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To the Churches in Galatia
1: 1-5

To the churches in Galatia DIG: Why does Sha'ul-Paul have two names? How did Paul assert his authority? How was Sha'ul commissioned as an apostle? How were the other twelve apostles commissioned? Why did Paul include the items mentioned in his greeting? Who were the brothers? Why did the phrase, "Grace and shalom," have a special significance to the Galatians? What was the purpose of Paul adding, "Who gave Himself for our sins?" Why no word of commendation?

REFLECT: Paul's tone reminds us that our faith is a matter of heart, as well as head – feelings, as well as intellect. How does this encourage you? How does it challenge you? Do you know anyone who finds it hard to accept the authority of apostolic teaching in the B'rit Chadashah teaching? How does that challenge you? How would you explain the gospel to someone who asked you today what you believe?

An introduction of Paul's letter to the Galatians, identifying the author, addressees, and the situation for the composition.

One way to deny the truthfulness of a message is to deny the authority of the one who gives it. The **Galatian** church had received the true gospel of grace from **Paul** and had believed it until some false teachers called **Judaizers** came in after he was gone. They not only attacked the validity of the message, but also that of the messenger. Apparently **the Judaizers** had convinced some of the **Galatian** church members that **Paul** was a self-appointed **apostle** with no divine commission.[6] **Paul** started **his** letter the way all letters were started in those days: from person A to person B, to the greeting. But as **he** goes along the way **he** decides to throw in various points that **he** will deal with later. These points need our attention.

From: Sha'ul (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click Bm – The First Missionary Journey: Paul is Sha'ul and Sha'ul is Paul**), **an apostle. Paul's** miraculous conversion and call to ministry created some problems. Right from the

very beginning, **he** was separated from the original **apostles**. His enemies said that **he** was not a true apostle for this reason. So, **he** immediately calls **himself an apostle** and begins to defend **his apostolic** authority. Where did this authority come from, **he** said: **I received my commission not from human beings or through human mediation, but through Yeshua the Messiah and God the Father (1:10** to **2:14, 5:11, 6:12-14).** Then **he** points out the most important part of the book, **the gospel, "God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (1:1)** By adding this qualifying phrase, **Paul** emphasizes that fact that whereas the other apostles were commissioned by **Yeshua** while **He** was present in the flesh during **His** incarnation, **he himself** was given **his** commission by the resurrected and glorified **Messiah**.

Having satisfactorily established **his** credentials – at least temporarily – **Paul** introduces **all the brothers** who were **with him (1:2a).** Who were **the brothers with Paul**? **Paul** based **his** ministry in the city of **Antioch** (see the commentary on **Acts Bj – The Church in Syrian Antioch**), a large ancient **city** with a substantial **Jewish** community and more than a dozen synagogues. In Syrian **Antioch**, **the believers** were first called *Christianoi* **(Acts 11:26)**, which became the Greek name for the sect. "Christians" was not a derogatory name; rather, that was simply a Greek name of **their** particular sect of **Judaism**.

In those days each synagogue had a name, like "the synagogue of the Hebrews," or, "the synagogue of the Freedmen," or something to denote their particular sect. Originally, the synagogue in Antioch was probably called "the synagogue of *the Christianoi*," in other words, "the synagogue of the Christians," serving as a meeting place for both **Jewish** and **Gentile** believers. The men who met with **Paul** in **Antioch** included **Barnabas,** one of the missionaries from the earliest days of the **Yeshua** movement; **Manaen**, once a member of Herod Antipas' court and someone who had perhaps known **Yeshua** personally; and also **Luke** the physician, **Paul's** traveling companion and the author of **the Gospel** of **Luke** and the book of **Acts (Acts 13:1-3)**. These were a few of the men with **Paul** when **he** said: **all the brothers with me.**[7]

Paul and Barnabas left Syrian Antioch on the eastern Mediterranean seaboard and spent some time ministering on the island of Cyprus. Then **they** set sail for the mainland and **their** ship entered the mouth of the Cestrus River. They sailed seven miles upstream to the river-harbor city of Perga. **They went from Perga and came to Pisidian Antioch,** and **entering the synagogue on Shabbat,** the two weary **travelers sat down (Acts 13:14).** After reading from the Torah and the

haftarah (the reading from the Prophets), the elders of the synagogue, as was the custom, offered **the visitors** to say a few words of teaching, a *derashah*. **Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, speak (Acts 13:15).**

As **Paul** began a synopsis of **the gospel**, **he** said: **Brothers, sons of Abraham and those among you who are God-fearers, it is to us the message of this salvation has been sent (Acts 13:26).** The threefold address refers to the three types of people one might find in any Diaspora synagogue of the first century. First, **Paul's brothers** were **his fellow Jews**, the descendants of **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** through a **Jewish** mother. Secondly, there were **sons of Abraham**, or **proselytes**. There were two types of **proselytes**: **proselytes of the Gate** and **proselytes of the Covenant**. **Proselytes of the Gate** adopted many **Jewish** practices like celebrating **Shabbat** and the feasts of Isra'el, but did not become a full **proselyte**. Most of these were men because circumcision was not required. But **proselytes of the Covenant** entered the Covenant of Sinai as **a** full **Jew**, so to speak. Most of these were women because this level required circumcision. Thirdly, there were **God-fearers**. These were **Gentiles** who became convinced that **ADONAI** was the only true **God**, they abandoned their paganism and idolatry, but they did not choose to become a **proselyte** in any form, and hence there was no adoption of **Jewish** customs or practices (see the commentary on **Acts Be – The Centurion's Vision**).

As **Paul** preached **the gospel**, **he** included all three groups of people in **his** message. **The synagogue** received **his** message with enthusiasm and asked **Paul and Barnabas** to return and speak more on the following **Sabbath**. **When the synagogue meeting broke up, many of the Jewish people and God-fearing inquirers followed Paul and Barnabas. They kept begging them to speak these things to them** again at **the next Shabbat. The following Shabbat, almost the entire city,** both **Jews** and **Gentiles**, **came together to hear the word of the Lord. They** came to hear **the Word of God** and **the synagogue** was overflowing with **people** standing outside. Since **the** town's **citizens** had the opportunity to hear **the Torah** read every **Shabbat, they** were presumably drawn to **Paul's** preaching of **the Word** in regard to **Jesus**.[8]

The teaching of **the Torah**, requiring circumcision, attracted only a few **Gentiles**, but the preaching of **grace**, attracted a multitude of **Gentiles** who had heard **Paul's** sermon the previous **Shabbat** and understood that the **salvation he** proclaimed in **Messiah** included ***them!*** **The word** had spread like wildfire through the **Gentile** community and **they** were there in masses. But **when the** unbelieving

Jewish leaders saw the Gentile crowd, they were filled with zealousness (Greek: *zelos*), as the Great Sanhedrin had been previously **(Acts 5:17)**. **Their zealousness** was over the presence of all those **Gentiles**. It was one thing to proclaim the coming **Messiah** to **the Jews**. It was quite another to maintain that **the Messiah God** accepted **the Gentiles** on an equal basis. To **them** this was a little short of blasphemy,[9] **and they tried to contradict Paul's** interpretation of Scripture **by** continually **revealing him.**

The message of **the gospel** itself raised no objections from the Jewish community. On the contrary, the **Jewish** people of **Galatia** listened eagerly and wanted to hear more. The message of **Messiah's** death, burial, and resurrection, and the justification and **salvation** available through **Him**, sounded good to their ears. They found no offense in the cross. Those were the days before Christian arguments had galvanized **Jewish** objection to **the gospel**. **They** didn't raise any objections until **they** saw the overwhelming response of **the Gentiles**. To **the Galatian Jewish** community of Pisidian **Antioch**, the offense of the cross was the inclusion of **the Gentiles**.

Paul and Barnabas shrugged off the concern and continued to teach the new believers. However, **both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and** said: **It was necessary for the word of God to be spoken to you first (Romans 1:16). Since you reject it and judge yourselves unfit for eternal life – behold, we are turning to the Gentiles (13:43-46). Paul** cited **Isaiah 49:6** as evidence that the **salvation** of **the Gentiles** had been **ADONAI's** plan all along. In the prophecy, **God** addresses **His** chosen **Servant** and tells **Messiah** to bring **salvation** to **the Gentile nations, "It is too small a thing for you to be My Servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Isra'el I have kept; I will also make You a light for the Gentiles, that My salvation (My Yeshua) may reach to the ends of the earth."** Eventually, pressure from the **Jewish** community forced **Paul and Barnabas** out of Pisidian **Antioch**. Recovered enough to travel deeper into **Galatia**, **they** set out for another **Galatian** city: **Iconium**. **They** shook the dust from **their** feet as **they** left.

Paul saw that pattern repeated over and over again in city after city. Popular success at the synagogue was typically followed by the conversion of **a large number of God-fearing Greeks and no small number of the leading women. But the Jewish people became jealous (Acts 17:4-5).** Everywhere **Paul** went, **Gentiles** seemed to flock to **the synagogue** to hear **him** speak. All over Asia Minor, **he** found **Gentiles** eager to hear the message of **the gospel** and **Jewish**

people eager to rid **themselves** of that same message, not because of theological objections about **Yeshua**, but because **they** objected to the intrusion of **Gentiles** into **their** faith on an equal basis. Nevertheless, **Paul** was able to establish a **Gentile** church in **Galatia**.

Paul eventually worked **his** way back to **his** home base (see the commentary on **Acts Br – Paul's Return to Syrian Antioch**). After completing **his First Missionary Journey**, **Paul** received word that the **Gentle** believers that **he** had established in **Galatia** were being **bewitched** (see the commentary on **Galatians Bf – O Foolish Galatians, Who has Cast a Spell on You**) by a group of **Judaizers** (see **Ag – Who Were the Judaizers?**), who had infiltrated **the city** after **he** had left. When **Paul** heard about this, under the influence of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh, Paul** sat down and wrote a letter to the **Gentile** believers in **Galatia**.[10]

To: The Messianic communities in Galatia. Unlike **Paul's** other letters this was not written to one specific city, but to a region in what is today central Turkey where **Paul** established the congregations of **Pisidian Antioch**, **Iconium**, **Lystra**, and **Derbe (Acts 13:51** to **14:23)** and later returned to strengthen them **(Acts 15:36, 16:1-6, 18:23) (1:2b):**

Grace and shalom to you from God our Father and from the Lord Yeshua the Messiah (1:3). Grace and shalom is a combination of traditional First Century Greco-Roman and Jewish greetings. The salutation proper given here is the uniform one found in all of **Paul's** letters, but it has special significance in this letter since **the recipients** were turning away from the doctrine of **grace** toward the legalistic teachings of **the Judaizers**.

Who gave Himself for our sins (1:4a). Here **Paul** brings to the attention of **the Galatians**, who were ignoring the substitutionary nature of **Messiah's** atoning death, which is the true ground of acceptance for all believers **(4:21** and **5:4)**. This was purposely added because **the Galatians** were falling back on good **deeds** as the basis for **their** acceptance and relationship with **ADONAI**. Therefore, **Paul** counters the bloodless religion of **the Judaizers** with the doctrine of substitution, which teaches that **the Lord Yeshua** took our place on the cross, and for those of **faith**, substituted **our sins** for **His** righteousness, which perfectly satisfies every demand of a holy **God**.

So that he might deliver us from the present evil, transitory **world-system (1:4b).** The word **deliver** (Greek: *exaireo* carries the idea of *rescuing from danger*)

is the big idea of the letter. **The Good News** is *a rescue*, an emancipation, as it were, from a state of slavery. The word **evil** is not from *kakos* here, but *poneros*. In the latter word, the intent of **the evil** can be seen as far more sinister than in the former. The *kakos* man may be content to perish in his own corruption, but the *poneros* man is not content unless he is corrupting others as well, and drawing them into the same destruction as he himself will suffer. The Adversary is not called *the kakos* one, but *the poneros* one. **The present evil world-system** is described by **Paul** as *poneros*. We might best translate this Greek word as pernicious.

It is important that **Paul** candidly states that **Yeshua gave Himself for our sins . . . so that he might deliver us from the present evil world-system.** Believers being rescued from **sin** is something that is to be affected by the work of **Yeshua**, not something that occurs via human effort. In too many cases throughout religious history, both before and after **Paul's** letter to **the Galatians**, untold multitudes have thought that their own actions in association with obeying the 613 commandments of Moses is what will rescue them from evil and bring them to **Abraham's** side. Those who think like this have forgotten that it was not the Torah that **delivered** Ancient **Isra'el** from Egyptian bondage, it was **ADONAI** who **delivered** her.[11]

The Dead Sea Scrolls understand that this present evil world-system is under the dominion of Belial, of the Angel of Darkness. "And the hand of the Angel of Darkness is total dominion over the sons of deceit; they walk on paths of darkness. From the Angel of darkness stems corruption of all the sons of justice, and all their sins, their iniquities, their guilts and their offensive deeds are under his dominion in compliance with the mysteries of God, until his moment; and all their afflictions and their periods of grief are caused by the dominion of his enemy; and all the spirits of his lot cause the sons of light to fall" (Rule of the Community 3:20-24).[12]

In obedience to the will of God, our Father (1:4c). But **Paul** is quick to add that the act of **Messiah** *rescuing* us is not according to our plan, or in proportion to our obedience to a set of rules, or because of any good quality in us, but according to **the Father's** sovereign **will**. Therefore, this *rescue* is according to **His** plan, not ours. All of which means that the **salvation** secured on the cross for us by our **Lord** is to be received by **faith**, apart from any merit of our own. We cannot earn what **Messiah** has secured for us. **Salvation** is a free **gift**. **For grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves – it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).**

Paul concludes **his** introduction with a doxology fitting for such a saving **God**. **His** motive for writing to the **Galatian** churches was that **he** might acknowledge that **ADONAI** is worthy of **glory forever and ever (1:5a)! The apostle's** supreme purpose was to glorify **his Lord**, and **he** calls all believers to do everything **to the glory of God (First Corinthians 10:31).** In these five opening verses **Paul** covers the four stages of our **salvation**. The first stage was the sovereign decree of **YHVH** to save, the second was the death of **Messiah** for our **sins**, the third was the appointment of **apostles** to testify to the gospel, and the fourth was the gift of **His** grace to those who would believe in **Yeshua Messiah**. In each of these stages **the Trinity** is at work, because **Their** will and **Their** work are always one. Together **They** planned **salvation**, together **They** provide **salvation**, together **They** announce **salvation**, and together **They** grant **salvation** to everyone who comes to **Them** in **faith**.[13]

The abruptness of the language is remarkable. In **Paul's** other letters, **he** always has a word of commendation for the churches to which **he** is writing, even in the case of the church at Corinth which **he** was taking severely to task because of serious disorders within its membership. **He** does not even address **them** as **those trusting in Messiah Yeshua,** or **the kedoshim**, *the holy ones*, although they were. This shows the extent and seriousness of their defection, also the troubled state of the **apostle's** mind mingled with **his** indignation at the actions of **his** converts.[14]

Amen (1:5b). This implies oath, acceptance of **words**, and confirmation or words. It implies oath, as it is written: **The woman is to say, "Amen, amen" (Numbers 5:22).** It implies acceptance of **words**, as it is written: **Cursed is the one who does not uphold the words of this Torah by doing them. Then all the people are to say, "Amen" (Deuteronomy 27:26).** And it implies confirmation of **words**, as it is written: **So the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May ADONAI do so! May ADONAI fulfill your words that you have prophesied" (Jeremiah 28:6a).**[15]

Therefore, **Paul** had already drawn the lines of battle by touching on two vital concerns. **He** had affirmed **his** own **apostleship** and had declared that the basis of mankind's **salvation** is based solely on the work of **Messiah** and not any human **deeds**.

*Dear **Father God**, We praise and thank you that you sent the message of your great love/gospel out to all so that you **might deliver us from the present evil,***

world-system (1:4b NIV). *The gift of* ***Your*** *love was at such a great sacrifice for you! Though* ***You*** *give your gift freely to all who believe, yet it cost you such pain and sorrow. We bow in worship and adoration of* ***You****! Please give us opportunities and the right words to use to share your gift with others, and may go ahead of us to soften their hearts to be willing to follow you as their* ***Lord*** *and* ***Savior****. We love you* ***Father****! In your holy* ***Son's*** *name and power of resurrection, Amen*