

# Dr. Tim Gombis, Galatians, Session 1, Introduction to Galatians Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Gombis, Galatians, Session 1, Introduction to Galatians, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This excerpt from Dr. Tim Gombis's session on Galatians introduces the study of Paul's letter by highlighting its historical context and ongoing relevance. **Gombis explains his personal journey into understanding Galatians, focusing on the tension Paul addresses regarding the Old Testament law and the gospel.** He emphasizes the strangeness of the first-century context for modern readers, particularly the intertwined nature of early Christianity and Judaism. **The lecture then outlines Paul's background as a Pharisee and his dramatic conversion, leading to his mission to the Gentiles.** Finally, Gombis details the likely circumstances surrounding the writing of Galatians, with Jewish Christian teachers challenging Paul's gospel in Galatia and prompting his passionate response.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Gombis, Galatians, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (New Testament→: Pauline Epistles → Galatians).**



### 3. Briefing Document: Gombis, Galatians, Session 1, Introduction to Galatians

Briefing Document: Dr. Tim Gombis on Galatians, Session 1: Introduction

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Tim Gombis in the first session of his lecture series on Paul's letter to the Galatians. The session serves as an introduction, highlighting the significance of Galatians, common misunderstandings, and the historical and cultural context surrounding its writing.

#### Main Themes:

- **The Enduring Relevance of Galatians:** Gombis emphasizes that despite being written in the first century, Galatians remains highly relevant, particularly in today's divided and confused culture. He believes it offers a crucial "gospel word on target."
- **Challenging Familiarity and "Domesticating" Paul:** A central theme is the danger of assuming we understand Paul and his writings, particularly Galatians. Gombis quotes Ernst Kasemann, stating that "the history of Pauline interpretation is the account of the Church's domestication of the Apostle." He argues that our own experiences and cultural lenses can lead to misinterpretations. He also cites Morta Hooker, who says, "the problem with Paul is that we know him too well, or perhaps we think we do." Gombis encourages students to "make Galatians strange" and recognize its distance from our modern context.
- **Reconceptualizing the Relationship Between Christianity and Judaism:** Gombis stresses that it is historically inaccurate to view Galatians as a text pitting a fully formed "Christianity" against "Judaism." He clarifies that Paul was a "Jew who is a Christian" writing to Gentiles who were being influenced by other Jewish Christians with differing views. He states, "Galatians is written by a Jew who is a Christian, written to Gentiles who are being influenced by other Jews who are Christians who have an argument with Paul." The line between the two was not yet clearly defined in the first century.
- **Understanding "Torah" vs. "Law":** Gombis highlights the crucial difference between the Hebrew word "Torah" and its Greek and Latin translations, which led to the English word "law." He emphasizes that "God gave Israel Torah," which is "instruction," a "life-giving reality," and a gift demonstrating God's love. He notes

how the negative connotations associated with "law" in English have negatively impacted our reading of Galatians and Paul's relationship with the Old Testament.

- **The Corporate and Rhetorical Nature of Galatians:** Gombis points out that Galatians was a letter intended to be read aloud to a community, not studied as individual theological treatises. He states, "being Christian inherently is corporate." Furthermore, he stresses that Galatians is "a hot rhetorical letter," not a work of systematic theology. Paul's arguments are targeted and context-specific to the situation in the Galatian churches and his opponents. He meant it to be an "inflammatory" and "provocative" document.
- **The Importance of Context and Avoiding Anachronism:** Throughout the session, Gombis underscores the need to understand the first-century context of Galatians, including the cultural, religious, and social dynamics at play. He cautions against imposing modern understandings of Christianity and Judaism onto the text.

#### **Most Important Ideas and Facts:**

- **Paul's Personal Journey:** Gombis recounts his own initial struggle to reconcile the Old Testament's positive portrayal of the law with Paul's seemingly negative statements in Galatians, which drove his extensive study of the book.
- **Paul's Background as a Pharisee:** Paul was "raised as a Pharisee," meaning he had an extensive knowledge of Scripture, a belief in the resurrection as a central reality, and a passionate desire for God's glory to be revealed in Israel. Their understanding of resurrection was tied to God's salvation and the expulsion of Israel's enemies.
- **Paul's Initial Opposition to Christianity:** As a Pharisee, Paul initially persecuted Christians because he believed their movement, centered on a "cursed" (by crucifixion, citing Deuteronomy 21:23) Messiah, was hindering God's plan for Israel's salvation. He thought, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."
- **Paul's Conversion and Mission:** Paul's encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus (around 33 C.E.) dramatically shifted his mission to proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles.
- **The "Silent Years" in Tarsus:** After a brief, unsuccessful visit to Jerusalem, Paul spent approximately eight or nine years in Tarsus before being called to ministry in Antioch by Barnabas.

- **Paul's First Missionary Journey and the Founding of the Galatian Churches:** Paul's first missionary journey with Barnabas (around 47-48 C.E.) likely led to the establishment of the churches in the region of Galatia (possibly Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium). Gombis suggests Paul's stoning in Lystra, where he was thought to be dead, was a significant event. He quotes Galatians 4:13-14, where Paul mentions preaching the gospel due to a "bodily condition" and how his "appearance tested" the Galatians, linking this to the aftermath of the stoning.
- **The Emergence of Opposing Teachers in Galatia:** After Paul's initial visit, Jewish Christian teachers arrived in Galatia, advocating that Gentile believers needed to be circumcised and adhere to Jewish customs to be fully saved. This mirrors the issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and was the immediate catalyst for Paul writing Galatians.
- **Galatians as Occasional Literature:** Gombis emphasizes that Galatians was written to address a specific situation and argument in a particular context, making it "occasional literature" rather than a timeless theological treatise.

#### Quotes:

- "Galatians is a gospel word on target that is absolutely relevant today."
- "the history of Pauline interpretation is the account of the Church's domestication of the Apostle" (Ernst Kasemann).
- "the problem with Paul is that we know him too well, or perhaps we think we do" (Morta Hooker).
- "make Galatians strange. It is a document that is very distant from us."
- "Galatians is written by a Jew who is a Christian, written to Gentiles who are being influenced by other Jews who are Christians who have an argument with Paul."
- "God gave Israel Torah."
- "Torah is instruction. It's a gift. Here's light on the way. Here's how you can remain in my love."
- "being Christian inherently is corporate."
- "This is a hot rhetorical letter where Paul says some things to the churches in Galatia that he would not say to other churches."

- "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Deuteronomy 21:23, as understood by Paul initially regarding Jesus).
- "you know that it was because of a bodily condition, or maybe a bodily illness, that I preached the gospel to you the first time. And that which was a trial to you, my appearance tested you" (Galatians 4:13-14).

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Gombis's introduction to Galatians sets the stage for a nuanced and contextually sensitive study of the letter. He cautions against simplistic readings and encourages a deeper engagement with the historical, cultural, and theological backdrop of Paul's writing. Key takeaways include recognizing the ongoing relevance of Galatians, challenging our assumptions about Paul, understanding the complex relationship between early Christianity and Judaism, appreciating the significance of "Torah," and acknowledging the corporate and rhetorical nature of this powerful letter.

## 4. Study Guide: Gombis, Galatians, Session 1, Introduction to Galatians

Galatians: A Study Guide

Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each, based on the provided excerpts from Dr. Gombis's lecture on Galatians Session 1.

1. What was the initial interpretive challenge Dr. Gombis faced regarding Paul's view of the Old Testament law in comparison to the Old Testament's own portrayal of it?
2. According to Dr. Gombis, why is it problematic to assume that modern readers inherently "get" Paul's letters, like Galatians?
3. What does Dr. Gombis mean by stating that studying Galatians requires recognizing its "strangeness"?
4. Why is it historically inaccurate and unhelpful to interpret Galatians as a text solely "pro-Christianity" and "anti-Judaism"?
5. Explain the significance of understanding the original Hebrew term "Torah" instead of solely using the English translation "law."
6. How does the fact that Galatians was intended to be read aloud to a community shape our understanding of its message?
7. Why does Dr. Gombis emphasize that Galatians is not a work of systematic theology?
8. What made Martin Luther's view of Galatians so significant during the Reformation?
9. Describe the Pharisaic understanding of resurrection and its connection to their mission of holiness.
10. What was Paul's initial reaction to the Christian movement following Jesus' crucifixion, and why did he feel this way?

Quiz Answer Key

1. Dr. Gombis was puzzled by Paul's seemingly negative portrayal of the Mosaic law in Romans and Galatians, which contrasted sharply with his own early

understanding of the Old Testament law (especially Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Proverbs) as a good gift from a loving God to Israel. He struggled to reconcile Paul's perspective with the positive descriptions of the law within the Old Testament itself.

2. Many modern readers feel they understand Paul because his writings resonate with their personal Christian experiences and struggles of faith. However, this can lead to "domesticating" Paul by reading his letters through the lens of contemporary culture and individual experiences, rather than recognizing the first-century Jewish context in which he wrote.
3. Recognizing Galatians' "strangeness" means acknowledging its distance from our modern context, including its embeddedness in a scriptural worldview and its specific rhetorical situation. Even statements that sound familiar to us are part of arguments rooted in a different time and cultural understanding, requiring careful study to grasp their original meaning.
4. Interpreting Galatians as purely "pro-Christianity" and "anti-Judaism" is historically anachronistic because in the first century, Christianity and Judaism were not yet clearly distinct religions. Paul, a Jewish follower of Jesus, was writing to Gentile believers being influenced by other Jewish Christians, operating within the broader canopy of Judaism.
5. The Hebrew word "Torah" means "instruction" and was understood as a life-giving gift from God to Israel, providing guidance on how to remain in His love and experience blessing. The Greek translation "nomos," the Latin "lex," and the English "law" often carry negative connotations, obscuring the original positive meaning and affecting our interpretation of Paul's statements about it.
6. Because Galatians was read aloud, it was a corporate message intended for the entire community, including both Gentile believers and the Jewish Christian teachers influencing them. This highlights the inherently communal aspect of early Christian discipleship and the public, rhetorical nature of Paul's arguments aimed at a mixed audience.
7. Dr. Gombis emphasizes that Galatians is a "hot rhetorical letter" written to address a specific situation in the churches of Galatia, rather than a purely academic treatise presenting timeless theological truths. Paul's statements were targeted and potentially inflammatory, tailored to the particular circumstances and not necessarily universally applicable in the same way.

8. Martin Luther viewed Galatians as incredibly precious, even calling it "my Kate" after his wife, because it powerfully articulated the concept of Christian freedom. Its emphasis on salvation through faith apart from works of the law deeply influenced Luther's theology and became a central tenet of the Protestant Reformation.
9. Pharisees believed in a future resurrection of Israel as part of God's larger program to end the present evil age, vindicate Israel, and restore God's glory. This belief drove their personal and communal mission to live lives of holiness and purity, assuming that such faithfulness to Torah would prompt God to bring about this saving resurrection.
10. Initially, Paul, as a Pharisee, viewed the Christian movement as a dangerous heresy that needed to be stamped out because it proclaimed Jesus, who was crucified and therefore cursed according to Deuteronomy 21, as the Messiah. He believed this movement was hindering God's plan to save Israel and bring about the anticipated resurrection.

## **Essay Format Questions**

1. Discuss the potential pitfalls of reading Galatians through a modern, Western lens. How can understanding the historical and cultural context of the first century help to avoid these pitfalls?
2. Analyze Dr. Gombis's argument that Galatians should be approached as a "strange" document. What are the implications of this perspective for interpreting Paul's statements about the law and Judaism?
3. Explore the significance of the shift in terminology from "Torah" to "law" in understanding the Old Testament. How might this linguistic difference impact one's interpretation of Paul's arguments in Galatians?
4. Examine the corporate and rhetorical nature of Galatians as a letter intended for a specific audience and situation. How does this understanding influence how we interpret Paul's potentially inflammatory language?
5. Based on Dr. Gombis's introduction, discuss the complex relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem church. How might this complicated relationship have contributed to the issues addressed in the letter to the Galatians?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Anachronistic:** Belonging to a period other than that being portrayed. In the context of Galatians, it refers to imposing later historical understandings (like a clear separation between Christianity and Judaism) onto the first-century setting.
- **Corporate (in the context of Galatians):** Relating to the community or group as a whole, rather than just individuals. Galatians was addressed to and intended for the entire body of believers in the Galatian churches.
- **Domesticating Paul:** The tendency of interpreters to make Paul's writings seem familiar and aligned with their own contemporary experiences and perspectives, potentially overlooking the original context and meaning.
- **Eschatologically attentive:** Being keenly aware of and focused on the end times or the future fulfillment of God's promises and plans.
- **Occasional Literature:** Writings that are produced to address a specific situation, problem, or occasion, rather than being intended as systematic or timeless treatises. New Testament letters are considered occasional literature.
- **Rhetorical (in the context of Galatians):** Concerned with the art of persuasive speaking or writing. Galatians is a highly rhetorical letter, with Paul using various persuasive techniques to address the issues in the Galatian churches.
- **Systematic Theology:** A discipline of Christian theology that formulates an orderly, rational, and coherent account of Christian beliefs. Galatians is not primarily a work of systematic theology.
- **Torah:** The Hebrew word for "instruction" or "teaching," often referring to the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch). In Jewish tradition, it encompasses God's guidance and law given to Israel.

## 5. FAQs on Gombis, Galatians, Session 1, Introduction to Galatians, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Galatians Based on Dr. Gombis' Introduction

### **1. What initially sparked Dr. Gombis' deep interest in the book of Galatians?**

Dr. Gombis' fascination with Galatians began early in his Christian journey when he noticed a discrepancy between the Old Testament's positive portrayal of the Mosaic Law (Torah) as a gift of a loving God and Paul's seemingly negative statements about the law in letters like Galatians and Romans. He struggled to reconcile why Paul appeared to oppose the very law that the Old Testament described as a blessing, leading him to intense study and a desire to find a consistent biblical theological understanding.

### **2. Why does Dr. Gombis emphasize the "strangeness" of Galatians for modern readers?**

Dr. Gombis stresses that Galatians can feel distant and strange to contemporary readers because we often approach it with our own cultural and historical lenses, potentially domesticating Paul's message and assuming we understand it too well. Paul wrote from within a first-century Jewish context, deeply immersed in the Old Testament scriptures and arguing with fellow Pharisaic-minded Jews. Many of his arguments and assumptions might not immediately resonate with those of us living in the 21st-century West, shaped by different cultural revolutions and a more distinct separation between Judaism and Christianity.

### **3. What is a crucial historical misunderstanding that Dr. Gombis wants readers to avoid when studying Galatians?**

A significant error to avoid is viewing Galatians as a text that pits Christianity against Judaism, with Paul forging a new religion and dispensing with the old. Historically, Paul was a Jewish follower of Jesus writing to Gentile believers who were being influenced by other Jewish Christians. At the time of writing, the clear demarcation between Judaism and Christianity as two separate religions had not yet fully developed. Paul was operating within the broader context of Judaism, attempting to define how Gentile Jesus-followers related to Jewish communities and the scriptures of Israel.

### **4. How does understanding the original meaning of "Torah" affect our reading of Galatians?**

Dr. Gombis highlights that our English translation of the Hebrew "Torah" as "law" carries negative connotations that obscure its original meaning. Torah is better understood as "instruction," a life-giving gift from a loving God to Israel, showing them how to live in relationship with Him and experience blessing. This translational shift has negatively impacted how we perceive the Old Testament and, consequently, how we

interpret Paul's discussions about the "law" in Galatians. Recognizing Torah as God's word and instruction is crucial for a more scripturally consistent and life-giving understanding of Paul's arguments.

**5. What does Dr. Gombis emphasize about the original context in which Galatians was received?** It's vital to remember that Galatians was not initially read by individual Christians privately, but rather heard by a predominantly illiterate audience in a corporate setting. This means Paul's letter was intended for the entire community of believers, addressing their collective discipleship to Jesus and their relationships with one another. Understanding this corporate and communal nature of its reception is key to grasping the full implications of Paul's message. Moreover, Paul was aware of a mixed audience, including Gentile believers and Jewish Christian teachers who opposed his views, making the letter a highly charged rhetorical piece.

**6. Why does Dr. Gombis state that Galatians is not a work of systematic theology?** Dr. Gombis clarifies that Galatians is not an abstract, academic treatise outlining timeless theological truths applicable in all situations. Instead, it is a "hot rhetorical letter" written to address a specific situation in the churches of Galatia. Paul's language and arguments are tailored to this particular context, and he says things in Galatians that he might not say to other churches facing different issues. Recognizing this occasional nature of the letter is crucial for interpreting its contents accurately and avoiding the imposition of later systematic theological frameworks onto the text.

**7. What significance does Dr. Gombis attribute to Paul's stoning in Lystra in understanding the context of Galatians?** Dr. Gombis suggests that Paul's stoning in Lystra, during his first missionary journey, was likely a miraculous event where he was resuscitated after being presumed dead. He connects this event to Paul's mention in Galatians 4 of preaching the gospel due to a "bodily condition" or illness, arguing that this condition was the severe physical trauma resulting from the stoning. This experience would have shaped the initial reception of Paul's message and the founding of the churches in Galatia.

**8. What was the central issue in Galatia that prompted Paul to write this letter, according to Dr. Gombis?** Paul wrote Galatians in response to the arrival of Jewish Christian missionaries in Galatia who were teaching the Gentile believers that they needed to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law in order to be fully saved by the God of Israel through Christ. This teaching was causing agitation and division within the Galatian churches. Paul, having encountered similar issues with teachers from Jerusalem in Antioch, was deeply concerned and wrote this passionate letter to counter their teachings and affirm the gospel of grace he had initially preached to the Galatians.