

GALATIANS

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC

J.K. MCKEE



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Second Edition

by John Kimball McKee

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ABBREVIATION CHART AND SPECIAL TERMS

The following is a chart of abbreviations for reference works and special terms that are used in publications by TNN Press. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as TWOT for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

Special terms that may be used have been provided in this chart.

ABD: <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>	LITV: <i>Literal Translation of the Holy Bible</i> by Jay P. Green (1986)
AMG: <i>Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament</i>	LS: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Lidell & Scott)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament	LXE: <i>Septuagint with Apocrypha</i> by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)	LXX: Septuagint
b. Babylonian Talmud (<i>Talmud Bavli</i>)	m. Mishnah
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.	MT: Masoretic Text
BDAG: <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)	NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
BDB: <i>Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>	NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
BKCNT: <i>Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament</i>	NBCR: <i>New Bible Commentary: Revised</i>
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.	NEB: New English Bible (1970)
CEV: Contemporary English Version (1995)	Nelson: <i>Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words</i>
CGEDNT: <i>Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words</i> (Barclay M. Newman)	NIGTC: <i>New International Greek Testament Commentary</i>
CHALOT: <i>Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>	NICNT: <i>New International Commentary on the New Testament</i>
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)	NIDB: <i>New International Dictionary of the Bible</i>
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition	NIV: New International Version (1984)
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls	NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
ECB: <i>Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible</i>	NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
EDB: <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i>	NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
EJ: <i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>	NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)	NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
EXP: <i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>	NT: New Testament
Ger: German	orthopraxy: lit. "the right action," how the Bible or one's theology is lived out in the world
GNT: Greek New Testament	OT: Old Testament
Grk: Greek	PreachC: <i>The Preacher's Commentary</i>
<i>halachah</i> : lit. "the way to walk," how the Torah is lived out in an individual's life or faith community	REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
HALOT: <i>Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Koehler and Baumgartner)	RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2001)	t. Tosefta
Heb: Hebrew	Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible	Thayer: <i>Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
IDB: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>	TDNT: <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
IDBSup: <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement</i>	TEV: Today's English Version (1976)
ISBE: <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i>	TNTC: <i>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i>
IVPBBC: <i>IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)</i>	TWOT: <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
Jastrow: <i>Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature</i> (Marcus Jastrow)	UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)	v(s). verse(s)
KJV: King James Version	Vine: <i>Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words</i>
Lattimore: The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore (1996)	Vul: Latin Vulgate
	WBC: <i>Word Biblical Commentary</i>
	Yid: Yiddish
	YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)

PROLOGUE

Among all the books of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament), Paul’s letter to the Galatians often presents the most challenges to Messianic Believers. After a surface reading of the text, most readers of Galatians consider its six short chapters to be the “final word” on Christians’ relationship to the Law of Moses. Paul apparently sees the Law as being outdated and unnecessary for faith. Paul condemns anyone who claims that the Law of Moses has any place in the life of a born again Believer, and was seriously afraid for anyone giving it any kind of merit, perhaps even suggesting that such a person was on the verge of apostasy.

While some of these conclusions are a bit overstated, even among Christians who do not believe that Torah observance is required for Believers today, they do summarize a fair amount of the rhetoric that we often encounter. Messianic Believers today advocate that the Lord is restoring a Torah foundation to His people. They practice this by studying the Torah portions every week, and by doing things like keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, appointed times of Leviticus 23, and kosher dietary laws. It should be our hope that in most cases the desire to do such things is because a person is trying to grow in his or her faith and live a life like Messiah Yeshua (Christ Jesus). The motives of a Spirit-led Messianic Believer should not be to try to rely on human actions to gain favor with God, but rather let those actions come as a result of a vibrant relationship with Him. As this relationship grows, not only will our heart be transformed—but we will have a mind that is focused on God and is able to reason with complicated issues as they arise.

Galatians is one of those texts of Scripture where a mind able to compute and fathom difficult concepts is needed. More commentaries and Bible studies have probably been conducted on Galatians and its emphasis on “freedom” than any other text. Much of the Protestant Reformation was spearheaded by Galatians, as Martin Luther appropriated its words on justification to refute Catholicism’s practice of selling indulgences. But, Galatians is sometimes used when “legalists” enter the community of faith and insist that a person live up to a standard of righteous living. Some pastors and Bible teachers use Galatians to refute those who would believe that a disciplined life of faith is necessary—often taking Galatians out of its original First Century Mediterranean, mixed Jewish and Greco-Roman, context. Messianic Believers who place a high emphasis on the Torah are easy targets for being “legalists,” especially when Paul has so much to say about the misuse of the Law of Moses in his writing to the Galatians.

A coherent Messianic view of Galatians is needed in this hour when our emerging Messianic theology is in a state of flux. Indeed, the reader will note that this work is the Second Edition of *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*, the First Edition being composed in 2004. This Second Edition is required for a number of reasons: (1) The First Edition was composed in a time when we did not consider the release of subsequent commentaries on other texts of Scripture (James, Hebrews, Philippians, and our Apostolic Scriptures survey as of 2007). (2) The First Edition primarily employed an inductive approach to the text of Galatians, without any serious engagement with secondary resources or scholastic commentaries. (3) Some Messianic views of Galatians espoused since that time require us to take a fresh and more detailed look at the text. While I do not believe you will find that the conclusions offered in this Second Edition are that much different from the First Edition, the style of approach to Galatians undoubtedly is. Much more careful attention has been taken to consider the opinions of Bible commentators, ancient history, and various Greek and Hebrew grammatical issues.

The biggest issue by far that needs to be considered by us in our examination of Galatians is consideration for what has been termed the New Perspective of Paul (NPP) that has been developing in various Christian circles since the 1970s. Even though it has existed for over thirty years, Christian pastors and laymen are just now having to consider some of its propositions—meaning that the Messianic movement is just now hearing whispers about it. The NPP began in the post-Holocaust environment of Christian scholars having to take the perspective of First Century Judaism much more seriously on its own terms. K. Stendahl’s work *Paul Among the Gentiles* began some of these discussions, primarily by pointing out the important fact that First Century Judaism was not the Medieval Catholicism that Martin Luther used texts such as Galatians (and also Romans) to protest. This was followed in 1977 with the release of the most-important book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* by E.P. Sanders. Two-thirds of this massive treatise includes a great deal of data from the various writings of Ancient Judaism (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash[im], Dead Sea Scrolls) and specifically examines its

position on works and righteousness. Other major NPP scholars that have arisen since include James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright.

The primary thrust of the NPP is that we have to consider Paul's writings in the context of First Century Judaism. We cannot *first* subject our Twentieth or Twenty-First Century worldview onto those ancient times. We have to consider things such as "circumcision," "works of the Law," and "righteousness" from the perspective of the wider First Century Jewish world. While the conclusions of the NPP have shaken up a few evangelicals—and even a few Messianics for that matter—what it brings to the table cannot be easily discarded anymore. We have to include the NPP in our conversation on texts such as Galatians, as it might help us realize things that we have so easily glossed over—possibly because we have looked at them through too much of a "Lutheran" perspective. Undeniable in Paul's argument to the Galatians is how these non-Jewish Believers were to be included in the covenant people of God.

This Second Edition of Galatians will be taking into account some of the proposals and suggestions of the NPP. Generally, the NPP has received its most opposition from Reformed (or Calvinist) theologians, and its most acceptance from Arminians and Wesleyans. I cannot call myself a complete advocate of the NPP, but you will find that I am very informed from its proposals and want to synthesize some of its ideas on righteousness being corporate covenant inclusion along with a personal just standing before God. I do not believe the NPP can be ignored if we are to have an accurate First Century understanding of Galatians that balances personal redemption with membership in God's corporate community. Many of the proposals of the NPP can definitely aid the credibility of the Messianic movement in the future—and most especially help our interpretation of some difficult words in Galatians.

Looking back on the past four to five years of Messianic theological development (2002-2007), it is clear to me that a more thorough and mature approach to Biblical Studies—particularly regarding Galatians—is required. Too many Messianic Believers when testifying of their Torah related convictions to Christian family and friends have Galatians quoted to them haphazardly. At the very least, this causes them to become discouraged and confused. The worst case scenario is that some Messianics perceive that Yeshua the Messiah and the Apostle Paul contradict themselves on the matter of the Law of Moses, and thus one must be discarded in favor of the other. I have heard liberal Messianics who counter claims from Galatians by saying that they only follow the Torah to evangelize their Jewish brethren, but they do not consider it important to follow beyond that. Likewise, I have heard unstable Messianics declare that Paul's letter to the Galatians must be a forgery and that Paul's other works should also be considered suspicious. Somewhere in the middle are those who try to examine Galatians with integrity, but who hold to a high view of the Torah and its continued validity for Believers today.

A responsible interpreter has much to weigh when considering a text like Galatians. I do not believe that it is difficult to reconcile the seeming differences between Yeshua's and Paul's words on the Torah—but in order to do this we must gain the proper perspective. What are the circumstances surrounding Paul's composition of Galatians? What issues were the Galatians suffering from? What were the spiritual dynamics at work? These are all important questions that we should consider when examining any Biblical text—but *they are imperative to consider when interpreting Galatians*. We cannot simply interject what we think the text might mean, nor can we just throw our hands up into the air and ignore it, either. We have to do the difficult work of exegesis, being guided by a sound ideology rooted in the Torah and embodied in the worldview of Paul.

As you prepare to read this commentary on Galatians, what issues might we be facing today as the emerging Messianic movement that are paralleled in this letter? What is our position on circumcision? (Have we even defined its Galatian meaning properly?) How does one become an accepted member of God's people? What is righteousness and how do we receive a proper standing before God? Perhaps most important, how do we avoid being placed in the position of the Galatians?

You will discover that Galatians' message and what it really communicates is as relevant for our times now as Messianic Believers as much as it was in the First Century. The challenge is whether or not we will actually heed this message. The obstacle to overcome is having the spiritual capacities to compute what the ancient challenge actually was—and whether we are indeed facing it in our midst again today. How can we be people who embody the essence of Paul's declaration, "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (5:14, NIV), while responding to some of the criticisms against that Law derived from Galatians? How can we be men and women who strive to obey God as a *natural outworking* of our faith, rather than something that is required to precede faith?

J.K. McKee
Editor, TNN Online

INTRODUCTION

Paul's Epistle to the Galatiansⁱ (Grk. *Pros Galatas*, ΠΡΟΣ ΓΑΛΑΤΑΣ) is a very difficult text for most of today's Messianic Believers to understand. This is due to any number of factors, the foremost being that Galatians is often examined and interpreted from a perspective that is largely distanced from the First Century situation that it was originally written to address. Rather than considering the specific spiritual and social dynamics of a group of newly maturing Believers in Yeshua (Jesus), who were challenged that their ethnic condition was not enough for true faith, many interpreters and lay readers consider Galatians to be Paul's *magnum opus* on Christians' divorce from the Torah of Moses. These Christian examiners of Galatians are often ill-informed of the *actual situation* of the Galatians, and too many Messianics—who have pro-Torah convictions—are ill-equipped to be able to respond to the claims made against them from this letter.

An engagement with the text of Galatians alone is not sufficient for a pro-Torah understanding of Galatians that will support Messianic convictions and lifestyle practice. (And neither is it sufficient for understanding *any* Biblical text). Most of the examination of Galatians that occurs today among your average Christians *and* Messianic Believers is often removed from its ancient context. Too much of it takes place on the basis of "this verse says this" and "but this verse says that" without consideration for the broader issues and discussions going on both in history and current scholastic study of Galatians. Furthermore, one must also keep in mind that Galatians is one of the earliest texts ever produced by the emerging Messianic movement of the First Century (save some of the creedal formulas used in some of Paul's letters).ⁱⁱ As a consequence, we have to temper our examination of Galatians with the understanding that further clarification of various subjects may be given in some of Paul's additional letters and other Apostolic documents.

The message of Galatians, the exact audience of the Galatians, and some of the historical background surrounding Galatians, have all been debated by theologians in the past century. This is being compounded today by the rise of theologians advocating the New Perspective of Paul (NPP), where Christian scholars are seeing Paul's view of the Law as being far more moderate than is traditionally believed. Being informed from this view can change our orientation of certain passages in Galatians that have often been perceived as anti-Law. Without question, the major theme of Paul's letter to the Galatians is a warning about some kind of perversion of the good news. But what this specifically is, and who the people are who are introducing this error to the Galatians, are often rigorously discussed.

Christian theologians for several centuries have commonly likened Galatians as the "Magna Carta of Christian freedom," further comparing Romans to being the "Constitution." Since the Reformation, Galatians has been an important text for the foundational concept of justification by faith.ⁱⁱⁱ Certainly, the Reformation was the key event used by God to return the Body of Messiah to the Scriptures and purge many unbiblical practices introduced via Catholicism. Today's Messianic movement would not be in existence without the Reformation. But as good and as important as the Reformation was, to what extent did the Reformers' conclusions go too far? How limited were the early Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin in using a text like Galatians to refute the errors of Medieval Catholicism—when Paul actually wrote Galatians to strictly admonish a group of new, maturing non-Jewish Believers in the First Century? Have we been affected by some misappropriation of Galatians' original situation?

Over the centuries, Galatians has been used as a major support for the doctrine of justification by faith, a critical part of Protestant theology. **No one is denying that this is important.** But how many of us have been introduced to a view of justification that is too much removed from its Hebraic context in the Tanach (Old Testament)? When we consider what it means to be justified or declared righteous, largely embodied by the Greek *dikaïosunē* (δικαιοσύνη) in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) and Septuagint—behind this stands the Hebrew word *tzedakah* (תְּצַדִּיק), used frequently throughout the Tanach. While righteousness is certainly a personal status that God can afford to people, embodied in critical statements such as "And men will say, 'Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a

ⁱ Please note that in spite of the common reference to Galatians as "the Book of Galatians," I am going to purposefully refer to the text as either the Epistle to the Galatians or Paul's letter to the Galatians, and not use this reference. By failing to forget that this text is a letter written to a specific audience in a specific setting, we can make the common error of thinking that this was a text written *directly to us*. Our goal as responsible interpreters is to try to reconstruct what this letter meant *to its original audience first*, before applying its message in a modern-day setting.

ⁱⁱ Including, but not limited to: Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20.

Cf. Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary: Galatians*, Vol. 41 (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1990), xlii.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. *Ibid.*, xlili-lv for a summarization of different views and approaches to Galatians from the Second Century to the Reformation.

God who judges on earth!” (Psalm 58:11), righteousness is *not just* an individualistic concept. There is a corporate sense of righteousness or *tzedaqah/dikaiosunē* that involves being a part of God’s covenant people:

“The covenant or theocratic aspect involves the nation of Israel, the covenant requires obedience to God by the nation and is the way of his people (Psa 1:1-6; Deut 6:25), a way of righteousness. God is righteous, under the covenant, when he delivers his people from trouble (Psa 31:1), their enemies (Psa 5:8), the wicked (Psa 37:6) and when he is vindicating Israel before her foes or executing vengeance on them (Jer 11:20). It is appropriate that Israel be assured of ultimate victory over her foes (Isa 54:14-17). In this last event the Lord is both righteous and the savior (Isa 45:21)” (TWOT).^{iv}

Consider that when the Ancient Israelites declared, “It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all this commandment before the LORD our God, just as He commanded us” (Deuteronomy 6:25), this was not just a statement of personal commitment to God. The statement that the Israelites will have *tzedaqah* via their obedience was a recognition that corporately they will all be in covenant with God. Reformation period theology largely emphasized the *personal justification* or righteousness that one was to experience via faith in Yeshua. While this is important, *corporate justification* or righteousness is likewise important as a definitive consequence.

When Paul talks about justification in Galatians – is he only talking about a personal status that Believers have in the Messiah? Or is he also talking about their corporate relationship to one another as members of a covenant community? Reading Galatians from this view may force a person to reevaluate some of his or her own Western individuality, something somewhat foreign to First Century Judaism – and ironically to much of the historic Christian Church as well.^v Messianic Believers are often not aware of some of the corporate aspects of justification that need to be considered. To Paul and to the other Apostles, it is not sufficient enough to be “justified” individually before God; one was interconnected to other men and women of faith who shared the same belief in Yeshua.

Corporate justification is important to consider because of the inclusion of non-Jewish Believers in First Century the community of faith. If Galatians is one of the earliest Apostolic texts produced, it is likely that the issue of Jewish-non-Jewish relations was still “in progress.” Some things still needed to be figured out and discussed as the gospel message was going out to the nations. Paul concludes that faith in Yeshua resulted in one having membership in “the Israel of God” (6:16), something that was contrary to the prevailing Jewish theology of his time. The Mishnah attests that all members of Israel (with few exceptions) were assured eternal salvation because of their ethnicity:

“All Israelites have a share in the world to come, as it is said, *Your people also shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified* (Is. 60:21). And these are the ones who have no portion in the world to come: (1) He who says, the resurrection of the dead is a teaching which does not derive from the Torah, (2) and the Torah does not come from Heaven; and (3) an Epicurean” (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1).^{vi}

Not only does Paul *not argue* that one’s ethnicity guarantees an individual a righteous status before God, but he recognizes that the work of Messiah Yeshua has brought a new status beyond the barriers of Jew and non-Jew. He says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua” (Galatians 3:28). His opponents would have disagreed with this, and would have instead argued that *something beyond belief in Yeshua* was necessary for inclusion among God’s people.

Freedom or liberty for Believers is also a major theme of Galatians, but many Christians often separate this from its original Tanach basis of keeping the Torah. Psalm 119:45 emphasizes, “And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.” It is a gross misconception that God gave His people the Law to place them in bondage, and that “liberty” means being liberated from obedience to Him. On the contrary, the Psalmist opens his words with, “How blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD” (Psalm 119:1). While God’s own intentions for giving His people the Torah were good, the fallen nature of humans can quickly change things and often goes beyond what He wants.

For Messianics today, Galatians often proves to be a problem text, as a surface reading of Galatians may appear to be quite negative toward a lifestyle of Torah obedience. As is summarized by most Christians, “Certain Jewish

^{iv} Harold G. Stigers, “צדקה,” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:754.

Cf. John Reumann, “Righteousness,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp 1129-1130.

^v Another concept that probably needs to be reevaluated from its Reformation emphasis (particularly from Calvinism) among today’s Messianics is the concept of the elect, particularly seen in passages such as Romans 9. Is the “elect” spoken of individuals destined for salvation, or God’s corporate people chosen to fulfill His mission? Have some views of God’s elect likely been influenced too much from Western individualism, and not enough from what the Tanach tells us about the mission of God’s chosen people as a whole?

^{vi} Jacob Neusner, trans. *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 604.

Cf. E.P Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), pp 149-150.

teachers, who professed to be Christians and acknowledged Jesus as Messiah, were obscuring the simplicity of the gospel of free grace with their propaganda. They insisted that to faith in Christ must be added circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law” (NIDB).^{vii} Similarly, much of the Messianic movement has been accused of doing the same thing. While this was certainly something going on in Galatia, *why was it going on?* Was it simply an issue of getting non-Jewish Galatians to observe the Torah, i.e., obey God? Was it forcing things onto people who were not ready? Or, was it an issue of status in the community of faith—and how one is specifically considered righteous before the Lord? These are certainly all things that we will have to consider in our examination of Galatians.

When we consider Galatians, Paul does warn his audience that there was another “gospel” circulating in their midst. Outsiders had entered in after he had left, and brought in a message that was going to be detrimental to their faith in Yeshua the Messiah, and their standing before one another as members of the faith community. The Galatians found themselves deserting Paul’s teachings for those of some others (1:6-7), and Paul was greatly concerned as a close relationship had been forged between him and these people—almost as a father toward his children. But when Paul is accused of teaching a “circumcision free” gospel, what is he specifically being criticized for? Has he cast aside the instructions of the Torah as many Christians have interpreted his words? Or is he arguing against circumcision being the means for justification? What must Paul truly explain to the Galatians about their spiritual walk? What had caused the discord among the assemblies of Galatia? These are also things we will have to consider in our examination of Galatians.

The Epistle to the Galatians certainly does teach us some important things about our present relationship to the Law and our faith in Yeshua the Messiah—be we ancient Believers in the First Century, or modern Messianic Believers living in the Twenty-First Century. It addresses the age old problems of gaining inclusion in God’s family by human merit, versus a steadfast belief in His Messiah. Paul himself argues that hearing the gospel and being filled with the Holy Spirit **is sufficient for our salvation** (1:1-5; 3:26-29; 4:6-7, 31; 5:1, 13, 25; 6:8; 15-16), and I will certainly *not argue* that Paul insists that Torah observance is required in order to gain salvation. But did Paul really consider God’s Instruction to be abolished? Did he consider that its commandments of morality, ethics, and conduct be cast aside and were only in place prior to the cross?

What might you need to reconsider based on common perceptions of Galatians? This is why it will be imperative for us to consider some of the new Jewish and Hebraic studies being performed in the New Testament in our discussion of Galatians. There have also been some varied Messianic commentaries produced on Galatians, which we will likewise take into consideration. Modern commentators are often perplexed at Paul’s view of the Torah—some of which are concluding is *less negative* than commonly perceived—and find it difficult to reconcile in their current and often divergent Christian traditions.

PAUL AND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO THE GALATIANS

Paul’s letter to the Galatians is among the non-disputed Pauline Epistles, as all, both conservative and liberal, agree on genuine Pauline authorship of the text. Only liberals who deny Pauline authorship of all of his attributed letters deny Pauline authorship of Galatians. All are likewise agreed on the literary unity of Galatians, as no one breaks it up into various pieces or sub-compositions.

Galatians was well known to the emerging Christian Church of the late First and early Second Centuries. It is referenced by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and listed among the books of the Muratorian Canon. Polycarp makes some direct appeals to Galatians in His *Epistle to the Philipians*:

GALATIANS	EPISTLE OF POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS
“But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother” (Galatians 4:26)	“These things, brethren, I write to you concerning righteousness, not because I take anything upon myself, but because ye have invited me to do so. For neither I, nor any other such one, can come up to the wisdom of the blessed and glorified Paul. He, when among you, accurately and steadfastly taught the word of truth in the presence of those who were then alive. And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building...

^{vii} D. Edmond Hiebert, “Galatia,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 367.

	...you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbor, “is the mother of us all.” For if any one be inwardly possessed of these graces, he hath fulfilled the command of righteousness, since he that hath love is far from all sin (<i>Polycarp to the Philippians 3</i>). ^{viii}
“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).	“Knowing, then, that ‘God is not mocked,’ we ought to walk worthy of His commandment and glory” (<i>Polycarp to the Philippians 5:1</i>). ^{ix}

There is important internal evidence that we see of Pauline authorship in Galatians. The author identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle” (1:1; cf. 5:2), and most of the material seen in chs. 1 and 2 is autobiographical. All of the Church Fathers and even some of the early heretics identified the author of Galatians as Paul. Extreme liberals such as the Nineteenth Century German higher critic F.C. Baur even considered Pauline authorship legitimate.

In Galatians, we see that Paul’s apostolic authority and legitimacy as a minister of Yeshua were both seriously challenged. The opening of Paul’s message to the Galatians is largely a defense of his service to the Lord and the work that he has thusfar accomplished both for the gospel, and for the Galatians in particular (1:8-2:10). The opponents that he chastises his Galatian audience about are promoting circumcision—something that Paul tells them not to receive. He candidly says, “Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Messiah will be of no benefit to you” (5:2). Paul’s message to the Galatians is that they should not receive this “circumcision.”

Many Christian expositors have only considered this circumcision in physical terms. Thus, it is asserted when Paul speaks against circumcision he is primarily thinking in terms of removal of the male foreskin of the *glans penis*. But is this what “circumcision” was really considered to be given the backdrop of Galatians? When Paul writes later, “But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished” (5:11), is he *just speaking* of a physical operation? Has he just issued a moratorium for the Galatians to go through a medical procedure? How much was this circumcision a physical act—versus something that had particular motives behind it with a certain result?

By the First Century, the rite of circumcision was extremely important—particularly in the larger Greco-Roman world—for a Jew to be identified as “a Jew.” T.R. Schreiner indicates, “Genesis 17:9-14 says that circumcision was the covenant sign for the people of God, and that refusal to take on the covenant sign would result in being cut off from the people of God...[I]n the intertestamental period circumcision [was typically required for one to become a proselyte to Judaism...any diminution of the rite would naturally inflame both the cultural and religious passions of the Jews.”^x

When Paul says that he is persecuted for no longer “advocating circumcision” (NEB), it seems best to view this *not* in the context of a medical procedure—but in lieu of what it would mean for one as a member of God’s corporate people. Whereas his opponents would be promoting circumcision as a means to attain justification—inclusion as a covenant member of God’s people—Paul argues instead that **this is accomplished via faith in Israel’s Messiah.** Messianic author Tim Hegg suggests that a better understanding of “circumcision” (Grk. *peritomē*, περιτομή) is as “a short-hand way of referring to the ritual of a proselyte, the rabbinic ceremony in which a non-Jew was accorded the status of a Jew.”^{xi} So, when we see the later claim brought before the Jerusalem Council, “Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1), this largely does not relate to the physical act of circumcision *as much as it relates to ritual proselyte conversion.*^{xii} Obviously, this can reorient some of our approach to what Paul is really arguing against in his letter to the Galatians, and the “circumcision” being advocated among them by Paul’s opponents.

Also important to keep in mind is the use of classical rhetoric in Paul’s epistle, features of which have been explored in many technical commentaries. While we will not be exploring them to the extent of other commentators,

^{viii} *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff, ed., Libronix Digital Library System 1.0d: Church History Collection. MS Windows XP. Garland, TX: Galaxie Software. 2002.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x T.R. Schreiner, “Circumcision,” in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 138.

Cf. Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp 89-90.

^{xi} Tim Hegg, *A Study of Galatians* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2002), 4.

^{xii} Cf. Tim Hegg, *The Letter Writer: Paul’s Background and Torah Perspective* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2002), 256.

Paul's words to the Galatians in 1:6, "I am astonished" (RSV) or "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Messiah, for a different gospel" (NASU), are important to take note of. These are words of ironic rebuke, as the verb *thaumazō* (θαυμάζω) can mean to "wonder, be surprised that" (BDAG).^{xiii} Paul is not really in "marvel" (KJV) at the spiritual condition of his Galatian audience, but employs this terminology to actually express how concerned he is for them!

(Paul's visits to Galatia and direct interactions with the Galatians are addressed immediately below.)

WHO WAS THE TARGET AUDIENCE OF THIS LETTER?^{xiv}

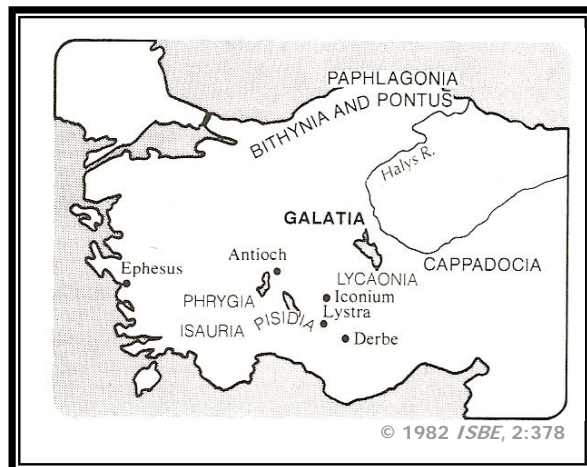
The target audience of Paul's letter to the Galatians is a vigorously debated issue among contemporary theologians. All are agreed that we are to place ourselves somewhere in Central Asia Minor, and that this is probably the only letter that Paul specifically wrote to a group of congregations: "the assemblies of Galatia" (1:2, YLT).^{xv} Being able to accurately identify the exact audience of Galatians is a debate that continues in contemporary theology, with *Galatia* (Γαλατία) representing either (1) an ethnic group of people, or (2) a geo-political group of people. However, regardless of which side an interpreter favors, the vast majority of the intended audience in Galatia—either ethnic or political—were relatively new, non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua.

The Book of Acts is the principal external witness to the events surrounding the composition of Galatians. Both Acts 16:6 and 18:23 make a reference to *Galatikēn chōran* (Γαλατικὴν χώραν), or the "Galatian region." In this case, Luke is probably using the term to describe an ethnic group as he links it with "the Phrygian...region" in Acts 16:6. Many interpreters over the centuries have concluded that Luke's ethnic Galatians are the same Galatians that Paul is addressing in his letter. However, renewed contact with Asia Minor from the Eighteenth Century to the present has caused many scholars to doubt that Luke's Galatians and Paul's Galatians are exactly the same.

A significant number of interpreters believe that as Luke's common practice was to use local designations for cities and places, that his Galatians are ethnic Galatians living in North Galatia. Paul in contrast, commonly used Roman provincial names and designations, so his Galatians must be those living in the province of Galatia to the South, regardless of their ethnicity. This is all compounded by the fact that who these congregations were lacks any archaeological evidence in *any* of the proposed locations. This does not mean that these people did not exist, because given the time that Paul interacted with the Galatians many of the assemblies likely met in homes or other domiciles.

"Galatia" originally referred to a region of Asia Minor inhabited by ethnic Celts, but by the First Century also referred to a province of the Roman Empire. *Galatai* (Γαλάται) was a Greek modification of the term *Keltoi*, as Celts (presumably from Gaul) invaded Greece in about 280 B.C.E., some coming to the aid of King Nicomedes I of Bithynia as mercenaries. Their movements ultimately led to more permanent settlements in Northern Asia Minor. This migration ended in about 77 B.C.E., but not before this ethnic people was subjugated by Rome in 189 B.C.E. These Galatians became a subject kingdom of Rome until 63 B.C.E., finding themselves incorporated into a province of a much larger area in 25 B.C.E. after the death of the final Galatian king. Are these the Galatians that Paul writes to?

Up until the Nineteenth Century, it was generally agreed that the target audience of Paul's letter was a group of people known as the Galatians. These Galatians were ethnic Celts, who later integrated into the local population. Called



^{xiii} Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 444.

^{xiv} Note that the order of composition factors listed in this Introduction differ from that of some of the other *Practical Messianic* commentaries, as the identity of the audience and date of writing is considered first, before the location of the author during writing. This is done purposefully per the debate over the Northern and Southern Galatian Theories.

^{xv} A significant exception to this might be the composition of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. The oldest extant copies of Ephesians leave a blank space in Ephesians 1:1, which in most Bibles reads "Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the will of God, to the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Messiah Yeshua." The RSV, following the most ancient reading, simply has "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus," with the clause *en Ephesō* (ἐν Ἐφέσῳ) missing. Paul's Epistle "to the Ephesians" might have likewise been a general letter written to a broad area, with the messenger Tychichus given authority to put a city name in the blank space. If this is true, then the Ephesian tradition of composition obviously won out, but it would make Ephesians a relatively broader epistle similar to Galatians.

Consult the author's entry for Ephesians in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* for more details.

today the **Northern Galatian Theory**, Paul's audience primary consisted of ethnic Galatians. We know from Luke's testimony in Acts that Paul did establish congregations in Northern Galatia after the Jerusalem Council during his Second Missionary Journey (Acts 16:6-8). These Galatians would largely be descendants of the original Gauls who had migrated to the region, living in settlements such as Ancrya, Pessinus, and Tavium.

The most support that is found today for the Northern Galatian Theory is largely seen among German theologians, who place the composition of the epistle after the Jerusalem Council. It is assumed from this viewpoint that Paul had to write Galatians because the Jerusalem Council's ruling on the inclusion of non-Jews in the faith community was not enforced, as Luke indicates "while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe" (Acts 16:4).

Most interpreters until the Nineteenth Century agreed with this premise, but likely because they were dealing with incomplete historical data.^{xvi} The thought that the Galatians in Paul's letter were ethnic Celts probably came from the fact that a later reorganization of the Roman provinces came in 297 C.E. to form an enlarged Cilicia and Pisidia, which included the old territory of the ethnic Galatian kingdom.^{xvii} However, even modern advocates of the Northern Galatian Theory, such as Hans Dieter Betz, must conclude "Whether [Paul's Galatians] were originally Greeks, Celts, or a mixture of diverse character is impossible to determine."^{xviii}

Sir William Ramsay is often credited with challenging the Northern Galatian Theory in the mid-Nineteenth Century, advocating instead that Paul's target audience was not ethnic Galatians—but instead Southern Galatians. Known as the **Southern Galatian Theory**, any reference to Galatia by Paul is a reference to the Roman province in what is today South-Central Turkey. Acts chs. 13-14 record how Paul and Barnabas traveled throughout the province of Galatia, including: Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-43), Iconium (13:51), the region of Lycaonia (14:6), and Lystra (14:8-19), likely including a return journey including Derbe (14:20) to organize the assemblies planted (14:21-23) on their way back to Antioch. The majority of American and British theologians today adhere to the Southern Galatian Theory.

The Southern Galatian Theory assumes that Paul is not writing ethnic Galatians as much as he is writing Believers who live in the Roman province of Galatia. This province became established when the last tribal king of Galatia, King Amyntas (36-25 B.C.E.), bequeathed his kingdom to Rome. The Roman historian Cassius attests, "The domains of Attalus and of Deiotarus, who had both died in Galatia, were given to a certain Castor" (*Roman History* 48.33.5).^{xix} The name Galatia became used for territory in Southern Asia Minor, and included much more than just the ethnic Galatians. *IDB* indicates, "A variety of native peoples, partly Hellenized and Romanized, were thus added to the Galatian tribes living in the core of the province."^{xx}

The Southern Galatian theory proposes that the Galatians that Paul addresses in his letter would have primarily included the congregations established during his First Missionary Journey, those of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 1e:4-14:28). This is consistent with how Paul commonly used Roman provincial names rather than local designations in his epistles (also followed by Peter in 1 Peter 1:1). Barnabas was present with Paul during his First Missionary Journey, and he is mentioned by name as having been known to the Galatians (2:1, 9, 13). Paul refers to his audience as the "Galatians" (3:1), in a similar way as he refers to his other audiences as the "Corinthians" (2 Corinthians 4:15) or the "Philippians" (Philippians 4:15)—members of a particular geo-political boundary, regardless of their ethnicity. F.F. Bruce remarks that if Paul is using "Galatians" in a more provincial than ethnic sense, it is no different than how the term "British" is often used today:

"What comprehensive term could have been used (other than 'Galatians') to address Pisidians (or rather Phrygians) and Lycaonians together? We may reflect that the one comprehensive term which is acceptable when Englishmen, Welsh, Cornish and Scots are referred to or addressed together is 'British', which 'ethnically' is appropriate only to the Welsh and Cornish (and the Bretons, who are part of another political unit). The name Britain, or Great Britain, to denote the whole island, is a political expedient; yet Highland and Lowland Scots would much rather be called British (which they are not 'ethnically') than English (which is applicable to them only linguistically, and even so is unacceptable)."^{xxi}

^{xvi} Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 5.

^{xvii} Cf. Longenecker, lxiii.

^{xviii} Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 4.

^{xix} Cassius Dio: *Roman History*, trans. anonymous (1914-1927). Accessible online at http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/home.html.

^{xx} M.J. Mellink, "Galatia," in George Buttrick, ed. at. al., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:336.

^{xxi} F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 16.

Ben Witherington III adds to this: “He could not...call them Phrygians or Lycaonians if he had evangelized a cross section of the residents of this Roman province.”^{xxii}

Confusion has taken place because it is easy to assume that when Luke talks about a particular location in Acts it is the exact same place that Paul refers to in one of his letters—but we know there are frequent exceptions. In Acts 16:1-6 Paul visits the same overall region, but it is designated by different names (non-Roman), and it is Paul and Silas who are recorded as having traveled together. But in Acts 14:12 it is Paul and Barnabas (mentioned by name in Galatians 2:1, 9, 13) who are welcomed hospitably like “Hermes and Zeus” in Lystra, and Paul testifies how hospitable the Galatians were when he visited them (4:14-15). When Paul taught in Galatia he was plagued by a physical illness (4:14), which the mountainous Northern Galatia would have been too difficult for a sick man to transverse. The Roman province of Galatia had a sizeable Jewish population, versus scant pockets of Jews in Northern Galatia. Most significantly, no direct appeal is made in Galatians to the Acts 15 Jerusalem Council ruling on non-Jews in the faith community, pointing to the Galatians he addresses as being provincial Galatians *prior to the Council meeting*. Paul’s reference to a visit to Jerusalem in Galatians 2:1-10 would instead concur with his relief mission in Acts 11:30.

In our opinion, the Southern Galatian Theory is more likely, as Paul is recorded as having visited cities in the province of Galatia in Acts chs. 13-14. “[I]t is more likely that ‘Galatia’ referred to the province than to the territory, for it is not certain that Paul preached the gospel in the latter upon two different occasions” (*ISBE*).^{xxiii} This would account for Paul’s intimate relationship with the congregations of Galatia, as indicated throughout his letter.^{xxiv} **In our analysis of Galatians, we will assume that the Southern Galatian Theory has accurately determined Paul’s target audience.**

While the native population of this provincial Galatia was largely made up of ethnic Galatians, Greeks, Romans, and other local groups, what of the Jews in Galatia? Assuming that the Southern Galatian Theory is valid, we see that Paul proclaims the gospel first at a synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-45), until being turned out of the synagogue by its leaders (Acts 13:46-50). At Iconium Paul likewise first teaches about Yeshua to those at the synagogue (Acts 13:51-14:2) until being forced out (Acts 14:3-5). In Lycaonia they are simply said as having “preached the gospel” (Acts 14:7, RSV), without any specific audience being referenced. Later in Acts 14:19, Jews from Antioch and Iconium are said to have come to Lystra to turn the crowd against Paul and Barnabas, an indication that there is probably a Jewish community there they did not want Paul to influence. In Derbe it is likewise only said that Paul only “preached the gospel” (Acts 14:20).

We can safely assume that covering such a large area such as the Galatian province that many of the assemblies Paul and Barnabas planted had mixed numbers of Jews and non-Jews. In Pisidian Antioch Luke records that “many of the Jews and of the God-fearing proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, were urging them to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 14:43). Many of the Jews in the synagogues Paul and Barnabas visited became Believers in Yeshua. Likewise, this must be tempered by the fact that Paul and Barnabas were often met with hostility from the local Jewish community. Many social and ethnic dynamics—both Jewish and Galatian—have to be considered in our examination of the Epistle to the Galatians.

In Paul’s letter, we see indications that his Galatian audience had endured some persecution (3:3), certainly something consistent with the events described in Acts chs. 13-14, and that they were growing and maturing properly in their faith in Yeshua just after he left them (5:7). What had changed between Paul’s visit to them and his need to write them? Was there pressure from the outside Jewish community being acted upon them? Was there pressure from the Jewish Believers toward the non-Jewish Believers? Had a third party found its way into the Galatian assemblies after Paul had left—which in their mind had to “clean up some of the mess” that Paul had left? Paul is concerned for the Galatians because they have quickly fallen into error. He scolds them as any good parents would scold their children about being led astray by “the crowd.”^{xxv}

As far as the composition of Galatians is concerned, it is notable that Paul probably did not *write down* most of Galatians himself, save the postscript where he says “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand” (6:11). It is most probable that Paul employed an amanuensis or trained secretary in composing this letter, dictating the words to him. While Paul is surely the author of Galatians, he demonstrates that he has a poor ability for actually writing.^{xxvi}

^{xxii} Witherington, 4.

^{xxiii} W.M. Ramsay and C.J. Hemer, “Galatia,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2:379.

^{xxiv} Ten specific reasons in favor of the Southern Galatian Theory are offered by D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, in *An Introduction to the New Testament*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 458-460.

^{xxv} Cf. Nanos, pp 60-61.

^{xxvi} Cf. Betz, 1; Longenecker, pp lix-lxi.

One thing we can be certain of is that Paul's Galatian audience was Greek speaking. While there are Messianics who like to claim that Paul wrote them in Hebrew or Aramaic, as an Eastern Roman province Greek would have been the predominant language in Galatia. Assuming a Southern Galatian audience, *ISBE* simply indicates "They spoke Greek."^{xxvii}

But even if one assumes a Northern Galatian audience, Hebrew or Aramaic as a composition language for the epistle still does not enter into the equation. G.W. Hansen remarks, "Although the [ethnic] Galatians became known as the 'Gallo-grecians,' Greek-speaking Galatians, they are depicted by the ancient Greek and Latin historians as barbaric warriors, invading and ransacking neighboring countries. They were more influenced by local Phrygian culture and religion than by Hellenization."^{xxviii} If Paul actually wrote to the Northern Galatians, the only other languages Paul could have chosen to communicate to them in would have been the local dialects. *IDB* indicates, "The descendants of the Galatian invaders maintained their Celtic language, as is attested by Jerome and other sources, until the end of the fifth century. In Lycaonia the peasants spoke their own Lycaonian language (Acts 14:11), while the Phrygians retained their idiom; and various other Anatolian dialects must have continued in use in the secluded areas of the mountains."^{xxix}

Aside from Greek, the only other linguistic options that Paul would have had to communicate to the Galatians would have been local dialects of Phrygian, Lycaonian, and whatever Celtic language the ethnic Galatians would have still retained.^{xxx} A Hebrew or Aramaic origin for the epistle, aside from some misguided Messianics who want it to be so,^{xxxi} has never been proposed by anyone in the scholastic community.

Paul's letter to the Galatians notably does follow some of the basic conventions of Greco-Roman letter writing, most significantly with him making pleas to his Galatian audience in the name of friendship. While many Messianics today are quite suspect of classical influences on the Apostolic Scriptures, it is nevertheless documented that Paul as a member of the Pharisaic School of Hillel (Acts 22:3) would have been trained in the Greek language and basic interaction methods (b.*Sotah* 9b), as its Rabbis were generally used as intermediaries between the Jewish community and Roman government.^{xxxii} Using ancient forms of communication, Paul reminds the Galatians that they have been generous people (4:12-15), urging them to return to their previous state prior to being influenced to walk a dangerous path. When we examine Galatians, we need to understand that the epistle is composed as though Paul is giving a speech. It is probably also true that Galatians was not as thoroughly planned out as some of his following letters, as it is imbued with a great deal of emotion.

WHEN DID PAUL WRITE THIS LETTER?

When Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians is a matter that is considered largely by his audience, and whether he wrote the Northern Galatians, concurrent with his visits to "the Phrygian and Galatian region" (Acts 16:6) after the Jerusalem Council, or his visits to the Southern Galatians in Acts chs. 13-14.

Advocates of the Northern Galatian Theory assert that Paul wrote his letter sometime between 53-57 C.E. immediately after the Jerusalem Council. There are probably some Messianics who read Galatians this way, primarily wanting to reconcile what can be perceived as anti-Torah statements by Paul against the backdrop of the Jerusalem Council's ruling, "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21), that encouraged the new, non-Jewish Believers to hear the Torah taught in the Synagogue. But is a Northern Galatian composition of Galatians absolutely required for a pro-Torah view? Could not a close reading of Acts 13-14 and Paul's actions in Southern Galatia also reveal a more moderate position toward the Law?

^{xxvii} Ramsay and Hemer, "Galatia," in *ISBE*, 3:379.

^{xxviii} G.W. Hansen, "Galatians, Letter to the," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 324.

^{xxix} Mellink, "Galatia," in *IDB*, 2:338.

^{xxx} Note that a Northern or Southern Galatian audience does not drastically affect how we interpret the Epistle to the Galatians; it only affects how we might view the text in relation to the Jerusalem Council ruling of Acts 15 (discussed further).

^{xxxi} A glaring example of this is seen in the "commentary" *Galatians: A Torah-Based Commentary in First-Century Hebraic Context* (Jerusalem: Millennium 7000 Communications, 2005) by Avi ben Mordechai (a/k/a Brad Marcus), where he suggests that "Paul took some liberties in writing his letter to the *Galut*—the exiles of Yah living in the land of the Arameans" (p 126), and he proceeds on the assumption that Galatians was written in Aramaic to people living in the so-called "Exile," **without any consideration for or reference to** contemporary discussions of Galatians and what Galatia actually was as a Roman province in the First Century. This is largely done to appeal to a Two-House Messianic audience to identify the Galatians as scattered Israelites in the letter's designation, but is done so without any valid exegesis.

In his follow up publication *Galatians Quick Reference Pocket Commentary* (Jerusalem: Millennium 7000 Communications, 2006) he more brazenly declares: "Paul spoke and taught in a dialect of Aramaic, not in Greek...It is likely that he knew some Greek, but I seriously doubt that he wrote his letters in that language" (p v). Again, **no consideration is made** for contemporary Galatians' scholarship and legitimate Biblical history seen in *both* Christian *and* Jewish theology today. An Aramaic origin for Galatians is just assumed without any examination of ancient data and who the Galatians really were—whether ethnic Celts or inhabitants of the Roman province.

^{xxxii} Cf. J.K. McKee, *Philippians for the Practical Messianic* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2007), pp 6-7; Hegg, *The Letter Writer*, 40.

Advocates of the Southern Galatian Theory assert that Paul wrote his letter either between 50-52 C.E., or perhaps earlier in 48-49 C.E., depending on how one dates the convening of the Jerusalem Council. Not only is this based on the presupposition that the Galatians Paul is writing are those whom he ministered among in Acts 13-14, but from the lack of reference to the Jerusalem Council in the epistle. The visit to Jerusalem described in Galatians 2 corresponds to the Acts 11:29 excursion by Paul “to send relief to the brethren who lived in Judea” (RSV) after Paul’s First Missionary Journey. As Witherington summarizes, “There must have been time after this journey to return to Antioch, go up to Jerusalem, go back to Antioch, have the disagreement with Peter [described in Galatians 2], and have the Galatian churches be troubled by the agitators.”^{xxxiii}

This proposition would probably place the composition of Galatians about a year or two after Paul’s visit and ministry among them. Corresponding to this would be a relative lack of establishment among the Galatian assemblies, coupled with an inadequate leadership structure. This would conform well to the Galatians being a group of relatively young Believers in Yeshua.

Among Messianic commentators, Tim Hegg is one who leans toward the side of 48-49 C.E. for the composition of Galatians.^{xxxiv}

If indeed the Epistle to the Galatians was written *before* the Jerusalem Council, are Paul’s thoughts about the Torah of Moses inconsistent with its final rulings? We do know from Acts 16:4 that at the start of Paul’s Second Missionary Journey, he, along with Silas and Timothy, “were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe.” This may have included some of the congregations in Southern Galatia, as Timothy “was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2), but may have included other congregations as well.

The Jerusalem Council’s ruling about the inclusion of non-Jews in the assembly was a pragmatic solution to a very volatile issue. Many thought that non-Jewish proselytization was imperative for acceptance of the gospel. Paul was commonly accused by his detractors of following a mission *completely independent* of the Jerusalem Apostles and their authority. However, as James D.G. Dunn remarks, “Initially he worked as one not directly dependent on Jerusalem’s authority...but [was] ready to acknowledge the authority of the Jerusalem leadership to pronounce on issues related to the gospel and its proclamation among Gentiles.”^{xxxv} Some of the leaders or members of the Jerusalem assembly prior to the Council (cf. Acts 15:1) may have disagreed with Paul on his opinion of inclusion of non-Jews among the community *via faith in Yeshua*. They thought that making them proselytes was necessary for covenant inclusion. So in a way, Galatians gives us a view into the rulings of the Jerusalem Council *before they were made*.

James Montgomery Boice adequately points out: “The *subject of dispute* is the same. The *character of the conference* is the same. Finally, the *results* are the same.”^{xxxvi} While Christian commentators will recognize that Galatians being written prior to the Jerusalem Council does not alter the fact that the Galatians submitted to its rulings, *their interpretation of Acts 15* is usually much different from a Messianic view. Most Christian expositors interpret Acts 15 as meaning that the new, non-Jewish Believers did not have to keep the Law – versus them not having to become “Jews” in order to be a part of the faith community. This viewpoint is based in a multitude of presuppositions, the foremost of which is that the new, non-Jewish Believers did not have to be trained in the Tanach Scriptures. A constructive Messianic critique of the common Christian view asks,

“If this [common Christian] interpretation is true, then how were these non-Jewish Believers supposed to learn about God? How were they to be instructed and disciplined as they began their new walk of faith? Were they just supposed to sit together in a room and pray? What Scriptures were they supposed to follow?”^{xxxvii}

Indeed, this is the same reasoning that has helped stimulate the growth of much of today’s modern Messianic movement. While the Apostle Paul did submit to the decrees of the Jerusalem Council for the non-Jews to abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, things strangled, and blood – how we interpret the reasoning behind this certainly plays into our view of Galatians and whether Paul was against or in favor of the Torah as God’s continuing Instruction. Messianics today choose a view that at present is not popular in the wider world of theology and Biblical living.^{xxxviii}

^{xxxiii} Witherington, 9.

^{xxxiv} Hegg, *A Study of Galatians*, 3.

^{xxxv} James D.G. Dunn, *Black’s New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 4.

^{xxxvi} James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians,” in Frank E. Gaebelin, ed. et. al, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 10:418.

^{xxxvii} J.K. McKee, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2006), 58.

^{xxxviii} For a further discussion of the issue of Acts 15, consult Chapter 6 of the author’s book *Torah In the Balance, Volume I: “What Happened at the Jerusalem Council?”*