

JUNE BOOK of the MONTH

GALATIANS

This book of the Bible is a letter full of emotional energy. He has received disturbing news. Beloved believers are in danger!! They must be warned and corrected!!!

WHO: The apostle Paul wrote this letter to congregations in an area called Galatia. He had traveled in their area bringing the good news of Jesus to pagan Greeks and Celts (mostly non-Jews). Those who heard and believed became the members of these very early congregations

WHERE: Galatia is a region near the modern city of Ankara, Turkey. During Paul's second missionary journey he traveled through this largely roadless mountain area. He probably spent the winter of 48 A.D. there. The book of Acts reports that Paul, Silas and Timothy traveled together on this trip (Acts 16:1-6). He returned during his third journey (Acts 18:22-23).

WHEN: This letter was written between 50 - 55 A.D. It could be before or after his third visit. He may have been in prison in Ephesus. Most Christians were Jewish believers. Gentile Christians were unusual. Jerusalem is still the center for believers. (It was destroyed in 70 A.D.)

WHAT: In only six chapters, Paul takes on a central issue for Christians in the first century and the second millennium: **What is required in order to become a Christian?**

Paul came preaching that Jesus has fulfilled all the requirements for forgiveness, for knowing God and for receiving the gifts of eternal life and heaven. No longer did anyone need to be anxious about God's requirements. For the Jews, "requirements" meant the Jewish law: circumcision, kosher food laws and so forth. Some other Christian teachers came to Galatia, teaching that Gentiles (non-Jews) should follow Jewish law. Paul wrote back: NO!! If you go back to living by the law, you will trust your own efforts, not Jesus. All you need is Jesus!

But Paul says much more. Don't be content with my tiny summary.

VOCABULARY:

Circumcision: Ritual cutting of the foreskin of the penis. This is done to all Jewish boy babies and all male converts. It is a sign of the covenant between God and the Jews.

Flesh: Literally the Greek word means "meat," but in Paul's writing he does not mean human body. He means humanness, human sinfulness, the dark side of human nature.

Cephas: Another name for the apostle Peter.

TIPS ON READING GALATIANS:

This is a book to read slowly. After all, you have a month! More importantly, there is a lot of power and depth packed into a few pages.

You may find it helpful to read through the entire book quickly to get an overview. Then you will be ready to go back and read sections slowly. If you use this approach, do not try to comprehend everything immediately. The goal of the quick read is give you a basic road map. Everything will make much more sense the second time through.

Let the chapter and paragraph divisions in your Bible help you. These were put in by Scripture experts and editors for the purpose of making the Bible easier to read and understand. You can take each section and read it over and over again until it you are comfortable with it. Galatians is like a set of building blocks in various sizes and shapes. When you are familiar with each piece and see how they are put together, it is awesome!!