



ELIZABETH WOODSON

LIVE FREE

A STUDY OF
GALATIANS

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ABOUT *the* AUTHOR



ELIZABETH WOODSON is a Bible teacher and author who is passionate about equipping believers to understand the rich theological truths of Scripture. She loves helping people internalize their faith and connect it practically to everyday life.

She is a contributing author for *World on Fire*, and the author of *From Beginning to Forever* and *Embrace Your Life: How to Find Joy When the Life You Have Is Not the Life You Hoped For*. Elizabeth is also a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary with a Masters in Christian Education and regularly serves as a teacher for Lifeway Women Academy.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

This Bible study book is designed to be used in a specific way, with the days of personal study walking you through the three-step study process of observation, interpretation, and application. However, the homework will also prepare you for two other essential components of this study: small group discussion and video teaching.

Our study of the Bible happens best in community. You will likely have questions as you walk through the workbook. Your time in community with me through the video teachings and/or with your small group will help resolve those questions for you.

In light of this, below are my recommendations for how to best use this study:

GROUP STUDY

Step 1: Complete the homework.

Step 2: Discuss the homework questions with your small group. I have noted some of the questions that will work well for group discussion, and these can be found on the "Group Discussion" page at the end of each session.*

Step 3: Watch the video teaching. Turn to the last page of this book for information on how to stream the teaching videos.

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Step 1: Complete the homework.

Step 2: Watch the corresponding video teaching. Turn to the last page of this book for information on how to stream the teaching videos.



*LEADING A GROUP?

An extended leader guide PDF is available for free download at lifeway.com/livefree. The leader guide offers several tips and helps along with discussion guides for each session.

FOREWORD

Welcome to *Live Free: A Study of Galatians*. This study is designed to help you learn how to study the Bible. Many of us approach our study of the Bible with the primary purpose of finding truth to help us live well. And this is not a bad goal. But while the Bible was written *for us*, it was not originally written *to us*.

Each time we open our Bible, we are entering a conversation that is already in progress. These conversations are words written by the biblical authors to groups of people who lived in a different time and culture than us. The biblical authors also had a specific message they desired to communicate to their audience. So, before we look to see what the text means for us, we need to learn what the text meant to its original audience. This study you're holding in your hands was designed to teach you a process that will help you read Scripture in this way.

The process I encourage for Bible study is called the Inductive Bible Study Method, an approach that looks at the text first for observation, next for interpretation, and finally for application.¹ This process invites us to slowly walk through the text by asking three critical questions:

1. Observation asks, "What does it say?"
2. Interpretation asks, "What does it mean?"
3. Application asks, "How does it apply to my life?"

The order in which we ask these questions matters. Unfortunately, we tend to rush too quickly to application, skipping observation and interpretation. When we do this, we run the risk of developing application points that might sound good but aren't faithful to the original meaning of the text. We also rob ourselves of the opportunity to grow in our Bible study skills—to become good students of Scripture we must trust the process, which includes developing the tenacity to keep going when it gets hard.

At some point in time, all of us have come across a passage of Scripture that was confusing or difficult to understand. In this moment our first response is usually to find a commentary or look at the study notes in our Bibles. While this

seems to be a helpful response, it rushes us out of a very important part of our learning process—applying our own minds to the text. Even though our lack of understanding can make us uncomfortable, this discomfort is often the place where learning happens. As we take the time to wrestle with the text on our own, rather than look for quick answers, our ability to read the Bible well grows!

For this reason, as you walk through this study I encourage you to refrain from using commentaries until after you have finished the homework and listened to the video teaching. Then, feel free to use them to answer any remaining questions you might have!

The following commentaries on Galatians are trustworthy and informed my study and writing of this book:

- *Galatians for You* by Tim Keller
- *Galatians (The Story of God Bible Commentary)* by Nijay Gupta
- *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* by David Platt

Keep in mind, commentaries don't only come in the form of books. Other types of commentaries include videos, the notes in your study Bibles, online articles, podcasts, and/or sermons from trustworthy sources. These resources can be very helpful, but when used prematurely they will stunt the growth of your personal Bible study muscles.

The ultimate goal of Bible study is to grow in our knowledge of and love for God. This growth is not merely an accumulation of knowledge for knowledge's sake; we need to apply what we learn about God to our lives. Knowing God more changes us. For this reason, at the end of each week's homework we will be challenged to meditate on what we have learned about God in that week's portion of the text and then identify at least one way we can live differently based on what we've learned. These two small steps are simple but powerful and will cause your relationship with God and others to be forever changed.

A WORD *from* THE AUTHOR

When people ask me to share my favorite books of the Bible, I usually mention one written by the apostle Paul. I resonate with his passion for ministry and appreciate the clarity and directness with which he communicated. He was a man deeply acquainted with the nuances of culture and could contextualize the gospel without losing the core of its message. He also understood the distractions, false gospels, and idols that constantly vie for our attention and heart affections. I believe that in each of the thirteen letters Paul wrote in the New Testament, he always invites us to choose the better way—the way of Christ.

This theme of choosing the better way rises to the top of his letter to the church at Galatia. In my glorified imagination, I see Paul writing this letter with great fervency after learning how the Galatian believers were being led astray by the false gospel of legalism. With each word he writes, Paul fights to ensure that nothing stands between the Galatian believers and the freedom they have in Christ, for it is this freedom that fuels both their eternal salvation and the abundant life they experience daily. The same holds true for us today. When we are freed from the power of sin, we are simultaneously freed to experience the *shalom* (wholeness and peace) that God designed us to enjoy.

As you read Paul's words, I hope you see his love for God's people shine through, even in the moments when his words are sharp and spicy! More importantly, as Paul slowly and methodically defends the truth of the gospel, I hope you are overwhelmed in all the best ways by God's love for you and the intentionality of His plan of redemption. You are deeply loved by a God who, through Christ, overcame what you could not, restoring your relationship with Him so that you can live free—both now and for eternity.

Elizabeth

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INTRODUCTION

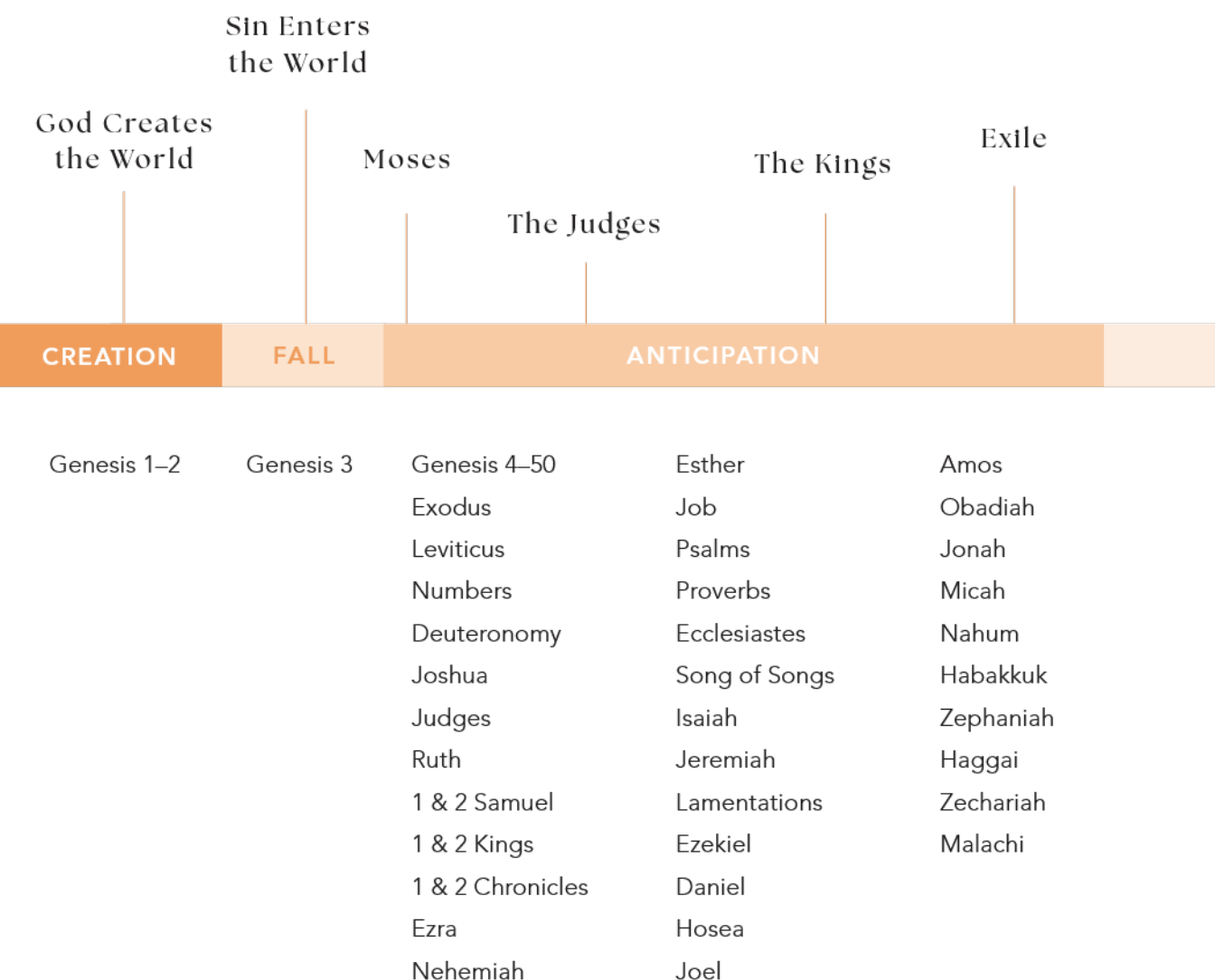
The book of Galatians is a small part of a big story, a story that includes all sixty-six books of the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, every word, event, and character is interconnected and points to an overarching message about God's redemption of humanity through Jesus Christ.

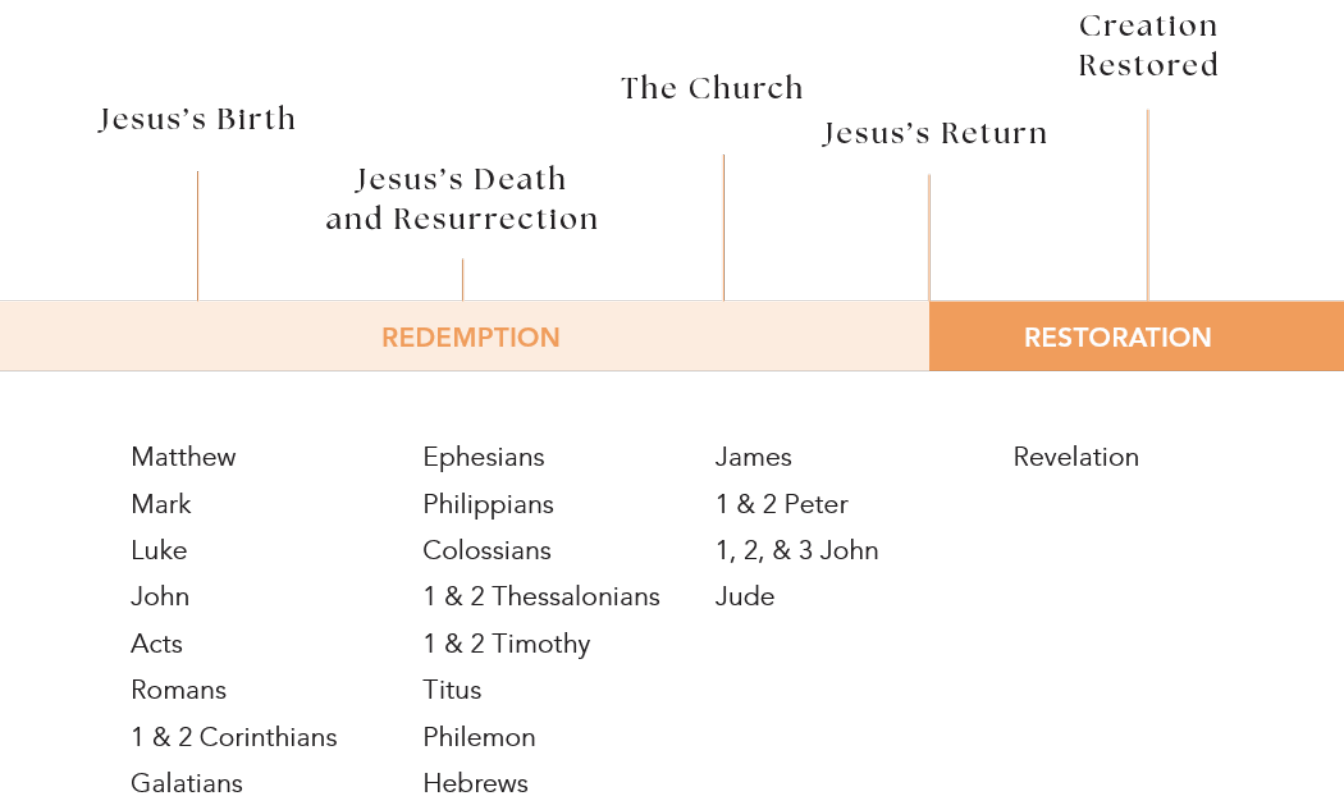
This larger story, also known as a metanarrative, provides the framework we need to interpret the rest of Scripture. If we study a part of the Bible without considering the big picture, we risk incorrect or incomplete interpretation of a passage. We miss the broader themes that run throughout the text. We fail to see the significance of the cultural, historical, and literary context. And worst of all, we end up using the Bible to justify our own beliefs or opinions rather than allowing it to shape our thinking and transform our lives.

So, before we zoom in on the message of Galatians, let's zoom out to make sure we understand the story of the Bible.

ZOOM OUT

THE STORY OF THE BIBLE





CHAPTER 1: CREATION

GENESIS 1–2

From the very first sentence in Genesis, we are told that God created the world. Out of nothing, all of creation came into being by His power. From the overflow of His love, God created nature, animals, and humans—male and female. Unlike the rest of creation, God created humanity in His image. As image bearers, we were designed to be God’s representatives, reflecting His glory to the world. We were also given the responsibility to cultivate the earth, building a beautiful world for the benefit of humanity and God’s glory.

In the beginning everything was perfect. Then something changed.

CHAPTER 2: FALL

GENESIS 3

Eve got a visit from Satan in the form of a talking serpent. He suggested that she shouldn’t follow the rules God had given her but should do what she thought was best. In rebellion, Adam and Eve rejected God’s rule over them and decided to live as their own gods. With this one decision they unleashed sin into the world, and suddenly, what God created perfect was broken. But in His grace, God promised to fix all that sin destroyed.

CHAPTER 3: ANTICIPATION

GENESIS 4–MALACHI

As the story unfolded, God’s restoration plan was accomplished through a series of promises, called covenants. God started with a man named Abraham, making a covenant to bless his family and to use his family to bless the world. After hundreds of years, Abraham’s descendants, the nation of Israel, became enslaved. Remembering His covenant, God used a man named Moses to set them free. But He also made another covenant with Israel.

Through Moses, God committed to be Israel’s King, and they committed to follow Him. God gave them the law, showing Israel

how to live as His people by loving Him and loving others. But Israel had one problem—they kept choosing their way over God’s way. In the midst of it all, God made another covenant with Israel through a king named David. God promised to raise up a King that would rule forever, perfectly leading Israel to love God and love others.

But Israel continued to persist in a sinful lifestyle. God used prophets to call them to repent, but they didn’t listen. So, in love, God punished Israel by sending them into exile. During this exile, He made one last covenant with them, promising to provide a permanent solution to their sin. He would save not only Israel but all of humanity through a future King who would lead them to live in God’s way.

God eventually released Israel from exile, but they continued to struggle with sin. Israel needed God’s promised Savior and, for hundreds of years, they waited, anticipating His arrival.

CHAPTER 4: REDEMPTION

MATTHEW–JUDE

One night, a virgin girl named Mary gave birth to a baby named Jesus. This child was the Messianic King God had promised Israel. At thirty, Jesus began His ministry by telling Israel He is God, their promised King and Savior. Along the way, He gathered a few disciples to follow and learn from Him. With them by His side, Jesus told Israel about the kingdom of God, teaching them that kingdom living involves rejecting selfishness, embracing God’s sovereign authority, and prioritizing the flourishing of all humanity.

Jesus told Israel that salvation from sin and entrance into the kingdom comes through Him alone. Some accepted His message. Most didn’t, and they ended up killing Him because of it. But three days after Jesus’s death, He was resurrected from the grave—conquering sin and death and restoring the kingdom of God for Israel and the entire world!

Before ascending into heaven, Jesus gave His disciples one last mission: Tell the world the good news. The promised King has come, and eternal life is available to all through Him. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples set out on this mission, and it is one we, as the church, continue today.

Living counter-culturally, as members of the body of Christ, we commit ourselves to self-sacrificially love God and love others. We obey His commands as we corporately proclaim the gospel, both in word and deed. Through our words we invite people to experience eternal life through faith in Jesus. Through our actions we live out the implications of the gospel, helping to heal the brokenness caused by sin and build a world where *all of creation* thrives. Even amid the difficulties of life, we resist the false gods of this world to find our hope and comfort in the one true God because our ultimate allegiance is to His kingdom.

CHAPTER 5: RESTORATION

REVELATION

In the final pages of the story, we are told that one day our Savior and King, Jesus Christ, will return to fully restore the kingdom of God. God's plan of salvation will be complete. Sin, evil, death, and Satan will be no more. When this happens, believers will not escape to a far-off world; we will stay here. Heaven and earth will be reunited, and all of creation will be perfectly restored.

In a world with no sin, believers will perfectly love God and love others. We will live out our divine design as image bearers, reflecting the glory of God and thriving alongside all creation in the fullness of our restoration. We will live in the kingdom of God, under His rule, and love and worship Him forever.

As we study the Bible, it is easy for us to forget this larger story and focus on what a single passage means for us as individuals today. But every passage in the Bible is designed to point us to a larger message about who God is, who we are in Him, and what it means for us to live in His world. Through Christ, God has redeemed humanity so that we might live in shalom—peace and wholeness—with Him for eternity. By centering our understanding of Galatians within the larger storyline of the Bible, we are able to guard ourselves against misinterpreting Scripture. We are also able to keep the main thing the main thing, which is the glory of our triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

TIMELINE *of* PAUL'S MINISTRY

DATE	EVENT	SCRIPTURE
AD 33*	Paul's Conversion on the Road to Damascus	Acts 9:1-20
AD 33/34	Spends three years in Arabia	Gal. 1:17
AD 36/37	Meets with Peter in Jerusalem, flees to Tarsus	Acts 9:26-30; Gal. 1:18-21
AD 37-45	Lives and ministers in Syria/Cilicia	Gal. 1:21-24
AD 44-47	Ministry with Barnabas in Antioch	Acts 11:25-26
AD 46	Visits Jerusalem during the famine	Acts 11:27-30
AD 46-47	First Missionary Journey Writes Galatians	Acts 13:4-14:26
AD 48	Returns to Jerusalem for the Jerusalem Council	Acts 15
AD 49-52	Second Missionary Journey Writes 1&2 Thessalonians	Acts 15:36-18:22
AD 52-57	Third Missionary Journey Writes 1 & 2 Corinthians	Acts 18:23-21:17; 1 Cor. 16:1-8; 2 Cor. 2:1-4; 7:8-16
AD 57-62	Paul is arrested in Jerusalem, transferred to Caesarea, and imprisoned in Rome (house arrest) Writes Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon	Acts 21:27-28:31
AD 62-64	Released from house arrest and travels to Spain on his fourth missionary journey Writes 1 Timothy & Titus	Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:13,20
AD 64	Arrested and imprisoned in Rome again Writes 2 Timothy	2 Tim. 2:9; 4:6
AD 64-67	Martyred	

**All dates are approximate and may vary by source.¹*

MAP of PAUL'S MINISTRY

GALATIA

ASIA

CAPPADOCIA

CILICIA

LYCIA

SYRIA

CYPRUS

JUDEA

Mediterranean Sea

Antioch in
Pisidia

Iconium

Lystra

Derbe

Tarsus

Attalia

Perga

Seleucia
Pieria

Antioch

Salamis

Paphos

Damascus

Jerusalem





Watch the Session One video and take notes below.

Now, through this week's teaching video, let's zoom in on the story of Galatians together, focusing on its historical, cultural, and literary context.

1. What is *context* and why should studying it be an essential part of our Bible study process?
2. Who is the author of Galatians? | *Historical Context*
3. When was Galatians written? | *Historical Context*