

## SEPTEMBER 14

Today you begin Galatians. Encourage yourself with some kind of treat. 2 Corinthians was the last long New Testament letter for a while. For a while now we'll read through some smaller but important letters. On the other hand, the next few Old Testament books will be long and weighty. This again is the joy of reading The One Year Bible. The Spirit can use the different parts of the Word to keep us fresh. And since we're doing this together we can share what the Spirit brings to heart. And don't forget, chocolate helps too.

### Isaiah 15-18

From this point on it will be common to have judgments and prophecies aimed at the nations surrounding Judah. They hated Israel. They not only attacked their towns, but often joined with others against Israel. They rejoiced when Jerusalem was destroyed. The situation today of Israel being hated by its neighbors is nothing new. It was just as true back then. You could say they started it by taking over Canaan, but actually that was God's idea. He's the one who decreed the change in ownership because of the evil of those who lived there. In the final event, the real animosity is caused on a spiritual level, because Israel was and is God's instrument of bringing His redemptive purpose in life, to completion. The hatred of man for God needs a symbol and object, so we have Israel. I was reading this morning what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:22, *You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews*. Like it or fight against it, but it is true all the same and the Son of God said so.

#### Isaiah 15

Vs. 1-9 This describes what will happen when Assyria wipes out Moab. After these wars and empires, you never hear of many of these people groups again.

V. 5 I'm not sure why God/Isaiah was saddened by this, other than that Moab was descended from Lot. It could be that this attack by Assyria, and being taken away in exile, would lead to the extinction of Moab.

#### Isaiah 16

Vs. 1-5 This is an offer for Moab to join Israel and take refuge in Zion. Jerusalem would be the only place that wouldn't be destroyed, but who would believe that? Because of the wording of the offer they were being given a chance to know the *steadfast love* of the Lord.

Vs. 6-14 So, as you read, can you see what it is that kept Moab from accepting this amazing offer? Those three years would have probably been just before the Lord destroyed the army of the Assyrians. There is no Moab after the Assyrians and Babylonians cleaned house. If Moab was saved at all, they were saved in one woman, Ruth, who gave herself to worship Yahweh and became a great ancestor of Jesus.

#### Isaiah 17

Vs. 1-3 This is destruction for Syria (and the northern kingdom). The glory of the children of Israel might be negative here since the northern kingdom had lost all of its glory. Notice that it doesn't say Damascus will be a heap of ruins forever. It will only be during this time of Assyrian domination. Some ancient cities have layers of ruins, having been destroyed and rebuilt several times. It was also common to rebuild a city on a different, nearby location. Modern Ephesus is two miles from the New Testament location, and in Jesus' time there was an old and new Jericho about two miles apart. I think today if they had to rebuild New Orleans, they'd choose higher ground.

Vs. 4-14 Notice the repetition of *in that day*. At one time, Damascus was ruled by Israel, and Israel and Syria had a very good relationship during the time of David and Solomon. You could

imagine that there was the knowledge of Yahweh in Damascus, but just as in the northern kingdom, that knowledge was lost.

Isaiah 18

Vs. 1-6 The Ethiopians were called on as mercenaries to help when needed. King Asa faced an army like this. Here, they are being told to stay out of these battles or they would become food for the local wildlife.

V. 7 It is interesting that God has a soft spot for the Ethiopians and for the Egyptians. It is not an accident that the first Gentile we know of who was saved in Acts was an official from Ethiopia.

It is interesting as we read this to see that the knowledge of God extended to many nations. God has some nations that He will welcome because of their relationship to Israel. God's plan of redemption is very intricate and has some interesting surprises. He is working in places and in ways that would surprise us. Even in countries that are hostile to the gospel, people still recognize that followers of Christ can be trusted where their fellow religious brothers are prone to graft and dishonesty.

### **Galatians 1**

Galatians has been called the cornerstone of the Reformation, because it was the short and clear declaration that salvation was by grace through faith alone. Luther called Galatians his wife. (Bible Knowledge Commentary-NT, p. 587)

Galatians is Paul's first letter to a church, and it is one of the most shocking. They were quickly being persuaded to associate grace in Christ with acceptance through works. In Galatians we get some biographical information on Paul that is not in Acts. We get some inside information on meetings we don't see in Acts. And all of this comes as a result of Christians from the circumcision party in Jerusalem, who took it upon themselves to corrupt what Paul was teaching. Opposition to Paul, within the believing church in Jerusalem, apparently began very early. Church conflict, don't you love it? But God uses it. Again, as a result of conflict, we are given the letter that broke the church out of the dark ages. And again, we find Paul having to defend himself.

For the disciple in the harvest and those groups of disciples working together (churches) in the harvest, Galatians simplifies our mission from age to age and from culture to culture. We are to present salvation as by grace through faith in Christ alone. Forms and traditions serve the church in a particular culture or generation; but often our traditions morph into laws that make us right before God, if we do them, and wrong before Him if we don't do things a certain way. This morning I read about Jesus rebuking the Pharisees, "*You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.*" The commandment of God for us is very simple. It involves being a disciple in the harvest, reaching the lost, making disciples with a very simple, trans-cultural message, always remembering 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. A disciple should be able to move from one culture to the next, one language to the next, with "no bag for his journey." The disciple doesn't need "baggage." He carries with him a very simple message he can preach from whatever Bible is available, that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The harvest isn't that hard, but there are always groups that make it difficult.

### **Galatians 1**

Vs. 1-3 Notice how Paul immediately begins defending his apostleship against the Jewish Christians who were turning the church in Galatia against Paul and what he taught.

Vs. 4-5 There are no wasted words here. Jesus gave Himself. That's enough, right? The present evil age brings to mind immediately the spiritual resistance to the truth of the gospel, in this case, the forces behind these "well meaning" Jewish Christians.

Vs. 6-9 There is no friendly transition here. Paul addressed the problem immediately. While this is unique for Paul, it isn't the only example. Look at 1 Timothy 1:3. It is equally as shocking. Something had ripped the church in Ephesus apart, and Timothy was on his way there to do emergency surgery. Here, the church was also in deep trouble.

This seems to connect to Paul's words against the Jewish super-apostles in Corinth, where he says that Satan presents himself as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) Interestingly, it would be years later that Paul would write 2 Corinthians. Paul was in this conflict his entire ministry. That was the price of following Christ in the harvest during that time.

Notice that Paul is repeating what he had already told the Galatians while he was there the first time. No one should be allowed to change the message of the gospel. Remember 2 Corinthians 11:4. *For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.*

So, what is the gospel? I think even among believers it is kind of fuzzy. But the issues will get clarified in this letter.

V. 10 The charge against Paul by the legalistic Christians was that the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone was "easy believe-ism." It was watered down to win approval. If you put the bar on the ground, everyone can walk over it and get into the church. The Jewish Christians wanted to "raise the bar" and make believers, Jews and Gentiles, have to do something that showed they really believed and were really following Christ.

Paul is saying that what he just said in 6-9 were not the words of a man who was interested in winning the approval of anyone other than God. No wonder Paul got all those beatings. But in a manner of speaking, if you look at how Jesus talked to the Pharisees, you could say that His mouth got Him killed. The reality is that some truth is worth going to the wall for. Or as Luther said as a result of the message of Galatians, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

Vs. 11-12 This is something we don't "see" in Acts. Paul was spoken to by the Lord and given his instruction and theological re-training. Opponents were saying Paul got his information from a bad source. Who knows where they said he got it from, maybe the apostles Thomas or Simon the Zealot. Notice what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3, he *received* this information. Later Paul says that everyone was preaching the same thing. Here we see where Paul received his information: from Jesus Himself. Also look at 1 Corinthians 11:23. Even the Lord's Supper was given to him personally from Jesus and from no other apostle.

Vs. 13-17 Do you see where Paul is defending his apostleship? He is showing he is as good, on a human level, as his opponents. If you want to read some hard words from Paul on this subject, read Philippians 3:1-6. But also, notice after those verses in Philippians, we have some of the greatest verses in the Bible.

Paul totally embraced the fact that God chose and called him to this ministry, along with the good, bad and ugly of his past. It was all incorporated into God's planning and timing.

Vs. 18-19 We have talked about this in Acts. Apparently Luke didn't mention that Paul left Damascus for three years, returned to Damascus, fled the city for Jerusalem and then met Peter. Acts 9:25 mentions that Paul had disciples who helped him escape, suggesting that some amount of time had passed since his conversion.

Vs. 20-24 Notice that Paul is concerned here also about his connection with Jerusalem and Judea. Paul is trying to show that his message wasn't given to him by some group, but rather by Jesus Himself. It was probably the case that his opponents were linking Paul's teaching to some person or group. It's kind of funny because critics always look for the influences on a person's views and beliefs. In the early 1900s there was a critical look at Paul as being a very

conservatively influenced, pharisaical Jewish convert. Paul was way too “legalistic” for the liberals. J. Greshem Machen wrote a book to refute all of this liberal criticism called, The Origin of Paul’s Religion. Oddly, Machen came to the same conclusion that Paul is making here. It all came from Jesus Himself, and everything Paul teaches is found in Jesus’ teaching.

Notice in v. 24 that all the apostles glorified God because of Paul. They saw in him the grace of God and the truth of God. Paul didn’t make himself. God made him. Paul may have been given great revelation, but he paid a price that no one would envy. He was given a physical disability from Satan, and Paul suffered like no other apostle we know of. And was Paul honored? Only among his closest circle of friends.

One discouraging thing in following Christ is dealing with the resistance and differences of working with other believers and churches. This is sort of a rite of passage for many people that proves their commitment to following Christ. There is no other way besides the church and working with others. God doesn’t commission us to the harvest to become loners. The core of disciple-making is equipping others and working together to reach others for Christ. It is a process that brings maturity, keeping our focus on the harvest and learning how to find like-minded people with whom we can work. It is definitely not for the weak of heart. What we see in all of Paul’s struggling is a solid commitment to make the church effective and useful for the Master, as we glorify the Father by bearing much fruit, so proving that we are disciples of our Lord.

### **Psalm 58**

Vs. 1-5 This is an ode to the wicked. David is thinking of those who are after him unjustly. In v. 1, *gods* could be translated mighty ones, or rulers who thought of themselves as untouchable.

Vs. 6-9 This is the psalmist’s inspired wish to see the wicked judged.

Vs. 10-11 I don’t identify with v. 10, but I love v. 11. If you think of the wreckage that Saul and his followers were responsible for, the killing of a town of priests and their families, v. 10 is a call for them to be judged according to their own violence.

### **Proverbs 23:12**

It’s easy to say “amen” to this and go on, but I really think it is a command to us to sweat and strain to gain wisdom and knowledge. We give it mental assent, but really don’t get it. On the “disciples following Jesus” front we do this all the time, and therein is our problem. Thinking is not doing. The harvest doesn’t get in the barn by force of thought. You have to go into the harvest and get it. Here is something that Paul told Timothy in the context of following Christ. *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.* (1 Tim. 4:15) In other words Paul is saying, “don’t just say, ‘yeah, I know, OK.’ You need to sweat and strain.” (in the joy and peace and grace and strength of the Lord, of course ☺)