

The issue

The 'Judaisers' were trying to force non Jews who would be Christians to become Jews / obey the Law / to be circumcised, first. Paul asserts you receive the Spirit 'through grace by faith alone' (cf Gal 3:1-3).

The tone of the letter

There is a hint of desperation. Paul, after his first, thrillingly-successful missionary foray, sees it all going 'pear shaped'.

The message of this letter is vital – it contends for the very heart of the Gospel. The explosiveness and crudeness of the letter lends weight to the suggestion that this 'shot from the hip', is Paul's first reaction to his first major doctrinal opposition – the whole future of the church seemed to be at stake. It would seem appropriate if this letter was indeed the earliest of the New Testament writings. It is: -

- a) Assertive (1:1) It is clearly an apostolic pronouncement from God.
- b) Urgent (1:6) There is no 'flannel' – he cuts to the quick.
- c) Serious (1:8) It is a matter of eternal life and death.
- d) Forceful (3:1) He berates the stupidity of the Galatians.
- e) Explicit!! (5:12) He speaks in the strongest (and crudest!) terms.
- f) Abrupt (6:17,18). Having emphatically made his point he closes the letter (– and hurries to post it?!)

A possible time line

Assuming Jesus was born in 4 BC, Galatian church is 'Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe' and the letter called 'Galatians' was written before the Council of Jerusalem:

- 29 Death of Jesus.
- 30 Death of Stephen (Acts 8:1) Saul *aka* Paul converted (Acts 9:1ff).
Paul left Damascus for Arabia (Gal 1:15), returned there (Gal 1:17).
- 33 After **3 years** (Gal 1:18) (= many days, Acts 9:23) Paul escaped Damascus, visited Jerusalem; Barnabus brought him to Cephas/Peter.
After 2 weeks, Paul to Tarsus in Cilicia (Acts 9:30, Gal 1:21).
No data for about 13 years.
- 46 Then Barnabus brought Saul from Tarsus to Syrian Antioch: '1 full year' teaching (Gal 1:21, Acts 11:25).
- 47 After **14 years** Paul to Jerusalem 'following a revelation' (Gal 2:1, 2) = Agabus prophesied famine (Acts 14:27ff), taking gifts (cf Gal 2:10)
- 47 or 48 Barnabus and Paul began 'first missionary journey' from Syrian Antioch to Cyprus and South Galatia (Acts 13, 14).

Letter to the 'Galatians' – 'so quickly...!' (Gal 1:6)

49 Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:2ff)

('bold' – the known dates and times)

A commendation?!

The great reformer, Martin Luther said of it 'The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine (his wife).'

The Letter

1] Format - from ... to... Greeting, (cf today – address, date... Dear?)

2] From - a sent one / apostle –

not from or by man but by God,

nb unique claim of apostles - raised from the dead (witnesses-Acts 1:22) as one unnaturally born (1 Cor 15:8)

all the brothers with me (cf Acts 13:1)

nb these ones acknowledge authority given by God

3] To - the churches in (south) Galatia

ie Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe. (Acts 13:13- 14:20)

4] Greeting

Grace and peace – *undeserved well being (Eph 2:8,9)*

God our Father - *(3x in 5 vss!)*

and the Lord Jesus Christ – *co equal (cf Phil 2:6)*

gave for our sins – *The Gospel (1 Tim 1:15)*

rescue from present evil age – *(Luke 18:30; 1 Tim 6:19)*

according to His will – *good & certain (Eph 1:9,11)*

to whom be glory - *'not yield my glory' (Is 48:11), my glory (Jn 17:24)*

Amen? – *Amen! (1Chron 16:36; Rev 22:20, 21)*