

UNDERSTANDING

the Galatians' Context

THE PRESENT EVIL AGE

Jews living during the “intertestamental period” (the time between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament) had experienced many tribulations. They were eagerly awaiting Israel’s messiah, who would usher in Yahweh’s end-times kingdom. Jewish theology of the time believed that they were living in the “present evil age” (or present age). This was an age controlled by the evil nations (and the devil), where darkness ruled, people didn’t follow Torah, and evil persisted. They eagerly anticipated “the age to come,” which would occur once the messiah came to bring justice and the rule of David’s throne.

Paul reminds the Galatians (1:4) that they (Jews and Gentiles alike) had been rescued by the God of Israel and His Messiah, **from the present evil age**—the age that began in Genesis 3 when Adam fell—and had been safely placed into the age to come.

Paul (and other New Testament writers) make frequent use of these terms when they reflect on the Christ Event (the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus). For instance, in Colossians 1:13–14 Paul writes, **“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”** Paul is modifying the terminology but means the same thing: that Christians have been moved from this *present evil age* (the domain of darkness) and have been rescued into *the age to come* (the kingdom of His beloved Son).

Paul is consistent in how he presents this concept. In 2 Corinthians 4:4 he writes, **“the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”** In English, we might not see a strong connection, but the word used for “world” here is the same Greek word used for “age” (*aion*) in Galatians. (For other passages that use a “present age/age to come” concept, look at **Matt. 12:32; 13:40, 49–50; Mark 10:30; Luke 20:34; John 15:19; 1 Cor 2:6–7; Eph 1:21; 2:2; Titus 2:12; and 1 John 5:19**).

The New Testament writers understood that these two ages overlap (i.e., they both presently exist). They believed that they were living in the present evil age, but because of what God had done in Jesus, which is highlighted in the Father's raising the Son from the dead (1:1), ***the age to come had been inaugurated***. This means that because Jesus is the firstborn of the dead (Col. 1:18), and the first-fruit of creation (1 Cor. 15:23), He has ushered in the age to come! The New Testament is clear that by means of what He has done, Jesus is NOW ruling over creation (Matt. 26:64; 28:18; Col. 3:1; Heb. 8:1), as He is the current King of kings and the Lord of lords (1 Tim. 6:15). This means that the people of God are living in two ages, but have no reason to fear the present.

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”



Gospel Implications for the Galatians

THE GOOD NEWS OF RESCUE

The gospel (the good news) is rooted in what God has done in Jesus—that by His life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ is currently sitting at the right hand of the Father and is ruling over His Kingdom! Israel's true Messiah has rescued all kinds of people for His Kingdom, but it is not because of one's ethnicity that someone enters this Kingdom, rather through repentance and faith.

The focus of this letter is on the importance of that gospel. The opening verses remind the Galatians that, because of this good news, they have been delivered from the present evil age into the age to come! God's Kingdom has come in the rule and reign of Christ, and people everywhere are able to become citizens of that Kingdom if they repent and believe the gospel.

