

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 16

Sha'ul's Letter to the Galatians ~ Part 1

We pause the ongoing story of **Sha'ul** to examine his **Letter to the Galatians**.

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

Introduction

As I pointed out in Part 2 of the **Yerushalayim Council**, there is some dispute about when **Sha'ul** wrote this letter. Although there is no consensus on the matter, it appears that while **Sha'ul** and **Bar-Nabba** were in **Antioch**, **Sha'ul** may have written this letter to the Galatian Believers among whom he and Bar-Nabba had worked during their recent travels to **Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe**. If this assumption is correct, the letter would have been written about 50 CE, shortly following the **Yerushalayim Council**.¹

Galatians, which may be the earliest of **Sha'ul's** letters, is also his most intense. It gives us a strong presentation of the truth that sinners are justified and live godly lives by trusting in **Yeshua** alone.

Understood politically, "**Galatians**" can refer to those living in the southern part of the **Roman** province of **Galatia**. That region included the cities of **Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe**, where **Sha'ul** worked to plant churches, as recorded in Acts 13:14–14:23.

The problem for us is whether the "Galatians" to which this epistle is addressed refers to ethnic Galatians in the north of the province or to the southerners of various races who were included in the Roman province.

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On **Sha'ul's** second missionary journey, he "*went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia*" (Acts 16:6) in north-central **Asia Minor** (near the modern capital of Turkey—Ankara). His later visit to the same general area is recorded in Acts 18:23 and 19:1. This is where a group from **Gaul** (modern France) invaded in the third century BCE and became known as **Galatia**.

In his letter to the **Galatians**, **Sha'ul** discusses what it means to be **God's** people. Although many groups have special conditions for membership, the **Family of God** is open to everyone. As **Sha'ul** explains, there is incredible freedom in **Yeshua** - yet, at the same, His followers are called to live like Him through the power of the **Ruach**. **Yeshua** has set us free, and we are to use our freedom to love others.

Much about the life and movements of the **Emissary Sha'ul** is only known - or filled in significantly - from **Galatians** 1:13–2:14 (and the personal glimpse in 4:13–14). Among these factors are **Sha'ul's** sojourn in "**Arabia**" (1:17) and descriptions of two trips to **Yerushalayim** (1:18–19; 2:1–10). **Sha'ul** described a confrontation with **Kefa** (2:11–14) mentioned nowhere else in the **Brit Hadashah**.

Galatians tells us much about the ministry of the **Ruach** concerning the **Messianic** life. After the **Ruach's** role in the ministry of adoption (4:5–6), believers are commanded to "*walk by the Spirit*" (5:16), be "*led by the Spirit*" (5:18), and "*follow the Spirit*" (5:25), as well as "*sow to the Spirit*" and "*reap*" the related eternal harvest (6:8). The moment-by-moment outcome of that kind of sensitivity to the ministry of the **Ruach** is what is meant by "*the fruit of the Spirit*" (5:22–23).²

¹ F. LaGard Smith.

² Boyd Luter, "Galatians," in Holman Illustrated Bible Commentary.

The theology of this letter is seen both in its explicit message and in the foundational presuppositions and implicit premises upon which the argument is built. The letter addresses a situation in which **Sha'ul's Gentile** converts are being told by a new group of teachers that to be integrated fully into **God's** covenant people they need to enter into the **Mosaic** covenant by circumcision (2:3; 5:2–6, 11–12; 6:12–13, 15). ³

In our next post, we will continue to explore **Sha'ul's Letter to the Galatians**.

³ R. E. Ciampa, "Galatians," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 311.