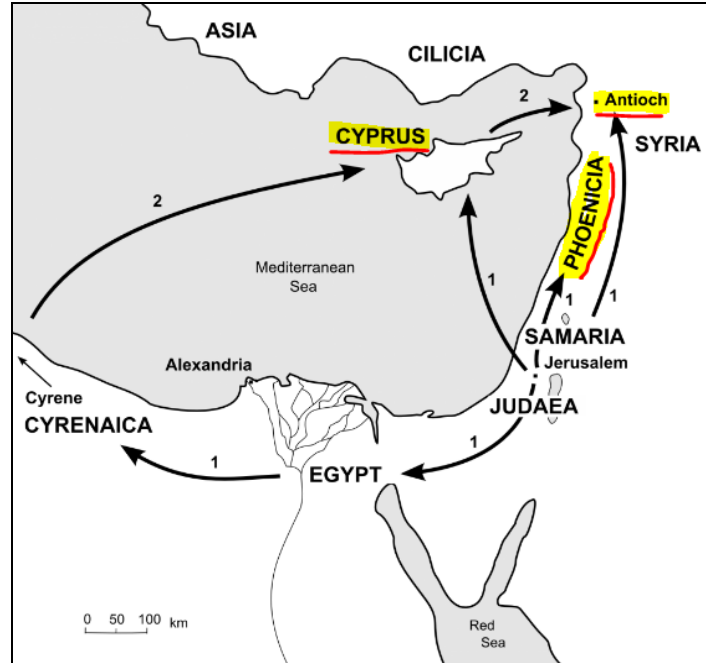
- Act 9:20-24 NIV At once he began to **preach in the synagogues** that **Jesus is the Son of God**. 21 All those who heard him were **astonished** and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" 22 Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and **baffled the Jews** living in Damascus by **proving that Jesus is the Messiah**. 23 After many days had gone by, **there was a conspiracy among the Jews to kill him**, 24 but Saul learned of their plan. Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.....Act 9:30 When the believers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and **sent him off to Tarsus**.
  - **Astonished** - that one who was so vehemently opposed to Jesus would now preach that He is Messiah, the Son of God
  - **Baffled** - to throw into disorder, to perplex
  - **Conspiracy** to kill him

### **Eventually the apostles and other believers are receiving news that Gentiles are receiving the word of God [Cornelius in Acts 10 a great example]**

- Act 11:1 NIV The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that **the Gentiles also had received the word of God**.

### **(show map of expansion into Antioch where disciples began to speak to Greeks also)**

- Act 11:19-26 NIV Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed **traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews**. 20 Some of them, however, **men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also**, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 **The Lord's hand** was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. 22 **News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch**. 23 When **he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done**, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. 24 He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord. 25 **Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, 26 and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch**. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.



(show map of Paul's first missionary journey - notice the region of Galatia)

- Act 13:1-4 NIV Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. 2 While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "**Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.**" 3 So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. 4 The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to **Seleucia** and sailed from there to **Cyprus**.



## Eventually Paul and Barnabas end up in the region of Galatia

- Act 13:13-16 NIV From Paphos, Paul and his companions sailed to **Perga in Pamphylia**, where John left them to return to Jerusalem. 14 From Perga they went on to **Pisidian Antioch**. On the Sabbath **they entered the synagogue** and sat down. 15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak." 16 Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: "**Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me!**"
  - Both Jews and Gentiles who had become proselytes heard the word of God

## The Jews were moved to jealousy (This is in Galatia)

- Act 13:42-52 NIV As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. 43 When the congregation was dismissed, **many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas**, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God. 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 **When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy. They began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaped abuse on him.** 46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. **Since you reject it** and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, **we now turn to the Gentiles.** 47 For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "**I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.**" 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. 49 **The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. 50 But the Jewish leaders incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.** 51 So they shook the dust off their feet as a warning to them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.
  - **Contradicting and heaping abuse** are the same word in the Greek language, rather than being considered a duplicate, when used this way, it is looked at as giving emphasis...the onslaught was non-stop so to speak...the Jews were motivated by **jealousy**
  - The Jews **rejected** the message
  - The Jewish leaders **incited** the women
  - They **stirred** up persecution
  - They **expelled** them from their region

## Many converts, but again Jewish resistance - even in the face of miracles (This is in Galatia)

- Act 14:1-7 NIV At **Iconium** Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that **a great number of Jews and Greeks believed.** 2 But the **Jews who refused to believe stirred up the other Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.** 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for **the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.** 4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the

apostles. 5 There was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, **to mistreat them and stone them.** 6 But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of **Lystra and Derbe** and to the surrounding country, 7 where they continued to preach the gospel.

- **Poisoned** = to injure the breath or soul...in other words it is injuring that which is meant to bring life

**Lystra and Derbe, Paul is stoned - This is Galatia** (they couldn't stone him in Iconium, so they came here to do it)

- Act 14:19-28 NIV **Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.** 20 But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. **The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.** 21 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to **Lystra, Iconium and Antioch,** 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. **"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,"** they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust. 24 **After going through Pisidia, they came into Pamphylia, 25 and when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. 26 From Attalia they sailed back to Antioch,** where they had been committed to the grace of God for the work they had now completed. 27 On arriving there, **they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.** 28 And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.
  - Wonder what your report would have been what with all the rejection, resistance and persecution? Paul's was "God opened a door of faith to the Gentiles"...Paul was a "glass half full" kind of guy

**The Judaizers continued to preach circumcision - This is now in Antioch**

- Act 15:1-2 NIV **Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."** 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

**Paul wanted to revisit those he encountered on his first missionary journey**

- Act 15:36 NIV Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."



### Paul circumcises Timothy and a second time enters into the area of Galatia

- Act 16:1-9 NIV Paul came to **Derbe and then to Lystra**, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. **2 The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.** 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so **he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area**, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. 6 **Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia**, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of **Mysia**, they tried to enter **Bithynia**, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to **Troas**. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to **Macedonia** and help us."

### Paul's circumcision of Timothy - when he knew it was not required, was likely motivated by the same heart he expressed in 1 Cor 9.

- 1Co 9:19-23 NIV Though **I am free** and belong to no one, **I have made myself a slave** to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

## Paul went back to Galatia on his third missionary trip

- Act 18:23 NIV After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.



## The reason Paul wrote the letter

Given the history of what took place in Galatia according to the book of Acts (the Jewish resistance to this message) it is easy to understand how / why some Judaizers would come in and attempt to motivate the Galatians to keep the ceremonial law of the Jews, to submit to circumcision, and to observe the Jewish feasts, etc...It is also easy to understand why Paul went to such great lengths to uphold the truth of the gospel and to contend for their faith.

### His concern for their salvation

- Gal 1:6 NIV I am astonished that you are so quickly **deserting the one who called you** to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--
- Gal 5:4 NIV You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

### His commitment to truth

- Gal 2:14 NIV When I saw that **they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

### His burden to see Christ formed in them

- Gal 4:19 NIV My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth **until Christ is formed in you**,