

## Studies in Galatians

Lesson 8: *Paul's Growing Concern*

## Galatians 4:8-20

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

12 I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. 13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. 14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. 15 What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

17 Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. 19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

**Their previous condition****▲ They had been strangers to the only God**

Galatians 4:8 Formerly, when you did not know God,

**▲ They had been slaves to those other "gods"**

Galatians 4:8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

**Their powerful conversion****▲ They received Paul graciously**

Galatians 4:13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. 14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. 15 What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

1. The Acts account of Paul's ministry in Galatia during his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14; 47-48AD) contains no reference to Paul's having an illness. The only physical affliction noted in Acts would have been the result of Paul's being stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19-20). But that stoning took place in the middle of his preaching the gospel there, not before his preaching there.

2. Some have speculated that, because Paul noted that the Galatians "would have torn out *their* eyes and given them" to him, Paul's illness had to do with his eyes. That speculation is strengthened by Paul's note at the end of Galatians (6:11) where he writes "See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!" Some have gone so far as to conclude that Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7) was an eye disorder.

**▲ They responded to Paul's gospel gladly**

Galatians 4:13 I first preached the gospel to you.

**▶ They entered into relationship with God**

Galatians 4:9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—

**▶ They enjoyed that relationship with God**

Galatians 4:15 all your joy

1. Paul's gospel ministry in Galatia during his first missionary journey was marked by much success. Note these summaries from the Acts record:

**Antioch**— Acts 13:44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. — 48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. 49 The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. — 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

**Iconium**— Acts 14:1 There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. 2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. 3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

**Lystra**— Acts 14:8 In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. 9 He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed 10 and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

**Derbe**— Acts 14:21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.

2. Paul did more than preach the gospel in Galatia. Churches were established and organized. On Paul's backtracking through the churches, Acts notes:

Acts 14:21 Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. 23 Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

**Their perilous contamination****▲ They'd been manipulated by false teachers**

Galatians 4:16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

**▲ They'd been misguided by false teachings**

Galatians 4:9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!

**Paul's pastoral correction****▲ Note Paul's panicked pleading**

Galatians 4:11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you. 12 I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.

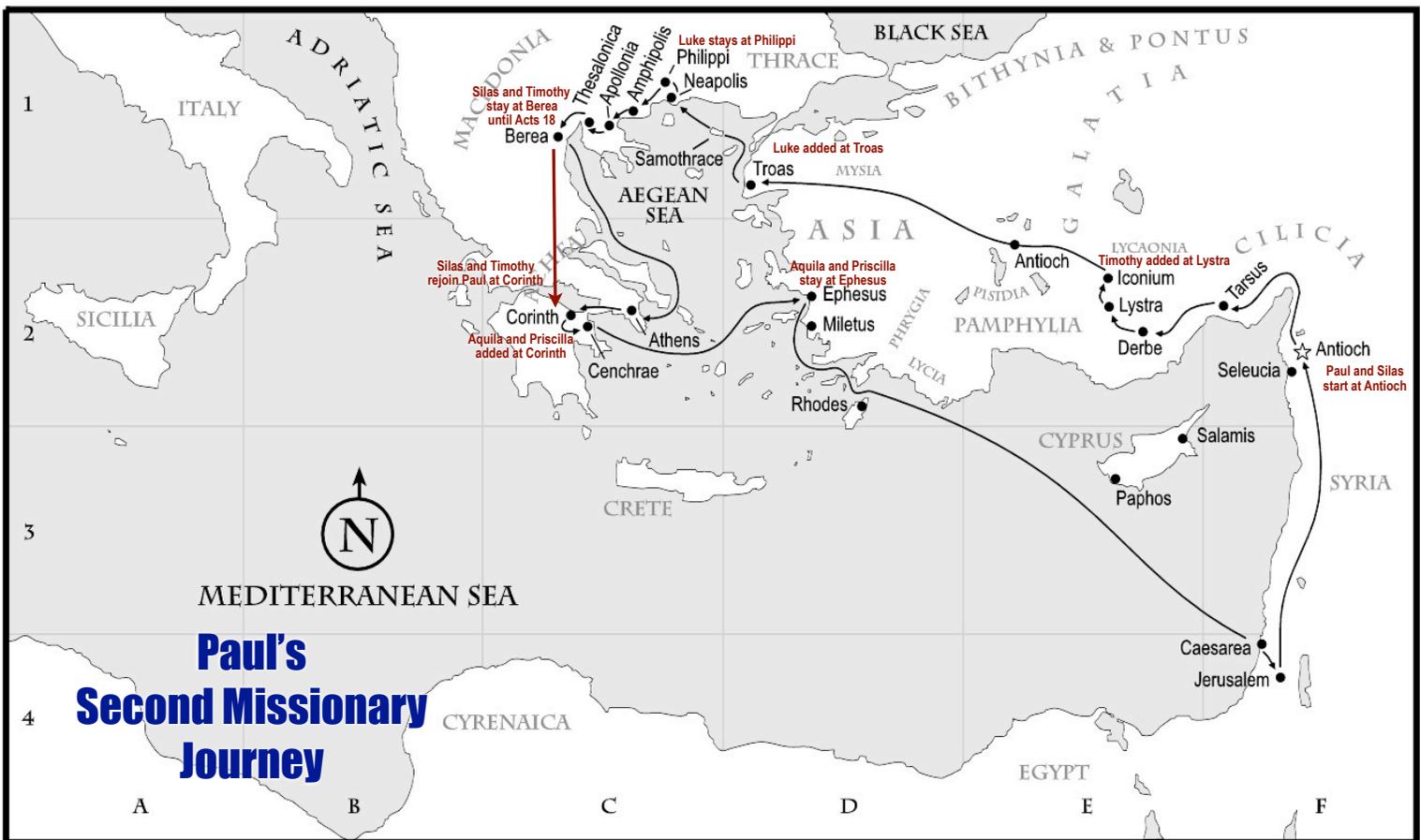
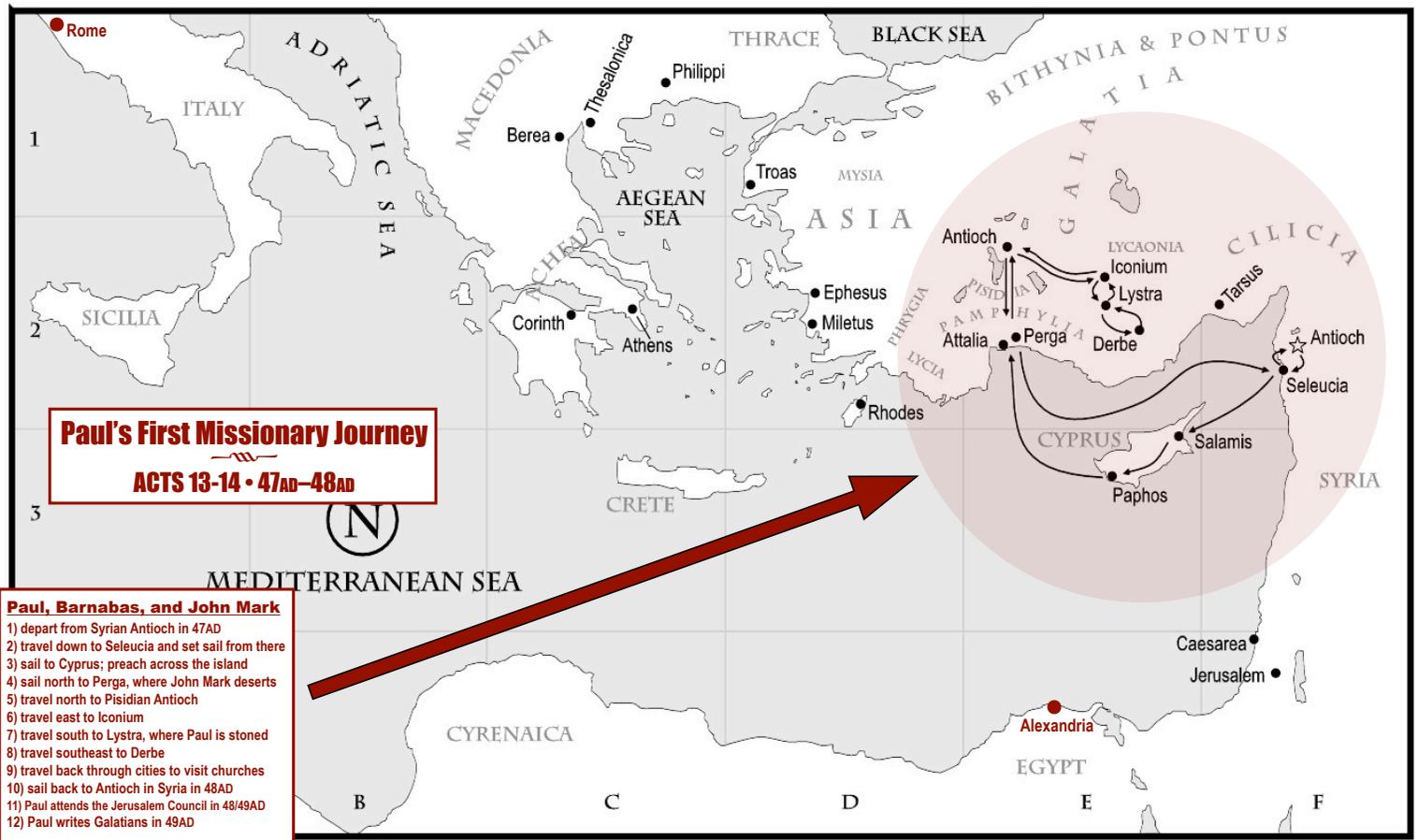
**▲ Note Paul's paternal pains**

Galatians 4:19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

1. The doctrinal error was critical enough to hinder the formation of Christ in these newborn believers, so Paul was moved with powerful pastoral jealousy.

2. The situation was serious enough to warrant the writing of Galatians and a second missionary journey shortly after Paul wrote Galatians.

Acts 15:36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."



**1. False teachers have always been and will always be present in the midst of the Church.** The Apostle Paul warned the Ephesians in Acts 20:29-30: *After I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from among your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.* Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 4:1: *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. False teachers and their falsehoods are inspired by the devil and are instruments of the devil.* Jesus called the devil a *liar and the father of lies* in John 8:44.

**2. The false teachers whom Paul addressed in Galatians were legalists.** They diminished and insulted the gospel of God's grace by teaching that salvation and justification could only come as a person obeyed the Jewish law in addition to following Christ. First and foremost, they promoted their belief that Gentile believers (and Jewish believers, of course) must be circumcised, but the natural continuation of that doctrine would include the keeping of the whole law. Their teaching suggested that the grace provided by the death of Christ was not sufficient in itself to save the believer. Paul would spend much of his ministry, including much of his letter-writing ministry, combatting this false doctrine and would write in Ephesians 2:8-9: *It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.* Paul would emphatically teach that true faith and salvation by grace produce a life of godliness, not a life of sin.

**3. Believers must guard vigorously against deception.**

- ▶ Every believer should be a diligent reader and student of the Word of God, especially the New Testament.
- ▶ Every believer should be devoted to prayer and worship.
- ▶ Every believer should pursue the fullness and freshness of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Every believer should be faithful to a local church where Bible truth is proclaimed comprehensively and consistently.
- ▶ Every believer should carefully and diligently cultivate an all-your-heart-soul-mind-and-strength love for the Lord Jesus.
- ▶ Every believer should guard against sin that so easily entangles.

Without these protections in place, many who were once strong have fallen into the deception of the devil and many young and weak believers have been led astray into false religion. We must hear and heed the exhortation from Jesus in Luke 8:18: *"Consider carefully how you listen."* And we must hear and heed the exhortation of 1 Corinthians 10:12: *If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*