

90 Days in
Judges, Galatians,
&
Ephesians

EXPLORE BY THE BOOK
Judges, Galatians, & Ephesians

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Studies in Galatians and Judges:

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EXPLORE

BY THE BOOK

90 DAYS IN

Judges, Galatians,
& Ephesians

— with —

Timothy Keller
& Richard Coekin

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Introduction

“The words of the LORD are flawless, like silver purified in a crucible, like gold refined seven times.”
(Psalm 12 v 6)

This book is not an end in itself. It is a means of accessing the treasures of a far greater book. Its words are valuable only to the extent that they help you to enjoy the infinite value of words that are perfectly true, gloriously beautiful, and utterly wonderful—the words of the LORD.

It is a magnificent thing, in a world which is used to mistakes, to deceit, and to confusion, to be able to read flawless, pure, refined words. And that is what you do each time you open your Bible. God does not make errors in anything he says. He does not obscure the truth, by accident or by design. He does not fail to do anything he has said he will do.

That is why this devotional is an “open Bible devotional”—that is, you will need to keep your Bible open, on your lap or on your screen, as you use these studies. You’ll be asked questions that bring you to examine and think hard about the text. The aim of the authors is to cause you to spend more time thinking about God’s words than their words.

So, rather than seeing these devotionals as snacks, view them as meals. Set aside half an hour in your day to work through the study, and to respond to what you have seen. They are best done daily—but the most crucial thing is for you to find a pattern that is sustainable—better five studies a week for life, than seven studies a week for only a week!

INTRODUCTION

Further, since every word of the Lord is flawless, we need to read every word in the Scriptures, rather than sticking to our favorite passages, or to an author's favorites. So *Explore by the Book* works, verse by verse, through whole books or large sections of the Bible. You will be moving through both famous books and not-so-popular ones, and within each book through much-used passages and less traveled parts. Expect to discover new favorite passages and memory verses that you had never read or noticed or appreciated before!

At the same time, God's word is not always easy to understand. Whether we are completely new to reading it, or have mined its riches many times, all of us still experience "huh?" moments as we struggle to grasp its meaning! So in this devotional series, some of the greatest Bible teachers in the evangelical world help you to dig up the Bible's treasures, and explain their more opaque aspects. They will show you how what you are reading fits into the great overall story of the Scriptures, and prompt you to apply what you have read to your life.

God's word is not simply pure—it is also purifying. It is the way his Spirit works in his people to challenge and change us. It is designed to move us to worship him with our lips, in our hearts, and through our lives. Each day, you will see one (or both) of these headings: *Apply*, and *Pray*. Use these sections to turn what you have read in God's word into words to speak back to God, and into ways you will change your life in response to God.

At the end of each study you'll find a journaling page, for you to record your response to what you have read, either in words or in drawings. Use these pages as you are led to—we all have different ways of making sure we remember what we have seen in the Scriptures, and of responding to those Scriptures. But here are a couple of very straightforward suggestions that you might like to try:

Before you work through the study, read the passage and record...

The Highlight: the truth about God that has most struck you.

The Query: the questions you have about what you have read (and your best attempt at answering them)

The Change: the major way you feel the Spirit is prompting you to change either your attitudes, or your actions, as a result of what you have read.

After you have done the study, record:

One sentence summing up how God has spoken to you through his word.

A short prayer in response to what you have seen.

INTRODUCTION

I hope you enjoy these 90 days listening to the flawless words of the LORD. Be sure that they will excite, change, challenge and comfort you. Be praying that God would be using his word to bless you. There is literally nothing like the words of the LORD.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Laferton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Carl Laferton, Editorial Director
The Good Book Company

Note: This devotional is based on the NIV₁₉₈₄ (Galatians, Judges) and NIV₂₀₁₁ (Ephesians) Bible translations, but it will also work well with the ESV translation.

Meet the Authors



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Day

I

Gospel Truth

Galatians I v 1-5

Paul was a church-planting missionary. After he planted a church and left a region, he continued to help the new congregations through his letters. One of these is this epistle to the Christian churches in part of modern-day Turkey, written by Paul only 15-20 years after Christ's death.

Paul and his role

Read Galatians I v 1-2

How does Paul describe himself (v 1)?

What can you learn from verse 1 about what an apostle is?

Who is Paul writing to (v 2)?

Paul and his message

Read Galatians I v 3-5

In verses 1-5, Paul offers us an outline of the gospel—and it's all about Jesus.

What does Paul, God's "apostle" (meaning "messenger"), tell us about Jesus in:

- verse 1?
- verse 3?
- verse 4?

This letter is all about the gospel. Given that Paul is writing to professing Christians in churches, why might this be a surprise?

The most obvious fact about the historical setting of this letter is often the most overlooked! In Galatians, Paul's going to explain in detail what the gospel is and how it works. And his audience of this outline of the gospel are people who already call themselves Christians.

Christians need the gospel as much as non-Christians do! Our problems in the Christian life come because we often lose or forget the gospel. And we progress in our faith only as we grasp and apply the gospel in deeper ways.

☹ Apply

It is very common in Christian circles to assume that “the gospel” is something just for non-Christians.

When was the last time you thought hard about the gospel message, simply for your own sake?

Are there parts of your life in which you haven't thought about how the gospel should shape your attitudes or actions?

Imagine a child asked you what the Christian gospel is.

How would you outline the gospel to them?

☹ Pray

Thank God for his gospel, and ask him to help you never to think you should move beyond it to more “advanced” doctrines.

Ask God to show you where your life needs to be changed by his gospel message.

Day
2

New Gospel = No Gospel

Galatians 1 v 6-9

News has reached Paul about the Galatian church that has moved him deeply. And his emotions almost immediately express themselves...

Yesterday we looked at Paul's gospel about Jesus. How would you now explain the gospel message to a friend?

A Different Kind of Greeting

Read 1 Corinthians 1 v 3-4; Ephesians 1 v 3; Philippians 1 v 3-4; Colossians 1 v 4.
Then read Galatians 1 v 6.

In most of his letters, Paul follows his greeting with a paragraph of thanksgiving and appreciation for the lives of the people.

Why is Galatians 1 v 6 such a shock?

Changing the Gospel

Read Galatians 1 v 6-9

What kind of gospel is produced when any change is made to the gospel (v 6-7)?

Why is this, do you think?

A group of teachers in Galatia had taught that Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians had to observe all the Jewish dietary laws and be circumcised for full acceptance and to be completely pleasing to God.

But by insisting on Christ-plus-something-else as the requirement for full acceptance by God, they were presenting a whole different way of relating to God (v 6) from the one Paul gave them (v 8).

Paul forcefully and unapologetically fought the “different gospel,” because to lose your grip of the true gospel is to desert and lose Christ himself. Everything was at stake in this debate!

How do people “add to the gospel” today in ways that diminish its power?

Here are three quick examples:

- Being good gets you to God.
- You need to perform certain rituals, or dress in the right way, or have a particular view of dating, to be a Christian.
- You need to feel overwhelming love for Jesus to truly be saved.

Even if an Angel...

What is Paul's attitude toward those who distort the gospel (v 8-9)?

Paul's gospel is the true gospel (we'll see why over the next few days. So if we hear any “gospel” which doesn't agree with Paul's, we can know it's wrong (v 9)!

Describe Paul's frame of mind when he wrote this. What has caused it? Is he warranted?

☹ Pray

Thank God for those who taught you his true gospel.

Ask God to enable you to care as much about gospel truth as Paul did. Ask him to help you recognize anything which in reality is a “different gospel.”

How Paul Got the Gospel

Galatians I v 10-12

It seems that the people who had come to the Galatian Christians with a “gospel” (v 7) which challenged Paul’s had been making some claims about Paul’s integrity or reliability. In these verses, he begins to defend himself.

Read Galatians I v 10-12

Gospel Source

What kind of challenge does Paul appear to be answering in verse 11?

Why would this claim be damaging to Paul’s argument that his gospel is the true one?

How did Paul receive his gospel (v 12)?

What a great encouragement to trust our lives and futures to this message!

Paul’s Conversion

Read Acts 9 v 1-9

Saul (also known as Paul) was going to Damascus to take Christ’s people prisoner; he ended up entering Damascus as a prisoner of Christ!

Paul’s conversion is a great reminder that no one is beyond the reach of Jesus. If the Lord can turn this persecutor into a preacher, he can bring anyone to faith.

*Are there people you know who you don't really think could ever become Christians?
Why not pray for them right now? And why not keep praying for them daily?*

Paul's Answer

Perhaps “some people” (Galatians 1 v 7) were claiming that Paul had just got his message from “HQ” in Jerusalem, and were saying, “We’ve also been trained there. And we say Paul didn’t give you the whole story. There’s more to this gospel message than what he’s said.”

But Paul had been preaching his divinely-given gospel for three years before ever going to HQ (see v 15-20)!

Gospel Change

*What results do you see in Galatians 1 v 10 of a gospel-changed life?
Whose approval could Paul seek (v 10)?*

If we know God’s approval, we don’t need to fear any disapproval from people. And, as we’ll see as we work through Galatians, the gospel tells us that God’s complete favor and approval are already ours, through Christ.

☺ Apply

To many of us, verse 10 will come as a challenge. We tend to think we can do both: live Christianly and enjoy popularity. Paul is quite clear that there will be many times when we will need to choose one or the other.

In which parts of your life do you most easily find yourself wanting to please people more than Christ?

To serve Christ in those areas, what needs to change?

