***Galatians***

Galatia was in modern western Turkey, but there is debate over whether it was in the north or south. Paul is irate in Galatians, as indicated by his omission of the standard “thanksgiving” for the Galatians in the standard ancient Greco-Roman letter, although Paul is angry in other letters as well, such as the Corinthian correspondence. Galatians clearly reveals that Paul’s converts in Galatia abandoned following Paul, for Jewish Christians who followed the Law of Moses/Torah, and required Gentile (non- Jewish) converts to do the same. Scholars call these the “Judaizers.” Thus Galatians is an extended defense of his true apostleship and of his novel message that Gentiles need not convert to Judaism in order to become Christians, which is what the very first Christian movement naturally assumed. From what Paul says in the first half, the Judaizers apparently taught that Paul started out in the Jewish Christian movement, led by the apostles of Jesus (Peter, Paul, James), but then “broke away,” and became a crazy renegade. In response, Paul says that he received his message and mission from the risen Christ, not from any human beings, swearing to God that this is true and he is not lying, giving interesting autobiographical details, and also explaining that when he eventually checked his message and mission with the first Jewish apostles, they approved. He refers to an incident between Peter and himself at Anitoch, which might have been the basis of the Judaizers’ version of events.

-Slide 15-

***Galatians, continued***

The second half of Galatians is a complicated and ingenious argument, in part from the Jewish scriptures (Old Testament), that God never intended the Gentiles to become Jews in the age of the Messiah. Paul argues that Abraham, who lived four hundred years before Moses and the Law of Moses, was one of God’s people by faith and faithfulness, not by the Law. He argues that long before Moses, Christ was promised to be a blessing to all nations of Abraham, Jews and Gentiles alike. The Law thus had only a temporary role in God’s plan for humanity. The Jews as God’s chosen people, far from having the job of converting the Gentiles to Law/Torah-observant Judaism, served the purpose of being the problem with all humanity: enslavement apocalyptic powers of sin, the flesh, and death. They are under God’s curse, which the Law issues on all who fail to keep the Law. Christ, as the Messiah and true king of Israel, took on himself the curse of the Law upon Israel, in order that the promise of bringing salvation to the Gentiles through the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit might come.

-Slide 16-

***Opposition Between the People of God***

Paul explains, arguing from the Old Testament, that during the time of Christ, the people of God in the present evil age are identified by their faith, not by Torah observance. “Works of the Law/Torah” in Galatians mean “getting circumcised and becoming orthodox Jews,” while “Faith” means knowing, loving, and serving the one true God, apart from the external Law, like Abraham, the father of the Jews did long before Moses and the Law. “Works of the Law” and “Faith” are thus two opposed badges of membership in the people of God. Paul is so angry with the Judaizers that he wishes when they circumcised themselves the “knife would slip” and they would castrate themselves.

-Slide 17-

***Paul on Justice***

Paul’s term “justification” in Galatians is an apocalyptic term used to mean “those in the right/who will be vindicated or justified.” This term did not mean how an individual “gets saved,” “gets right with God,” or “gets into heaven.” Rather, it is a term for identifying the people of God in the present evil age, who appear to be on the losing side of history. They are suffering, misunderstood, and persecuted, but will be “vindicated” or “justified” when God breaks into history, in conjunction with the second coming of Christ, to “set everything right” by punishing the wicked enemies of God’s people, punishing the evil cosmic forces of Satan and demons, and resurrecting his people to share in the new redeemed creation.

Paul also addresses in Galatians an accusation against his message and mission that if he does not require his ex-pagan Gentile converts to keep the Law, then they will not know how to live morally and please God. Paul responds that the Holy Spirit, who is both Holy and God Himself, is the one who teaches his (Paul’s) Gentile converts how to live holy lives pleasing to God.

-Slide 18-