

# Characteristics of Christ

UNIT  
1  
LESSON  
3

UNIT 1

## Bible Reference

Colossians 1:15–23

## To the Teacher

Students who begin to understand Christ's supremacy can also begin to understand the freedom and security of the Christian life. This lesson should be one of joy, as students learn how Christian communities enjoy the riches and blessings of being one with Christ.

## Preparation/Materials

- \* Activity sheet, one per student

## Lesson Highlights

- \* Paul speaks of the riches Christians enjoy as heirs of Christ.
- \* Paul demonstrates the adequacy of Christ—we need nothing and no one else besides him.

- \* Students will understand the great riches they inherit as children of God.
- \* Students will be challenged to respond to Christ's blessings in their lives.

## Background

Paul, in Rome, received an urgent visit from Epaphras, a minister in Colosse. Epaphras's greatest concern was false teachers and heresy that had begun to infiltrate the church. Instead of openly attacking the heresy, Paul wisely addressed the issue of the supremacy of Christ. In order to accomplish this goal, he exalted Christ as the very image of God, the Creator, the preexistent sustainer of all things, the head of the church, the first to be resurrected, the fullness of deity in bodily form, and the reconciler. Christ, and Christ alone, is completely adequate to meet all our needs.

The Colossian heresy was a completely hollow and deceptive philosophy. The theme of Colossians is the complete adequacy of Christ, as contrasted with the emptiness of mere human philosophy.

## Lesson Steps



### Bridge

Write the heading "Riches" on the board. On the left side, write "World" and on the right side "Christ." Ask students what kinds of things "rich" people in this world might possess. Write these on the left-hand side of the board, under "World." After reading Colossians 1:15–23 with students and completing the activity sheet, ask students what realities or qualities make Christ "rich" and write them on the right-hand side of the board under "Christ."

RICHES	
World	Christ
Money	He was created in the image of the God. (Colossians 1:15)
Cars, boats, ATVs, snowmobiles, and RVs	He is above all things. (Colossians 1:17)
Houses, cottages	He is the head of the church. (Colossians 1:18)
Electronic games, DVDs, and CDs	God's fullness dwells in him. (Colossians 1:19)
Clothing—name brand	Christ has reconciled us. (Colossians 1:20–22)
Expensive toys—dirt bikes, etc.	Christ's message of hope is intended for every creature under heaven. (Colossians 1:23)



### Scripture Link

1. Tell students that Paul warned the Christians in Colosse to refrain from chasing after the hollow “things” and philosophy of the temporal/earthly life.
2. Have students scan Colossians 1:15–23 to reflect upon the riches of Christ.
3. Discuss with the class one verse at a time, eliciting answers and explaining briefly how the attribute of Christ in that particular verse is a source of rich blessing to the student.
4. Students will assess, in light of these verses, the “rightness” of their Christian lives. Tell students, “It was Paul’s goal to let the Christians in Colosse know that they shouldn’t give in to the world’s values, standards, and riches. Instead, Christians need to prioritize their lives and place God first.”



### Student Activities

1. Distribute the activity sheet, and have students complete it individually.
2. Review the answers and finish filling in the chart you began earlier in the lesson. Help students realize the magnificence of the gifts that are ours through Christ. They are in no way superficial or fake, and they will not easily fade away. They impart to us such confident assurance that we have nothing to worry about; God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit are in control of every detail of life.

## Characteristics of Christ

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions, using Colossians 1:15–23.

1. Using clues in the verses below, identify the characteristics of Christ that we inherit as children of God. Then use a sentence to explain your answer. This will require some extra thought, because the answers go beyond what Paul says in the verses.
  - a. 1:15: Jesus is God. Because he is in control of everything, I can draw from his power source to serve him.
  - b. 1:16: Creator. Since God created the whole world, I know that he created me with gifts.
  - c. 1:17: Sustainer. God takes care of the whole world, including me. As his hands and feet in the world, I can help take care of his creation, including other people.
  - d. 1:18: Head of the church. Because I am a Christian, I am a member of Christ's family, the church.
  - e. 1:18: First to be resurrected. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.
  - f. 1:20: Reconciler. Just as Christ forgave me, I can forgive others.
2. What caused people to become alienated from God? Evil behavior alienated us from God—first Adam and Eve's sin, but our own sins, too.
3. How could the Colossians (and how can you) be reconciled (made right) so that you are holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation? (1:22). Christ's physical body through his death and resurrection reconciles us to God.
4. If you believe in Jesus, you are an heir of great riches. You can have confidence in Jesus right now and for all eternity. Identify five riches (blessings) you have because of Jesus.  
Possible answers: hope of eternal life; peace; assurance that Jesus is in control of my life, which allows me to surrender my concerns to him; knowledge that Jesus will help me work things out when I pray; assurance that my sins are forgiven, which frees me up to let go of grudges and forgive others; and the privilege of worshiping and praising the Creator.

UNIT 1 LESSON 3

7

5. You are on a journey. As you press forward, what difference does it make for you that Jesus is supreme and in control of all things? Look up Romans 8:28 to help you with your answer.  
Answers will vary. Romans 8 promises that God will go so far as to turn what is meant for evil into good for the sake of those who believe in him.

6. What two things will you commit to doing today, this week, and further along on your journey in response to what you have learned about Jesus? Answers will vary.

**"FORGIVE  
as the Lord  
forgave you"**  
 (Colossians 3:13b)

8

## Enrichment

- \* **Art.** Have students decorate a piece of construction paper to answer the question "Who is Jesus?" Encourage students to use creative expressions (pictures, word art, symbols, etc.) to reflect what Jesus means to them.
- \* **Music.** Play "Jesus, I Lift My Eyes" from the CD *Redemption Songs* by Jars of Clay.
- \* **Music.** "Beautiful Savior" from the *Psalter Hymnal*.

# Cleansing the Temple

UNIT  
4  
LESSON  
2

## Bible Reference

Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48

## To the Teacher

Help students recognize Jesus' appropriate and righteous anger against those who were defiling the temple. The exchange of money and animals in the outer courtyard of God's house was disrespectful and improper within this sacred precinct. Jewish merchants doing business in the court of the Gentiles were preventing the Gentiles, who were allowed no further access into the temple, from worshipping God. The Jewish leaders had once again rendered the laws or rules of worship more important than the spirit of worship. Jesus saw and corrected the problem, but, nor surprisingly, the Jewish leaders did not respond affirmatively to his criticism and decisive action. They continued to view him as a threat to their authority and continued to plot his death. Remind students that Jesus had done nothing wrong when he cleansed the temple; the Jewish leaders only perceived it that way, not recognizing that Jesus had rectified a problem they themselves should long since have done something about.

## Preparation/Materials

- \* Transparency of the teacher resource sheet
- \* Activity sheet, one per student
- \* Unit organizer journals

## Lesson Highlights

- \* Herod's temple included a specific place (in the busy outer courtyard) for Gentiles to worship.
- \* Jesus wanted the Gentiles to be able to worship God meaningfully and in an atmosphere conducive to reverence.

- \* God's house was supposed to be a house of prayer, but the merchants had transformed the outer courtyard into a noisy, bustling trade center.
- \* The Jewish religious leaders continued to plot Jesus' death.
- \* Jesus cleansed the temple and, in a related story, cursed a fig tree, causing it to wither.

## Background

On the day following his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Jesus went to the temple, thereby making it clear to the people that he had come to save them not from the Romans but from their sins. Jesus entered the temple, as everyone did, through the bustling outer courtyard, the Court of the Gentiles—the only temple area in which non-Jews were permitted to worship and pray. The courtyard was filled with smelly, braying animals; merchants touting their “wares”; and noisy money changers. The merchants had taken the opportunity to set up their booths to sell animals that met the sacrificial requirements, and the money changers were there to exchange legal tender from other parts of the region for the local currency needed to pay the temple tax. The merchants and money changers were unabashedly in the business of making money—not in offering the pilgrims a fair price.

Jesus was outraged by the commotion in the court of the Gentiles. The religious leaders had robbed the Gentiles of their ability to worship reverently or meaningfully by allowing these businesses to overrun the courtyard. By driving out the merchants and money changers from the temple precinct and demonstrating thereby that the Gentiles were important to God, Jesus reminded the people that God's house is to be a house of prayer.

After cleansing the temple, Jesus returned to Bethany to spend the night.

The cleansing of the temple is framed within the story of the cursing of the fig tree. In dealing with the story of Jesus cleansing of the temple, it is imperative that we see beyond his righteous indignation at the outrageous situation he had found there. Jesus' action was also prophetic; he was demonstrating that business as usual in the temple was drawing to an end.

Paul Achtemeier, in his *Commentary on Mark* (Fortress Press, 1986) puts it this way: "If sacrificial animals cannot be purchased, then the sacrifice cannot be carried on. If money proper for paying of the half-shekel temple tax cannot be obtained, the monetary support of the temple and its priesthood would have to come to an end."

Furthermore, Achtemeier points out that the "den of robbers" (Mark 11:17) refers to Jeremiah 7:8–11. The prophet talked about the robber's cave as the place to which robbers would escape after having committed their crimes. Interpreted in the light of Jeremiah, Jesus was using the phrase to accuse the Jews of abusing the temple services. They were acting as they pleased and then blithely entering the temple, still expecting to find God's forgiveness there. Besides, the temple was no longer functioning as a place of prayer "for all nations," as God had intended.

Jesus announced, in effect, that temple worship was doomed; Jesus himself was taking the place of the temple. The framing of the temple cleansing story with the fig tree story makes the point that both the fig tree and the temple were under God's curse for having failed to bear fruit.

## Lesson Steps



### Bridge

1. Project the transparency from the teacher resource sheet for students to view. Explain that Jesus went to the temple the day after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Many of the Jews were still expecting a political ruler, so they were probably surprised to see Jesus at the temple. Why do students think this may have been true? (The people probably expected Jesus to go to a center of political, not religious, power.) Jesus was making a statement to the people that he had come for religious, not political, reasons.
2. Have students turn to the entry "Herod's Temple" on page 54 in the student text. Ask student volunteers to take turns reading the paragraphs, or read to students as they follow along. Have students locate the Court of the Gentiles in the drawing.

### HEROD'S TEMPLE

To gain the approval of the Jews, Herod the Great had decided to rebuild the Jerusalem temple. The work was started in 19 B.C., but the entire temple area was not completed until A.D. 64 (after Jesus' death and resurrection). Herod's temple was destroyed soon afterward, however, in A.D. 70.

Herod honored the Jewish traditions of worship by making certain that the construction process did not interfere with the Jews' temple worship. He trained 1,000 of the priests to serve as masons and carpenters, working in the inner areas that only priests could enter.

Herod's temple was surrounded by three courtyards. The platform on which stood the temple and its courtyards was surrounded by high walls with entrance gates.



Roman soldiers observed the worshipers from porches along the inside of the walls, making certain there were no riots.

The outer court was called the Court of the Gentiles. This was the largest of the three courtyards and on the lowest level. All visitors were free to enter this area, so it was a busy place. Children played, merchants sold animals for sacrifice, and money changers exchanged currency. The rest of the temple area was separated from the Court of the Gentiles by a low wall. Signs on the wall warned that any non-Jew who entered risked being put to death.

Twenty-two feet higher up and through a large bronze door was the Court of Women, the place where Jewish women worshiped. Thirteen trumpet-shaped chests were set up within the Court of Women so that Jewish women could pay their temple taxes and present their money offerings.

Up another 15 steps, the gold-silver Nicanor gate separated the Court of Women from the Court of Israel. Only Jewish men could enter this area to pray and to observe the sacrifices.

The Court of the Priests, only one step higher, was reserved for priests. The altar of burnt offering stood in the center, with the laver behind it. This laver sat on 12 bronze lions.

The actual temple building was 12 steps higher than the Court of the Priests. Constructed of cream-colored stones, the temple had been fashioned after Solomon's temple. The east side of the temple was covered with gold to reflect the rising sun. The Jews were upset about Herod's decision to place an eagle at the entrance to the temple; an eagle was not only an unclean bird but it was the Roman emblem.

This temple building (like the tabernacle and the previous two temples) was divided into the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies). The Holy Place contained the lampstand (also called the menorah), the altar of incense, and the table of showbread. An embroidered curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. This is the curtain that was torn when Jesus died. The Most Holy Place was empty now, because the ark of the covenant had been destroyed. As in ancient times, the priest still entered the Most Holy Place only one day each year, on the Day of Atonement, to sprinkle blood from the sacrifice on a rock where the ark of the covenant would otherwise have been standing.

### Scripture Link

1. Have students turn to Mark 11:12–26, the story of Jesus cleansing the temple and cursing the fig tree. Read these verses aloud, or have student volunteers take turns reading.
2. Ask students to keep their Bibles out and turn to the entry “Money Changers” on page 125 in the student text. Have students read the entry silently.

### MONEY CHANGERS

No standard money system existed during Bible times. Each new ruler ordered new coins to be forged. The money changers had to determine the value of each coin and to exchange it for different coins, exchanging large coins for smaller ones and foreign coins for local currency. They charged a fee for this service.

Many money changers conducted their business in the Court of the Gentiles. Pilgrims from numerous countries made the journey to the temple to pay their temple

taxes and offer sacrifices. They were forbidden to use their foreign coins because these coins were inscribed with images of their rulers. The money changers exchanged foreign currency for Jewish coins, which bore no images of people.

Many of the money changers were dishonest. Their fees were excessive, or they cheated customers out of the true value of their coins. Jesus turned over the tables of the money changers because they were corrupting the purpose of the temple.

3. Ask students why Jesus was so angry, both with the fig tree and with the temple authorities. Write the reasons on the board. (The money changers had taken over the court, the Gentiles were unable to pray or worship reverently or meaningfully with so much noise and commotion, and the money changers were taking advantage of the pilgrims who had traveled to Jerusalem. Neither the tree nor the temple was bearing fruit.)
4. Emphasize that the only place in which Gentiles were allowed to worship was the bustling outer courtyard. The presence of the money changers and the merchants there was preventing the Gentiles from worshipping God. Jesus once again showed that he had come to save all people, including the Gentiles.



## Student Activities

1. Remind students that some of the Pharisees were continuing to look for reasons to kill Jesus. His cleansing of the temple added one more offense to their already lengthy list.
2. Distribute the activity sheet.
3. Read the instructions on the top of the activity sheet, and have students complete the sheet individually or with a partner. You may choose to complete the second half of the activity sheet together, as a class. These provocative questions may lead to a stimulating discussion.

**Cursing the Fig Tree and Cleansing the Temple**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Read Mark 11:12–26 to understand Jesus' reasons for cursing the fig tree and cleansing the temple.

1. What did Jesus do to a fig tree on his way to Jerusalem? Jesus cursed a fig tree.  
What caused Jesus to do this? The fig tree wasn't bearing fruit.
2. What did Jesus do to the businessmen, bankers, and merchants? He drove them out, turned over their benches and tables, and wouldn't let them carry merchandise through the courtyard.
3. Try to imagine the scene in your mind. What do you think each group did as soon as Jesus interrupted their activities? Answers will vary. Perhaps they tried to get their animals back, to gather up their scattered coins, or to go the long way around to their destination.
4. What Old Testament prophet did Jesus quote as saying that the temple would be a house of prayer for all nations (Gentiles)? Look at the study notes at the bottom of your NIV Study Bible in Mark 11:17. Isaiah
5. What did Jesus' concern about the Court of the Gentiles show about who God wanted to include in his kingdom? His kingdom is also for Gentiles.
6. What did Peter notice about the fig tree on the way back from Jerusalem? The fig tree was withered and dead.
7. What was Jesus' response? Have faith and pray; faith and prayer, not the temple, are now the way of God.

The reasons the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus were political, religious, and personal. In a sentence or two, explain these reasons in more detail. Use examples if you can.

8. Political Reasons: Jesus was crucified because he was seen as a threat to the Jewish leaders. Jesus' use of nonviolent resistance, as well as his stirring up of the people while empowering the poor, were correctly judged as challenges to the political power structures of his day.

9. Religious Reasons: Jesus' cleansing of the temple disrupted the entire Jewish system of faith and its religious authority structure. Jesus clearly taught that everyone was welcome in God's kingdom, which meant that the Jewish leaders were no longer the key to a relationship with God.

10. Personal Reasons: Jesus threatened the Jewish leaders by accusing the Jews of abusing the temple services. Jesus threatened both their financial gain through taxes and their teachings by saying that God's kingdom is for all nations.

**Question for Reflection**

11. Jesus shows that he is taking a stand as he defends his father's house, the temple. Think of two concrete examples (school, home, after-school activities, etc.) in your life where you need to "stand up" and defend your Christian beliefs. How will you defend your faith in these situations? **Answers will vary.**

**"DO THIS in REMEMBRANCE of ME"** (1 Corinthians 11:24b)

60

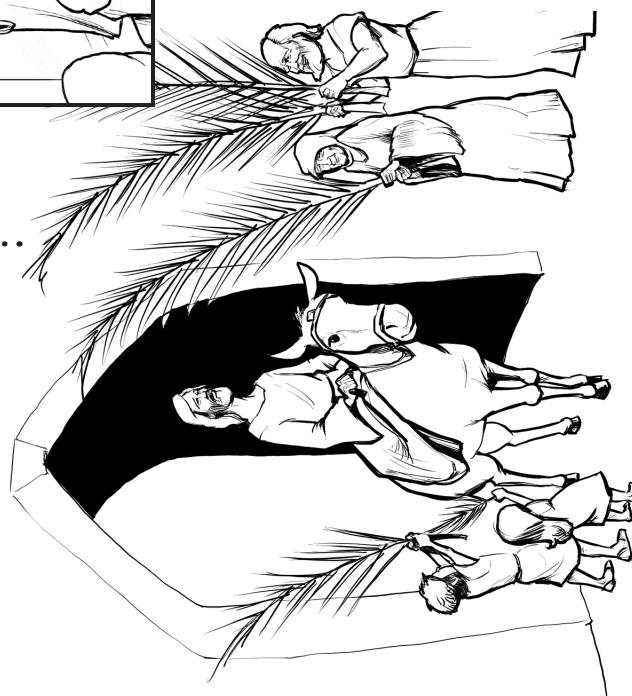
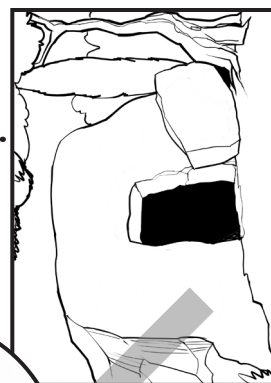
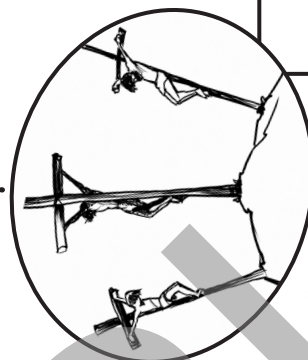
4. Introduce the new memory work, 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, and encourage students to begin memorizing this passage.
5. Allow time for students to write their journal entry for this lesson.

## Enrichment

- \* **Devotional material.** Meditation 23, "This Is God's House," from *The Shortest Disciple* by Steve Jensen.
- \* **Art.** Have students construct models of Herod's temple. This could easily be a class project. Help them to use a consistent scale for the various pieces and parts of the temple.
- \* **Social studies.** Have students research the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and of Herod's temple in A.D. 70. Students should find out the Romans' reasons for attacking Jerusalem. They may want to include in their research what happened to the site of the temple. Allow students to share their information with the class.
- \* Read about or ask interested students to report on the triumphal entry, as described by Ray Vander Laan in *Echoes of His Presence*.



Friday	Raising of Lazarus	
Saturday	The Sabbath	
Sunday	The Triumphal Entry	
Monday	Cleansing the Temple Cursing the Fig Tree	
Tuesday	Questioning of the Sanhedrin	
Wednesday	Teaching about Last Days	
Thursday	Passover	
Friday	The Crucifixion	
Saturday	Jesus in the Tomb	
Sunday	The Resurrection	



## Passion “Week” Timeline

SAMPLE

# Return to Antioch and Jerusalem

UNIT  
8  
LESSON  
4

## Bible Reference

Acts 14:21—15:35; Galatians 1–2

## To the Teacher

At the end of this unit, students will look at the Book of Acts and be introduced to Paul's letter to the Galatians. This is a good time to study Galatians because the epistle deals with the controversy that led to the Jerusalem Council, which is covered in Acts 15.

Christians today often have an unrealistic "all is calm, all is bright" perception of the early church. Acts 15 and the Book of Galatians together inject a dose of reality. Although the Spirit was leading the church in a new direction, a powerful group of Jewish Christians (the Judaizers) wanted to follow the old path.

In the first two chapters of Galatians, Paul sets forth his reason for writing, defends his apostleship, and begins to build his case for the supreme authority of the gospel of grace. He contrasts "works of the law" and justification by faith. As you read and study Paul's argument against the Judaizers of his day, make certain that students understand the difference between justification by grace through faith and the Judaizers' concept of justification by observance of the law.

Portions of the Book of Galatians are not easy reading, so keep students' reading abilities in mind as you create your teaching plan for this lesson.

## Preparation/Materials

- \* Activity sheet, one per student

## Lesson Highlights

- \* Paul and Barnabas preached in Derbe and revisited the new converts in Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch.

- \* Paul was a true apostle, whose commission to preach to the Gentiles and to admit them freely into the fellowship of God's people had come directly from Christ.
- \* The Judaizers' insistence that Gentile Christians had to be circumcised and obey Jewish ritual laws—"works of the law"—constituted a "different gospel."
- \* The central message of the Book of Galatians is that the Christian gospel is one of grace, not works.
- \* Being justified by faith in Christ means that we have been set free from the burden of trying to earn God's approval—or our own salvation.

## Background

Paul completed his first missionary journey as he left Lystra and headed 30 miles (48 km) southwest to Derbe. At Derbe, Paul and Barnabas won many disciples. After this, the two missionaries conscientiously revisited the Galatian cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. This missionary duo encouraged converts and Christian communities in their newfound faith. Paul and Barnabas, however, were deeply disappointed with the backstabbing Judaizers (Jewish Christians who continued to stress the importance of laws and works), who were seriously undermining their work. This sect of Pharisees insisted that Christians needed to be circumcised and to obey the whole body of the extensive oral law. Paul's message: Christ had already fulfilled the law, and Christians needed only to believe in him in order to be freed to serve him. The Jerusalem Council was convened, and the delegates debated the issue of law versus grace. Paul, sensing that the new converts in Galatia needed stability, wrote an epistle (letter)

encouraging the Galatians to hold firmly to their newfound faith.

Doing justice to the Book of Galatians is impossible without delving into the meaning of justification by faith. Some students may be familiar with this concept; others may not. Justification means being made right with God on the basis of faith in the atoning work of the crucified Christ. Because no unholiness can exist in God's holy presence, sin had separated the human race from God. Although God's justice and holiness demanded payment for humanity's sin, God's love and mercy had already made provision for that payment through the sacrificial death of God's perfect Son, Jesus. Thus, Jesus' death on the cross justifies believers, making them "clean"—just as though they had never sinned. This justification is available to all who will believe,

totally on the basis of faith in Christ. God's gift of grace saves, and faith is our appropriate response. God's grace evokes faith.

In the Book of Galatians, Paul stated that the Judaizers erred by stressing what believers had to do in order to fulfill the law or be included in God's family. The heart of the Christian faith is what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. The Judaizers were in fact preaching a "different gospel." Although Paul did not disparage the law, he argued that the law did not bring salvation. Rather, salvation comes through faith in Christ alone. The Jerusalem Council's decision against the Judaizers' position in the year A.D. 50 meant that the official Jewish leadership of the early church was firmly behind Paul's impassioned belief that faith in Christ is the only prerequisite for justification in God's sight.

## Lesson Steps



### Bridge

1. Briefly review Paul's first missionary journey, asking students to keep their textbooks open to the map on page 224 (figure 34 in the text). Refer to the map as you mention each stop in the lesson, and ask students to follow along. You may also wish to project [www.apostlepaulthefilm.com/paul/journeys.htm](http://www.apostlepaulthefilm.com/paul/journeys.htm) and play "Paul's First Journey."
2. Explain that Paul and Barnabas's last stop on their first journey was Derbe, where many disciples were won. Then Paul and Barnabas made a deliberate decision to revisit the new Christian converts, churches, and communities that had sprung up in Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Be sure to point out that these four cities (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe) were all located in the province of Galatia.



### Scripture Link

1. Have students read Acts 14:21–28 silently.
2. Direct students to the student text and together read and discuss the sidebar "Judaizers" on page 187.

## JUDAIZERS

Judaizers were Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile Christians had to be circumcised. They also tried to force the Gentiles to observe Jewish feast days, as well as Jewish dietary and Sabbath laws. (See Leviticus 11–15 for a listing of such laws.) The word *Judaizer* is not found in the New Testament; it comes from a Greek word in Galatians 2:14 that means “to live like Jews.”

3. Paul and Barnabas became frustrated and angry. Their hard work was being undermined by the Judaizers, who were trying to change the new converts in Galatia into practicing “Jews” who, they insisted, had to be circumcised and obey the law in order to receive salvation.
4. Paul and Barnabas become activists who took two important steps to bring the Judaizer problem under control: They traveled to Jerusalem to debate the issue, and Paul wrote a letter to let the Galatians know that the message of good news in Jesus’ gospel is all that is necessary for salvation.
5. Read and discuss “Another Gospel?” on page 189 and “A True Apostle—No Other Gospel” on page 193 in the student text. These sections provide background information for understanding the controversy that prompted Paul to write the Book of Galatians.

## ANOTHER GOSPEL?

After Paul and Barnabas had returned to Syrian Antioch, news reached them that Jewish Christians from Jerusalem had been disturbing the Galatian churches. These Jewish Christians, called Judaizers, had evidently followed on Paul’s heels in visiting the newly founded churches in Galatia. These Judaizers were visiting these new churches because they didn’t approve of Paul or of the gospel he was preaching. They accused Paul of being a false apostle, claiming that he didn’t speak with God’s authority. They also claimed that he had received his message from the original apostles and had then watered it down to make it more acceptable to Gentiles. These Jewish Christians insisted that Paul’s message of salvation by faith in Christ alone was misleading: Gentiles also had to adopt Jewish practices, they insisted, in order to be saved.

The new Christians in Galatia didn’t understand everything about their new faith, and the ideas of the Judaizers confused them. In fact, the Galatian believers began to question everything Paul had taught them.

Have you ever built a terrific sandcastle—complete with moats, drawbridges, and towers—only to have someone else level it with a well-aimed kick? If so, you have some idea of how Paul must have felt when he found out what was happening in the churches that he and Barnabas had helped to start in Galatia.

Paul was hopping mad. The Judaizers were lying about God, undermining not only Paul’s work but the Spirit’s. The Holy Spirit had led Paul and Barnabas to strike out in a new direction by beginning to minister to Gentiles. But these Jewish Christians, afraid of the wind of the Spirit, were trying to turn back the clock. They wanted to control the way the church would develop. So much more than a human project was at stake here.

Paul was also concerned about the young Christians in Galatia. He knew they were already right with God because they trusted in Jesus Christ; they did not have to obey all of the Jewish laws. So Paul wrote a letter to the Galatian churches, revealing to the Christians there the danger of falling for the Judaizers’ teachings.



## A TRUE APOSTLE—NO OTHER GOSPEL

Paul began his letter by dealing with the Judaizers' challenge to his authority as an apostle. This challenge was serious, because if the Galatians didn't believe that Paul was a true apostle, they would doubt both Paul's teaching and their own salvation. So Paul forcefully defended himself, providing proof that he had indeed been commissioned by Christ himself to be an apostle, just as those in Jesus' original circle had been. You can find Paul's defense in Galatians 1:11—2:21. Paul's ringing words in Galatians 2:15–21 are among the best known in the Bible.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul took on the Judaizers and their ideas. Not only were they wrong, he contended; they were also in danger of eternal condemnation. Strong words! He charged them with preaching a “different gospel—which is really no gospel at all” (Galatians 1:6b–7a). In the Book of Galatians, Paul proclaimed a gospel that breaks down walls and leads believers from a closed prison into Christ's freedom, where there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). All believers are united, for all are one in Christ.

6. Read aloud and discuss Paul's greeting to the Galatian churches in Galatians 1:1–4. Have students turn to the entry “Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Paul's Greeting from *Traveling Light*” on page 196 in the student text.

### EUGENE PETERSON'S PARAPHRASE OF PAUL'S GREETING FROM *TRAVELING LIGHT*

I, Paul, and my companions in faith here, greet the Galatian churches. My authority for writing to you does not come from any popular vote from the people, nor does it come through the appointment of some human higher-up. It comes directly from Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead: I'm God-commissioned. So I greet you with the great words: Grace and peace! We know the meaning of those words because Jesus Christ rescued us from the present mess we are in by offering himself as a sacrifice for our sins. God's plan is that we all experience that rescue. Glory to God forever! Amen.

Note these Peterson comments: In this greeting and in the story of Christian freedom, God is always the subject and the human is always the object. In these opening lines, Paul *is made* an apostle by God, Jesus *is raised* from the dead by God, and *we are rescued* by God. So our freedom is the result of “God-initiated resurrection.” Salvation is by grace; it's something God does.

7. Introduce the memory work: Galatians 2:20–21.



## Student Activities

1. Distribute the activity sheet. Have students read Galatians 1:11—2:21, using the activity sheet to help them maintain their focus. Address question 1 together as a class, and talk with students about Paul's tone. (He is angry in verse 6; you may even wish to read verse 6 aloud in an angry tone.)

Or have student groups read the Scripture passage in three segments: 1:11–23; 2:1–10; 2:11–21. Then have group members work together to summarize each segment. Have students jot down questions about difficult words or passages. Ask groups to present their summaries. Discuss the argument in each segment, and have students correct/augment their summaries as necessary. Deal with students' questions.

**Trouble in Galatia**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Galatians 1:6–24

1. What is Paul's tone in this chapter, specifically verse 6? The tone is strongly emotional: Paul is angry and frustrated.
2. Who does Paul say sent him out as an apostle? (v. 12) Jesus Christ and God the Father.
3. What does Paul say should happen to anyone who taught a "gospel" other than the gospel that he had taught the Galatians? (v. 8) The person should be eternally condemned.
4. Briefly summarize Paul's defense of his view of the gospel. (vv. 12, 16) The gospel Paul preached was received by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. After Paul's conversion, he did not consult those who became apostles before him.

Galatians 2:1–10

1. Why did Paul go to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders 14 years after his conversion? (v. 2) To tell them the gospel he had been preaching to the Gentiles.
2. Titus went with Paul to Jerusalem. Why does Paul bring Titus into the story? (v. 3) Although Titus was an uncircumcised Greek Gentile, the Jerusalem apostles did not insist that he be circumcised.
3. What does Paul say is at stake in the controversy? (See v. 4) Paul says that freedom in Christ is at stake. The Judaizers want to take away that freedom and make Christians slaves.
4. Paul states three times in verses 7–9 the difference between his ministry and the ministry of Peter (and John and James). What is the difference? Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles; Peter and the others were apostles to the Jews.
5. What main point is Paul making in verses 1–10? That his work is legitimate, and, in fact, supported by the apostles in Jerusalem.

**"The life I live in the body, I live by faith"**

UNIT 8 LESSON 4 153

Galatians 2:11–21

1. Briefly describe Peter's actions at Antioch. (v. 12) Peter quit eating with Gentiles because of pressure from Judaizers.
2. How did Paul react to Peter's behavior? (v. 14) Paul publicly apposed Peter, strongly speaking out against what Peter was doing.
3. According to Paul's words in verses 15 and 16, what is the only way to be justified? We are justified only through faith in Christ, not by observing the law.
4. Reread verse 21 and then write what it means to you. A possible answer: If I believe that observing the law can justify me, then Christ died for nothing.

**Personal Response**

1. Which verse or verses have a message for you? What do they tell you that is important?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Write out your memory work from Galatians 2:20–21.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is Paul emphasizing for you in these two verses?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

154

2. Use the following topics for discussion or journal writing.

- In just two verses (2:15–16), Paul states three times that we are not justified by "works of the law." What are works of the law? How do we sometimes act or think in ways similar to the Judaizers? (Works of the law are activities we still do or religious traditions we still follow in order to fulfill the Jewish laws in an attempt to gain God's love and approval. We think like the Judaizers when we assume we need to do religious and moral deeds as a way to gain God's approval.) Elicit examples from students, or refer to the bridge activity. How

does trying to justify ourselves leave us in a terrible bind? (This calculating behavior imprisons us all over again. We can never feel free to be ourselves or recognize that we are accepted by God just the way we are.)

- Some of our Christian practices come from our culture rather than from the Bible itself. When we present the gospel to unbelievers who do not share our culture, to what extent should they be free to interpret Christianity through their own cultural eyes? (You may wish to work with students to draw up listings of practices that are nonnegotiable and others that are cultural in nature and emphasis.)
- *Justification by faith* is a key phrase in the Book of Galatians. Write or explain the meaning of the phrase in your own words.
- Tell students that Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem to debate this same issue with the Jewish leaders there.

## Enrichment

- \* Make Bible handbooks and dictionaries available for students to research the writing of the Book of Galatians.
- \* Read portions of a biography of Martin Luther in order to demonstrate how an understanding of justification by faith liberated him. Or make several biographies available for student reading.
- \* **Drama.** Have students create a drama based upon Martin Luther's life. Give students the opportunity to present the drama to another class or as part of an all-school chapel service.