

Cave Walls or Sea Gauls

We often hear preachers speak of understanding the Bible “in context.” We know it is important not to take a specific passage out of context. Context can erase misunderstandings and expose false doctrine. However, what is context? Context is thought to be surrounding verses on the same subject. This is correct; but is a limited understanding of context. Context is not merely surrounding verses in the same chapter. It even extends further than one book of the Bible. Since God is not one who will create conflict with His teachings, all passages must be considered within the entirety of Scripture. Even studies of history and culture are of paramount importance to the understanding of many passages. Let us first define context.

Context 1. the parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specific word or passage, usually influencing its meaning or effect: *You have misinterpreted my remark because you took it out of context.* **2.** The set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc. (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)

The first definition promotes the limited idea of “surrounding text.” The second definition hints there is more than just the surrounding verses. Yet, *context* has another definition which better explains what we need to understand when reading Scripture.

Context of Situation, Linguistically. the totality of extralinguistic features having relevance to a communicative act. (*The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*)

Context includes the experience of the time or place that affects the understanding contained in the text. History can fill in the missing context not included in the text. However, what is taught today as history may be no more than reviewing previous events, within a modern context. Few judge history within the framework of its day including the ambient culture, linguistic understanding, and moral development. Without such examination, it is doubtful that we understand what we read in history. If we neglect this type of context to Scripture, we have limited understanding and can misjudge the desires of the writer.

A review of Galatians reveals how drastically our understanding can change as context is brought to light. Few readers of Galatians understand its culture, people, and history. Nor do readers understand how the culture of the Galatians relate to that of Paul’s culture and history.

My childhood understanding of the New Testament was provided from classes known as “*Sunday School.*” When I was young, my family attended a church and before every Sunday congregational service there were classes where children were separated into comparable age groups and given teaching according to their capacity to learn. The very young children sat in a class and had the teacher tell Bible stories. These presentations contained visual aides including the exciting action packed demonstrations known as flannel graphs. Flannel graph presentations included cutout paper cartoon-type drawings of the characters in the story. They would be placed in an appropriate way on a flannel-covered board allowing them to stick to the board like velcro only with less vigor. As the lesson was given, the paper cartoon figures were moved by the teacher to have them act out the story. This gave the class an ability to view the story in a simplified animated form. The visual aspect helped the children gain a sub conscious

understanding of the text while it was being told to them. This enabled us to see men wearing robes rather than visualize them in a modern context wearing pants. It helped us understand that all the people looked like my family (western Europeans) except they had long hair and beards. We were told that Jesus and Paul were Jews, but with the addition of flannel graph drawings, we knew that they looked like anyone living in Anglo-Saxon America, but wore different clothes and really liked wearing beards.

Since the flannel graph was an inexpensive visual aid, and readily available to the public, America's presentation of the first-century culture prevailed as the proper understanding for the Protestant church. There was no obvious cultural difference presented between Yehoshua (Jesus) and the rest of society around him. He was portrayed in the same way as those in the crowds. Shaul (Paul) was also presented in this fashion, totally integrated with the surrounding culture. Sometimes a Roman soldier would appear, or a picture of Caesar with a silly-looking wreath around his head, but the masses were always people dressed in modest robes donning beards and somewhat longer hair. Is it a surprise that when I visualize the Galatians, I also visualize bearded men wearing long robes and looking western European? There was no character of a scantily dressed Roman temptress trying to allure men from the public baths to worship Aphrodite, nor were there any darker-skinned Middle Eastern Orientals teaching in the public square. The presentation was illustrated in such a manner as to make any white American feel as if they were an extension of that culture.

The remark concerning the scantily-dressed Roman temptress is not to suggest that our flannel graphs needed to be "R" rated in order to properly instruct our youth. However, this explains how our misunderstanding began concerning the context of the book of Galatians. This confusion was facilitated by the Gospel stories in the Sunday School classes of our youth. With some caution, recognizing our possible prejudices, let us review a passage.

(NKJV Galatians 4:9-11) But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

From our flannel graph days with those white Americans running around in robes, we know that there was no distinction between the author and those being instructed. The author was Paul, a Jew, who looked very much like an Englishman with a closely cut beard and a bushy hairstyle. The similarity of all flannel graph audiences would subconsciously give us the impression that they must also be Jews who look like Englishmen. Our church did not teach the book of Galatians in the younger classes. The flannel graph groups only reviewed Old Testament stories and the Gospel account. One had to be a teen before Galatians was taught, but our understanding was built upon the previous 10 years of flannel graph instruction lodged subconsciously in our memory.

We were told that the Galatians were returning to the *Jewish practices*¹ of their old

¹ The term Jewish is most commonly used to describe these festivals, yet they are not given only to the Jews. These are biblical festivals listed in the Christian Bible and are not designated as Jewish anywhere in Scripture.

religion including keeping the Sabbath and other *Jewish festivals*. This seems logical with the reading; and for most people, there is no reason to question this interpretation. Our early flannel graph instruction left us with the impression that both people groups looked the same. The location of the Galatians and their heritage were of no consequence in our discussions.

As a long accepted interpretation of these verses, it is obvious to the readers that Paul would fear for our souls if we returned to keeping the Sabbath, New moon celebrations, or any of the *Jewish festivals*. But, what was Paul really stating? Were these Galatians Jews who had recognized Messiah, or were they an ex-pagan population that heard the Gospel message preached by Paul and transformed from their pagan heritage turning to YHWH the God of Israel by accepting Yehoshua, (Jesus) the Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures?

Notice Galatians 4:10 says, “You observe days and months and seasons and years,” not *you observe Sabbaths, new moons, and festivals*. Changing of terms is filling in the context. The teacher supposes that the earlier phrase is synonymous with the later. There are some similarities since the Sabbath is a “day,” the new moons are the beginning of the Hebrew “month,” and festivals fall during “year” changes and “season” cycles. However, all the pagan festivals follow a close correlation with the same phrase in Galatians. If we are to reject days in general, is not Sunday a day? If festivals are innately evil, is not Easter a festival? It will take more study to determine if this is a warning against the Festivals and Sabbaths given by God in the Hebrew writings.

My early understanding of these passages was reasonable considering the information, age and the visual presentation which had preceded in my training. From these verses it was learned not to observe the Sabbath or have anything to do with the Jewish feasts like Passover. God had shown us a better way with Sunday worship and communion. End of explanation!

In reviewing this teaching, it is necessary to ask one poignant question. Does the wording of this verse actually support the standard teaching? We must review this *primary* form of context to see if it supports such an interpretation. Let us begin with the previous verse.

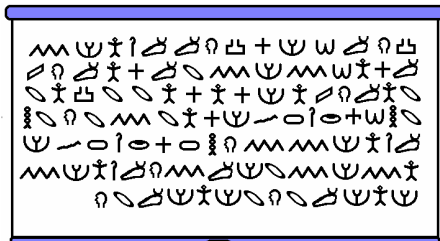
Galatians 4:8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

The Galatians, we are told, historically did not know God. They served those who by nature were not gods. This verse lets us know that they did not know the specific God YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, yet they served those whom nature should have revealed were not gods at all. Notice that *gods* is plural and not capitalized.² This second phrase is a reference to idolatry the pagan practices of the polytheistic Greco-Roman culture surrounding and dominating the Jewish state. Due to our early teaching, we have not been given enough information to distinguish between the path given by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the idolatrous practices of the Roman culture. To us, both are strange and therefore possibly the subject of Paul’s warning.

² The distinction of using a capital “G” to denote YHWH while using a little “g” to refer to all other gods is not a part of Greek language. All the letters were capital in the earliest Greek manuscripts. I refer to the translator’s differentiation as expressed by the use of capital letters

Few reading this article grew up in a totally **pagan** culture, so it is difficult to get this point across. However, we all should recognize that when a missionary goes into the African jungle to present the gospel, everything the missionary says is strange to that culture. Being strange is not the sole identifier as to what is sinful. The reverse is also true. Being familiar is not the sole identifier as to what is righteous. The Galatians were returning to familiar practices with which they had grown up. Paul is letting them know that their returning to familiar practices was of great concern and was not righteous. My question to each one of us is, “Do we believe we are following a righteous path because it is what we grew up doing and are familiar with it, or do we know that it is righteous because our God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob commanded us to do what we do?”

While presenting a series of talks on Genesis, I once told a congregation of a peculiar individual I had come across in their town. He was a man with a long unkempt beard and hair extending beyond his shoulders. He did not wear the typical western-style pants and shirt, rather he wore a long white robe which looked frayed at the bottom and needed the attention of a cleaner. I was going into a restaurant to have breakfast and was stopped by this character. He wished to present a document that he was distributing to whomever would listen and to give me a lecture on his god. He handed me the document and continued to talk of the virtues of his religion and the god he followed.



I then placed on an overhead projector a portion of the writing this man had given me and asked the congregation if I should pay any attention to him or follow the teachings from his book. There was a unanimous reply that I should not listen to him or follow the teachings of his book. I then explained that his book was the Bible and the strange writing was the first few verses of Genesis written in the Hebrew of about 1700 BC.

I must admit that my first reaction would be to join them in a caution against following such characters. However, I should critique content and must not judge based on familiarity. The text looked strange, and so did the peddler of the text. To me his appearance seemed like an eastern religion guru. I associate this eastern dress with Hinduism or other mystical type religions. I am just familiar enough to make a mistaken judgment. If one was familiar with the origins of Christianity, he would have recognized that this character was wearing 17th century BC dress and was handing out the Hebrew Scriptures as they were originally written.

This story demonstrates how we can read the above mentioned verses in Galatians. We are familiar and comfortable with our practice, but unfamiliar with pagan and Biblical feasts and consider them both strange and incorrect for study and participation. The nationality and the culture of the recipients is now very important. Was Paul writing to Jewish believers who could **return** to keeping the Biblical feasts and Sabbaths? Remember the previous passage says that they “knew not God.” Who were the Galatians,-- were they Jews? Did their heritage include the

biblical festivals, or did they participate in pagan festivals that differed greatly from the biblical festivals?

Paul is considered the apostle to the Gentiles. In other words, he went to groups of people other than Jews. However, when we interpret this passage concerning Galatians, we mix in the teaching that they were Jews as well as Gentiles. The previous verse indicates they were pagans and we insert that they were returning to Jewish practices. How can one return to a practice that was not a part of his heritage? Gentiles did not keep the Biblical feasts, only Jews. The Jews served the right God, YHWH, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Only the pagans served idols and many gods. It is important to distinguish who these Galatians were and to which practices they were returning.

Unfortunately we find a flurry of confusion when attempting to find out who these Galatians were. Are they a distinct race or people group called the Galatians, as the Egyptians were? Are they from a town called Galati like the Philippians were from a town called Philippi? Could they be from a particular country or district of the Roman Empire and bear the name of that area? Few of these questions have been conclusively answered. Most scholars realize they are improvising when they explain anything about the Galatians.

There is great speculation about most of these questions. For example, some believe that these people lived in a section of modern-day Turkey. Others believe they lived in a large district of the Roman Empire called Galatia. One commentator suggested that they are Jews from a town called Galati. This enabled him to justify the additional references to the law intermingled with statements about worshipping gods. However, no such town has appeared in any literature or archeology project.³ This suggestion fabricates a group of *pagan Jews* returning to festivals they would not have been keeping since they were pagan. Considering such, this view has not been prevalent among scholars, but for some reason permeates the Christian lay community. Might these Galatians be the French? The French are known today as the Gauls. Gaul may be spelled differently, but the pronunciation lends to such a connection. How does this compare to scholarly opinions?

It is interesting that almost all scholars are agreed about one particular point concerning these people called the Galatians. Most accept the fact that they are Gauls. One explanation is they are *Gauls* who became mercenaries at the invitation of Nikomedes, king of Bithynia, to fight for a section of Asia Minor known today as Turkey. It is also suggested that they are *Gauls* who settled together in a province known as Galatia much, like the Germans did in America creating a people group known as the Pennsylvania Dutch. Galatia was in the area of modern-day Northern Italy, Western Germany, Southern Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland and France. We can say they most likely were *Gauls*, but who are the Gauls?

The Galatians are not limited to national France, but evidence points to a common ancestry with modern France. In fact, they extend much beyond the French border. Most history books give an additional name for the Gauls. They are called Celts, who migrated throughout Europe, concentrating in France, and spreading into the British Isles. This is where the term

³ The absence of information is never proof of anything. I do not use this line as a proof, rather a statement of fact as presently known.

Gallic originates. It means *pertaining to the Gauls*. Today's French were originally Celts who settled in the area and took on the language of the Empire. The language of the Roman Empire became Latin, and those in France learned a Romantic language which has developed into modern day French. However, it is a close sister to Spanish and modern Italian, all deriving from the same ancestor, Old Latin. The language similarity plays no significance in ancestry. The Spanish and Italians are not relatives of the French, however the language is related. The Gauls are the ancestors of the French, the Irish and Scots. The language of the Scots is referred to as Gaelic, meaning the language of the Gauls.

We have not conclusively discovered the location of the people group addressed by Paul; but we do know their ancestry. From this information, we will piece together a fascinating puzzle which will not only reveal the need for "Context of Situation," but will resolve the seeming conflict in these previously discussed passages of Galatians. Ancient American history may be helpful in our quest. Bible context can be found in seemingly unrelated topics, and often is fun and exciting to uncover. Please read this chapter before you complete the article. Press the link below to access the article:

["In Plain Sight" by Gloria Farley, chapter four *The Anubis Caves: Discovery and Development*.](#)

Ms. Farley has been on several interesting adventures to discover the meaning of these caves. Notice how she brought experts to the site in order to expose the true meaning of the petroglyphs in the cave? The rancher who wished to show Ms. Farley the buffalo drawing with his ribs showing arrived at his assumption based on what he had been taught in school concerning the history of the region. However, her slow, methodical and scholarly way of finding the truth has rewarded her with an incredible finding. These drawings were made by the same ethnic group as that of the biblical Galatians. They exposed the historical practice of that group. Unredeemed Galatians (Celts) participated in days-- Samhain or Safrain, Seasons-- equinoxes and solstices, and other feasts and festivals that better match the description of "days, months, seasons and years." The history of the Celts included the druid religion with their Satanic-like rituals. This additional information makes sense out of Galatians 4:9 when coupled with the previous verses. They worshiped, "those which by nature are not gods." No wonder Paul feared for them. They were returning to Satanic practices.

This cave in simple terms was a religious calendar for days of worship. However in biblical terms it was a cave designed to reveal *days, seasons and years* to an unrepentant Galatian. It was created to properly detect religious holidays by a Celtic astronomer/priest probably within a hundred years of when Paul wrote his discourse to the Galatians. This is a clear piece of context to the Galatian passage. It is revealing the worship customs practiced by this group of people prior to their conversion to Christianity. Remember, not all Gauls became Christian. Many continued their practice for centuries after Paul addressed his particular group of Gauls. Most of the Gauls eventually became Christian by the middle of the second millennium AD and the Druid religion became virtually extinct.

The practice of the denomination I grew up in, taught these verses forbade participation in the Sabbath and other biblical feast. A college associated with the denomination had a yearly Halloween party complete with characters dressed in ghoulish outfits. They also had a fair to

raise money for that college which they associated with “May Day,” another ancient pagan festival. One year they even had some kind of May pole ceremony. However, they were most likely ignorant of the origin of the May pole. For some reason, the spiritual guides of this denomination did not speak a word about the pagan associations with either of these practices. However, they did say plenty, when someone suggested that the feasts and Sabbaths of God were valid for the modern believer.

I do not wish to malign my brothers from the congregations of my youth. They were not practicing pagans. Their intent was not pagan. The historical meaning of Halloween and May Day had been lost to them and those festivals had taken on new meanings not associated with their origin. However, the practices of this denomination were those that Paul had warned us to avoid, not those that were given in the Bible as the commanded festivals of YHWH. As the context to these verses become more universally known, continued participation may actually develop into rebellion against God. We become in the spirit what we act out in the flesh. For this reason, Paul was sharply warning the Galatians against returning to their old practices.

Our misinterpretation of Scripture is facilitated by the erroneous context imposed by well meaning people. We need sufficient information to make correct conclusions. As additional information is revealed we must be willing to scrutinize previously-held positions. We again gain understanding as to why we should participate in the festivals that God has given us in Scripture. These festivals were not merely commanded in the “Old Testament,” rather there are many Brit Chadasha (New Testament) passages that also encourage us to participate in them. Would you reconsider the entire Scripture?

(Bold colored print is added for emphasis)

Sabbath

Exodus 31:16-17 refers to the weekly Sabbath as a **perpetual** covenant saying it is a sign **forever**.

NKJV Exodus 31:16 'Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations *as a* **perpetual** covenant.**17** 'It *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel **forever**; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' "

Day of Atonement

Leviticus 16:31 discusses the day of Atonement calling it a statute **forever**.

NKJV Leviticus 16:31 "It *is* a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. *It is* a statute **forever**.

Firstfruits

Leviticus 23:14 mentions a festival referred to as Firstfruits in the New Testament and calls it a statute **forever**.

Leviticus 23:14 'You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; *it shall be* a statute **forever** throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Incidentally, Firstfruits is the festival on which Yehoshua (Jesus) rose from the dead. This is commemorated as Easter in most churches however the calculation for the date is somewhat disassociated from the modern Jewish calendar. Both the Christian and Jewish calendars have changed since the time of Christ. A Jewish scholar, Hillel 2 (2nd half of the 4th century), abolished the proclamation of a new month by the first sight of the crescent moon, the biblical indicator for the beginning of the month and in turn standardized a calendar based on a series of complicated calculations which may shift the month off the lunar cycle one or two days. It also has potential of shifting the first month off one month from the harvest of barley, the biblical indicator for the beginning of the year. The Christian calendar did much the same by using the vernal equinox as an indicator for spring thus declaring the first month in relation to the change of that season. The biblical calendar was not related to the seasons or difficult astrological calculations, rather it was based on the crops ripening and the sight of the first crescent. The Galatian passage may also be referencing the use of astrological calculations as a means for determining a calendar.

Shavuot (Pentecost)

Leviticus 23:21 discusses Shavuot (Pentecost) and calls it a statute **forever**.

Leviticus 23:21 'And you shall proclaim on the same day *that* it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work *on it*. *It shall be* a **statute forever** in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles)

Leviticus 23:41 discusses Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles) and calls it a statute **forever**.

Leviticus 23:41 'You shall keep it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. *It shall be* a statute **forever** in your generations. You shall celebrate it in the seventh month.

Every festival, with the exception of the day of trumpets, is listed as a statute forever. It would be presumptuous to think that Paul had the authority to suspend an eternal command of God. Paul's statements in the Bible cannot be taken out of the context of pre-existing Scripture. It is reasonable to consider both *period evidence* and *Scriptural context* in Paul's references to observing, "days and months and seasons and years."

Frank Houtz

For further evidence that the New Testament encourages the keeping of the feasts of God, the booklet *Episunagoge* by the same author is available on this web site. It is a single chapter from the book *A Sign Between You and Me*, which deals with the festivals and the Sabbath and also is available in our market place.

