

## STUDY THE BIBLE 24 (STB 24) "THE BOOK OF GALATIANS"

*"Stand fast therefore in the **liberty** wherewith Christ hath made us **free**, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."* (Gal 5:1)

### BACKGROUND

Paul writes this epistle around **50 AD** just after he gets back from his **first trip, 45 – 48 AD** (the details being in Acts 13-14), to the region of **Galatia**. In this epistle he also records the disagreement he had at a conference with Peter and Barnabas and their associating with the Judaizers, as Paul calls them 'evil workers', that had come from Jerusalem.

It had been a very profitable trip in that he was greatly welcomed in the region and many people, generally Gentiles, had received Christ as Saviour. But after he left this region, there were certain **false Jewish teachers** that came along on his coat-tail, insisting that Gentiles could **not** become Christians without keeping the **laws of Moses** eg **days, times and festivals** (Gal 4:10), and in particular, **circumcision** (Acts 15:1). As Paul says "...*certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, **Except ye be circumcised** after the manner of Moses, **ye cannot be saved.***" (Acts 15:1). Paul had spent his life teaching Gentiles they could be Christians without becoming 'Jewish', that is, reverting back to Jewish laws. This was upsetting to the Jews generally, for they thought that the Mosaic law, was binding upon all. They were bitterly opposed against uncircumcised Gentiles who were presuming to call themselves disciples of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. While Paul taught Gentile Christians to stand firm in their liberty in Christ, as in Galatians and Romans, he did not want them to be prejudiced against their Jewish fellow Christians, but to regard them as brothers in Christ. Paul did not want to see two churches, a Jewish church and a Gentile church, but one church – Jews and Gentiles as one in Christ.

These **false teachers, Judaizers**, were not willing to accept Paul's doctrine of getting saved, and staying saved, without the works of the law. They insisted that a Gentile could not become a Christian unless he first adhered to Moses' laws. They made it their business to trouble and vex Christian churches, being fixed in their determination to make Christianity a sect and a branch of Judaism. Much like today, certain Jews, and Jew loving people, are infiltrating churches with their demonstrations of Jewish rites and festivals. They are intent on stamping the Old testament feasts and rituals, as found in the Pentateuch (Genesis to Deuteronomy) on everything Christian and drawing believers away from the sufficiency of Christ.

Now the Galatians received these false Jewish teachers with the same enthusiasm that they had welcomed Paul. But Paul calls these teachers **dogs** and **evil workers** who put their faith in the flesh. He says to "*Beware of **dogs** beware of **evil workers**, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have **no confidence in the flesh.***" (Phil 3:2-3). You see, dogs rip and tear their meat before they eat it. Similarly, Paul says these false teachers would **rip and tear at the true spiritual circumcision** that occurs when a person gets saved. God's spiritual circumcision is a divine operation whereby he separates a person from their sins of the flesh, and thereby creates a sinless inner man that is not contaminated by the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11). These false teachers were ignoring God's circumcision in favour of their own that entailed "Do this! Don't do that! You can't eat this! You must get physically circumcised!" and so on. It was a ripping and tearing away of God's perfect operation of removing sins and substituting it with their own physical laws of "Do's and Don't's". This is called **concision**. The only circumcision that Paul recommended was that of the spiritual kind where "... *ye are circumcised with the **circumcision made without hands**, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:*" (Col 2:11).

So what followed in Galatia was a general explosion of circumcision among the Gentile Christians. As we know, circumcision was the introductory rite into Judaism. Gentiles could indeed become Jews through circumcision and the observation of all the ceremonial laws. However the time for becoming a Jew had passed and had been surpassed by the necessity for all to become Christians.

Paul then writes this epistle to the Galatian churches warning them with "***Are ye so foolish?** having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"* (Gal 3:3). He urges them to "***Stand fast therefore in the liberty** wherewith Christ hath made us free, and **be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.** Behold, I Paul say unto you, **that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.** For I testify again to **every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*** (Gal 5:1-3)

Although a necessary part of old testament Judaism, Paul clearly states that circumcision has nothing to do with getting saved and nothing to do with staying saved. It was obsolete! Instead of becoming more perfect Paul warns the opposite would happen – they would end up in a worse state.

## CHAPTER SUMMARIES

**Chap 1 = Paul's authority & credentials**

**Chap 2 = Chief Apostle**

Gentiles live by faith

**Chap 3 = Bewitched**

The curse of the law

Faithful Abraham believed God

The law is a schoolmaster

**Chap 4 = Two sons**

Abraham & Ishmael

Beggarly elements

**Chap 5 = Liberty**

Walk in the Spirit

No circumcision

Fruits of the flesh and Spirit

**Chap 6 = Bear one another's burdens**

### Ch 1 = Paul's Credentials direct from God

Paul states that he marvels that just a couple of years on from his visit to the region, the Galatians churches were returning to the **beggarly elements** of the law (Gal 4:9). They had begun to walk in the Spirit, and according to Paul's doctrine, after they first got saved but were now guilty of the heresy and blasphemy of walking in the flesh in order to become perfect (Gal 3:3).

Infiltrating Jewish leaders, called the Judaizers, were wanting to nullify Paul's claim to be an apostle in the eyes of the Galatians. They were saying that because Paul was not one of the original twelve (indeed thirteen if you include Matthias Acts 1:26), he was a pretender and a fraud.

So Paul begins this first chapter with a very forthright claim of who he was – an apostle, not of man, but direct from God and not given to him by man, but again, by God himself (v1). He has a very strident vindication of himself as **chosen by God as an apostle born out of due time** (1Cor 15:8) with **his gospel being given direct from God**.

Now Paul marvels they have removed themselves from the sufficiency of Christ to another gospel (v6) and that those preaching this false gospel be accursed (v8). He tells how he surpassed all others in his pursuit of Jewish law and tradition (v14) and how he spent three years in Arabia (v17) after his conversion. In essence he proclaims "Look you Galatians, I ought to know what I am talking about, because I was the chief of all these false teachers. I was the first and foremost Jew of a Jew! No-one surpassed me in my zeal for the keeping of the law and persecuting Christians!"

After his three years in Arabia, Paul then goes to Jerusalem and confers with Peter and James, the Lord's brother. He meets with them to see if he is on the right track, because he doesn't want to run in vain in his new found faith (v18). He wants to know if he is headed in the right direction.

### Ch 2 = Paul is the Chief Apostle

"**Then fourteen years after** I went up again to Jerusalem..." (Gal 2:1). This will be fourteen years **after he first went to Jerusalem to see Peter and James** (Gal 1:18-19)

<b>32 AD The cross</b>
<b>34 AD Paul saved on the road to Damascus</b>
<b>34-37 AD Goes to Arabia for three years</b> (Gal 1:17-18). Visits Mt Sinai in Arabia (Gal 4:25) which is over on the other side of the Gulf of Aqaba. Mt Sinai is <b>not</b> at the bottom of the Sinai Peninsula – Bible maps have it completely wrong.
<b>37 AD Returns from Arabia</b> <i>Then after three years</i> (in the desert of Arabia) <b>I WENT UP TO JERUSALEM TO SEE PETER, AND ... JAMES THE LORD'S BROTHER.</b> Gal 1:18-19 Paul probably says "Look <b>Peter</b> , you're the knowledgeable head of the apostles, and you <b>James</b> , you're the Lord's brother, so you know a lot about Jesus. Let me run a few things by you what was shown me in the desert of Mt Sinai. Tell me if I'm on the right track or not?"
<b>43AD</b> Paul caught up to the third heaven (paradise) 2Cor12:2-4

This is God, no doubt, **preparing Paul for his first trip** to begin two years later in 45AD. **God takes him up to the third heaven** where he hears "...unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." 2 Cor 12:4.

**45-48 AD Trip 1** To the churches in Galatia

**50 14 years after 37AD** Then **FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER** I went up **AGAIN to Jerusalem** with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. Gal 2:1

This is the meeting called the **Jerusalem Council** where Paul withstands Peter for being a hypocrite Gal 2:11. How the tables have turned! Peter guides Paul in 37AD but now the reverse occurs where Paul teaches Peter!

**50 Writes Galatians**

**Two years after** his first trip to Galatia, and after the Council at Jerusalem, Paul marvels they are so soon removed from Christ (Gal 1:6)

It seems ironic that after meeting with Peter fourteen years previous, he ends up withstanding Peter to the face (v11) and confronts him and Barnabas with their '**two faced' dissembling and dissimulation** (two faced hypocrisy of saying one thing and doing another) (v13). You see, the Judaizers had come from Jerusalem and had infiltrated the proceedings. Peter, Barnabas and others had bowed to their doctrine rather than to Paul's (v12). They went and sat at the Jews table as a sign of respect to the laws given to Moses (v12) and so treated Paul like a leper. Although Peter and Barnabas were Christians, they acted like weak babies when standing for their beliefs when confronted by these hard headed Jews. Paul says to Peter that it was wrong to now compel the Gentiles who had become Christians to live like the Jews (v14) and to do so is to sin (v18). In fact, Paul says to do this, means that Christ died in vain (21).

### Ch 3 = Bewitched so soon

Paul just can't get over the fact that a 'witchcraft type spell' (bewitched v1) seemed to have settled on the Christian churches in Galatia. They were trying to combine the Jewish law of festivals, days, times and circumcision into their Christianity, like the Jews, (v5) and Paul stresses the fact, that this mixture wouldn't work (v2). As he says "**Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?**" (v2-3). He goes on to say that even Abraham, the Jews' earthly father, and indeed their father in the faith, simply "... believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. (v6). For Abraham to be right in God's eyes, **all** God required from him was that he believed God with no rites, laws, rituals or festivals.

What did God want Abraham to believe? God wanted Abraham to believe (have the faith) the impossible - that he would be the father of many nations even though he was a one hundred year old barren man, with a similar aged wife. Abraham says to himself "How can this be possible? Well, if God promised this, it must be true." Dear Reader, you have to admit that this would be the ultimate in faith if you were told something similar by God?

This act of believing (having faith) God gave Abraham right standing with God (righteousness) (Gen 15:6).

Paul then says that if they wanted to keep the one law of circumcision, then they had better keep the lot. They would be cursed if they didn't keep all the laws given to Moses. As Paul says "*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, **Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them*** (v10). This is called the curse of the law (v13) because it demands 100% obedience.

Then Paul says that anyone who can show faith like Abraham can be called, and indeed are, "... *the same are the children of Abraham.*" (v7) Paul says all those who have faith like this are justified before God - they will be blessed (v8-9).

Paul then hammers home the truth that struck Martin Luther as he wrestled for years on how to get right with God. Luther read Habakkuk 2:4 (also repeated three other places in the Bible Rom 1:17, Heb 10:28 and here in Gal 3:11) "**But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.**" (Gal 3:11). You see, Luther had submitted himself to all sorts of restrictions, laws, physical deprivations and self-inflicted tortures with whippings, fastings, starvations, the wearing of jagged metal that would pierce his skin under his clothes, and humiliations as he lay in doorways and let others stand on him and wipe their muddy shoes on him. Job asks the question "**How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?**" (Job 25:4).

Now these new Gentile Christians were 'clean and justified before God' as they had their sins already washed away. "And from **Jesus Christ**, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and **washed us from our sins in his own blood** (Rev 1:5). But now they were being hoodwinked into believing that if they got circumcised, that would enhance their Christianity and become more perfect. As Paul states *This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? **having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?*** (Gal 3:2-3)

The remainder of the chapter (v13-29) explains the purpose of the law and why God cursed the Jews with its demands (v13). Because the law is from God it is 100% perfect as "... *the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.*" (Rom 7:12). Just as fish bait makes fish appear, so the law does the same in exposing sin in man. So Paul explains that the function of the holy law is to curse man because he can't keep its demands (v13).

Paul explains that God giving the law to the Jews 430 years after Abraham believed, didn't cancel or annul the promise given to Abraham by his believing and being justified before God (v17-18). He explains the reason that the law was given in that the Jews had become ignorant of their wretched sinfulness (v19). How do governments reduce the crime rate? Simple, just abolish laws – abortion, sodomy, fornication, drunkenness and so on. The opposite is true – introduce laws and people become aware of sin. Not a popular move.

But Paul continues his encouragement by saying the law is good because it takes us to someone, Jesus Christ, who can keep it on our behalf (v24). Paul states that the purpose of the law was to show man that he is a sinner (v22) and that the law is our **schoolmaster** (v24) that keeps saying "**You are are not good enough! You've failed again! You must have 100% perfection.**"

What then was the law? What did it demand? There are 613 commandments neatly contained in the Ten Commandments and these are further summarized into two. What were these two? Jesus says "... *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.***" (Matt 22:37-40).

Of course, Paul's readers, indeed those of us today, are complete, utter and miserable failures when it comes to the demands of these two commandments! Even all the good things, our righteousnesses we do, are nothing but "... **filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.**" (Is 64:6)

Now Paul states that the law which was given four hundred and thirty years after Abraham believed in 1876, in no way cancels the promise given to Abraham (v18). But simply explained, the law was put on the Jews at Mt Sinai because of their wilful ignorance of their own sins and disobedience (v19).

Paul says to the Jews "You need someone (Jesus Christ) to take **God's examination** of '**You must be sinless from the day you were born to the day you die**' for you and then put his (Jesus Christ) perfect results on your School Report!" Such that we can say "Look God! I passed all that the law has demanded of me! I got 100% ! Jesus Christ sat the exam for me ... and I didn't even have to do a thing! How good is that!!!!" It's like did you ever want 'the brain' in your class at school to sit your exams for you but you get his results on your report Card? And God says "Well done, please enter heaven." But they wouldn't.

So Paul concludes by saying that anyone like the jailer who obeys "... *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ...*" (Acts 16:31), will be called the seed of Abraham and have their faith accounted for righteousness (v29).

What had happened was that the Jew knew that Abraham was circumcised as a sign of his believing God (Gen 17:11, 24) and this circumcision took place after he believed. However, after 430 years of pretending they were obeying and believing God, the formality of the physical ritual of circumcision had replaced 'the believing bit'. They assumed that because they had been circumcised, they were OK with God and in his 'good books'. This is the danger of churches today that water baptize people - they assume they must be saved because they submitted to the ritual of water. Many are like the Pharisees "*Woe unto*

*you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also **outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.***" (Matt 23:27-28)

#### **Ch 4 = Two sons**

Now an exasperated Paul asks further "*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, **how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe **days, and months, and times, and years.*****" (v9-10). He can't get over the fact that "If you are now sons of God (v6), why do you now want to return to the curse of the law which you couldn't, can't and will never be able to keep? Why do you now want to rip the fulfilled law out of Jesus' hands so that you can do a better job obeying it? The curse of the law is now dead and buried. It's a corpse that's dead and buried, so why do you now want to dig it out of the ground, give it blood transfusion, connect it back up to an oxygen tank, put on some make-up and stick a wig on it's head and pretend it's still alive?"

You can see Paul metaphorically tearing out his hair by the roots.

It's like reasoning with a person who, after walking on crushed glass in their industrial strength boots, wants to remove these boots, and continue their journey with bare feet.

He then questions whether he has just wasted his time with the lot of them (v11). He indeed has questioned them previously (Gal3:4) whether they are saved or not. The Galatians were excited and zealous with this new false teaching of the Judaizers, but Paul says it was not the right thing to be zealous about (v17-18).

Paul then cleverly returns to the example of Abraham again who had two sons – one by the bondswoman **Hagar (Ishmael)** (v25) and the other by the freewoman **Sarah (Isaac)** (v28). The children of Isaac, through Jacob, were the children of promise and therefore free while the children from Ishmael were cast away (v30).

The foundation to the story is this: God told Abraham when he was 76 years old, that he would be a father of many nations with countless physical children. So Abraham says to himself "Well, sounds good." So he waits and waits and waits while he tries and tries and tries with his wife Sarah. No children! So like a good wife she suggests he goes in to her servant Hagar and see if she will give him a child. Success! Ishmael is born. But here's the catch – Abraham did it with his own efforts and this is why Paul equates this to the law given at Mt Sinai. God says at Mt Sinai "You, Israel, think you're so clever, smart and righteousness – well try this on for size. I am God and these are my standards. This is my law and you will utterly fail to keep it. I am going to curse you with its demands, but look, have a go anyway." And so they try and try and try to produce what God wants but they fail and end up with their own righteous acts and obedience that Paul equates to an illegitimate child called 'Ishmael'. Through their own efforts they will fail miserably and completely.

This is his message to the Gentile Christians who were also trying to keep the Jewish laws. He says "If you, through disobedience to me by following the dictates of these evil workers and Jewish dogs, are going to jump back into the cesspool of the law, you will only produce a rejected and castaway spiritual child like Ishmael. You will come back under bondage because you insist on producing a bastard and illegitimate righteousness by your own efforts."

He goes on to say "However you gentile Christians, consider that you are already now free and are citizens of the Jerusalem above. You now live in this new city to come down from heaven. This new Jerusalem is Christ's wife."

Now dear Reader, where do we find this in scripture? In John's Revelation we have

<sup>2</sup> *And I John saw **the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.** Rev 21:2*

*"... saying, Come hither, **I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.** And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me **that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,**" Rev 21:9-10*

Ishmael was the result of Abraham's action in taking matters into his own hand to produce an heir, while Isaac resulted from Abraham believing God. God miraculously gave barren Abraham and Sarah the proper heir. Paul concludes by saying "Look, do you want return again under bondage? Of course you don't. Cast away the demands of the law and be free." (v30-31)

#### **Ch 5 = Liberty with freedom in Christ**

Paul outlines the bondage trap of doing just a bit of the law through circumcision (v3). It's all or nothing – it's a package deal – you have to take the lot! (James 2:10) He congratulates the Gentile Christians for having already doing well up till now (v7). Paul says that if you start messing around with these evil dogs you'll be infected. He equates this to a baker who puts the rising agent of yeast (leaven) into the dough. You know how it works – you get the yeast and dissolve it in some water and then you mix it in the flour in the bowl. The yeast that was separate, has now infused itself and joined with the flour.

Indeed Paul says "**Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.**" (Gal 5:4). Going back to just one aspect of the law to become more perfect will infect and ruin everything (v9).

But here's consequences, the results and the knock-on effect of it all. He says be very careful indeed, because if you start to introduce aspects of the law you will **devour** each other **with works of the flesh** (v15, v19-21). Your fruit of the spirit (v22) will no longer be present. Why? You will be provoking others to be as good as you in keeping the law. **You will become self-righteous and proud and arrogant.** You will start to **set standards that others can't keep.** You will start to think yourselves better than others (v26). This will result in all manner of corruption, division and violence (v19-21). He doesn't say you will lose your salvation, no, that is secure, but your inheritance in heaven will be zero. It's like the person who reads the will of a deceased person to the remaining relatives all eager to see what has been left to them. "Yes, the piano goes to Bobby as he was a good boy. The car goes to Mary as she obeyed me. But you Gentile Christians who have come back under the law, you get nothing." So God says "Yes, you are saved and you can come to heaven all of you, but you Jewish law abiding Christians get no rewards. You have tried to produce your own fruit through your own spirits with disastrous results. But you Christians who have been grafted into Christ (put into the death Rom 11:17, 19) have produced **his** fruit."

## Ch 6 = Meekness and bear one another's burdens

So Paul says be **meek** and **bear one another's burdens** (v1-2). Stop looking at other people and **concentrate on your own work** for the Lord (v4). He says don't sow to the law (the flesh) as this will just bring corruption (v8) and arguments and debates and fighting within the church. Don't be weary in well-doing (v9).

Paul is very perceptive when he says that keepers of the law don't suffer much outside persecution from others but true Christians do (v12-13). Here's the reasoning: "As long as you are working your way to heaven or trying to maintain your own salvation, then others won't worry you. Why? You're just like them. You climb two feet up the slippery pole but slide down three feet." These Judaizers will bring you into bondage and domination (v13) and will boast about it. He ends up with another sobering fact about who he, Paul, is and that he is not to be troubled by these evil workers and their converts (v17).

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