

## **Who Were Paul's Opponents in Galatia?**

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### **Why Is the Identity of Paul's Opponents an Issue?**

Paul's opponents in Galatia are central to the argument of Galatians because the epistle is essentially a response to their threat to the churches of Galatia. Therefore it is not surprising to see that the opponents are mentioned in every chapter (1:6-9; 2:4-5; 3:1; 4:17; 5:10, 12; 6:12-13). Conservative scholars have historically assumed that these foes were Judaizers and have interpreted the text in that light. However, in the last 70 years a persistent critique now gaining widespread acceptance says that the Judaizer identity is totally inadequate in explaining crucial verses like Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brethren, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

While Paul was apparently addressing some sort of Judaistic aberration in Galatians 3-4, these critics argue, he was also overtly attacking an antinomian aberration in Galatians 5-6, and the Judaistic identity cannot encompass this additional aberration. Therefore an increasing number of New Testament scholars are advocating a different identity for Paul's opponents in Galatia. Evangelicals should not blithely continue to assume the correctness of the Judaizer identity. They must see if their assumptions need revision and if this will aid in understanding the latter part of Galatians.

### **The Three Major Views of the Opponents' Identity**

Three major views of Paul's opponents in Galatia encompass numerous minor views. The traditional view is that the opponents were "Judaizers" pressuring Gentiles to live as if they were Jews.

The *two-opponent* view holds that both Judaizers and libertinistic "pneumatics" plagued Paul in Galatia. The *Gnostic/syncretistic* Jewish Christians view is that there was one group of opponents with both Judaistic and libertinistic traits in some of the peripheral groups within Judaism and Asia Minor.

#### THE TRADITIONAL VIEW: JUDAIZERS

Since the second-century Marcionite *Prologues to Galatians* (preserved only in Latin translations), it has been inferred that Paul's opponents were overzealous Jewish Christians from Jerusalem. They advocated in Galatia the traditional Jewish proselyte model by requiring Gentile Christians to attach themselves to ethnic Israel. This identification was carefully confirmed by John Calvin<sup>1</sup> and more casually assumed by Martin Luther.<sup>2</sup> Since Calvin's and Luther's day the majority of Protestant scholars have identified Paul's opponents in some way with the Jewish Christians from Jerusalem.

This identity was solidified in the 19th century by F. C. Baur of the Tübingen School, who made these opponents a decisive interpretive key to all Paul's writings. Baur's reconstruction of the history of the early church does not so much pit Paul against the Jerusalem apostles, as is popularly understood, but against the party of Jewish Christians identified with James and the Jerusalem church.<sup>3</sup> These Judaizers had an Ebionite tendency and had not broken out of the limits of Judaism in their understanding of Christianity and the sufficiency of Christ's ministry.<sup>4</sup> To Baur, the Epistle to the Galatians was a microcosm of the massive struggle between Pauline and Jewish Christianity. So while Baur never wrote a commentary on Galatians, his central and emphatic identification of Paul's opponents in Galatia became the almost unquestioned standard, even to those who opposed major portions of Baur's reconstruction of early events. Schmithals summarized the situation, saying,

There are few problems in the realm of New Testament introduction in which the scholars of all eras are so unanimously and indisputably of one mind as here.

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries 11, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (1556; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), pp. 4-7.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, trans. Erasmus Middleton, ed. John P. Fallows (London: Harrison Trust, 1850; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1979), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ferdinand C. Baur, *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben*, ed. K. Scholder (reprint, Stuttgart: Frommann, 1963), 1:49.

<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand C. Baur, *Paul, His Life and Works*, trans. E. Zeller, 2 vols. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1875), 1:113, 129-30.

The heretics in Galatia are Judaizers, that is, Christians who demand the observance of the Jewish law on a greater or lesser scale, but in any case including circumcision: thus they are Christians in whose opinion membership in the eschatological community of the Messiah who has appeared in Jesus depends upon membership in the national cultic union, constituted through the rite of circumcision, of the ancient people of the covenant. This thesis is the presupposition of the exegesis of the Galatian epistle in the commentaries, not its conclusion; and it can be such a presupposition because no one would deny it.<sup>5</sup>

Schmithals himself denies the traditional identity of Paul's opponents, holding, instead, that they were Gnostics. Before Schmithals wrote in the 1970s and 80s, the status of the Judaizers identity was generally unquestioned. Ironically some recent New Testament introductions have assumed some form of his position.<sup>6</sup>

Viewing Paul's Galatian opponents as Judaizers seems supported by strong internal evidence. Those who "distort the gospel" in the churches seem to have come from the outside (1:7) and they confused the churches (1:7; 5:10, 12). They seem to have been Christians, since they were offering "a different gospel" (1:6) and desired to avoid persecution from the Jewish community (6:12). Paul's focus on Jerusalem and Judea in Galatians 1–2 and 4:21–31 seems to point to the opponents' origin from this area, though this is not held as firmly as other aspects of their identity. Their Jewish roots seem unassailable given their emphasis on circumcision (5:2; 6:12–13), observance of the Mosaic Law (3:2; 5:4) and certain festivals (4:10), and apparent interest in being "sons of Abraham" (3:6–29; 4:21–31). With its straightforward reading of Galatians and its correlation with Acts 15, many scholars continue to espouse this traditional view in standard New Testament introductions,<sup>7</sup> technical monographs,<sup>8</sup> recent commentaries on Galatians,<sup>9</sup> and recent journal articles.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Walter Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Helmut Koester *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2: *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 118–19.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Werner Georg Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, rev. Eng. ed., trans. Howard Clark Kee (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), pp. 298–301.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., George Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia*, Society for New Testament Monograph Series 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 1–19.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., Ronald Y. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), pp. 13–19.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., J. Louis Martyn, "A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 (1985): 307–24, and John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1988): 73–93.

Worthy of inclusion under this major view is the position argued by Johannes Munck.<sup>11</sup> While he was reacting against Baur's bifurcation of the early church into competing Pauline and Jewish segments, Munck nonetheless saw Paul's Galatian opponents as Judaizers. The uniqueness of his view is that he saw these Judaizers as Gentile Christians from within Galatia).<sup>12</sup> They had only recently been circumcised, according to Galatians 6:13, in which Paul used the present participle of οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι to describe them.<sup>13</sup> While Munck perceived himself to be opposite Baur with this particular view, his identifying of Paul's opponents does not lead to any substantial difference from Baur's in interpreting the epistle as a whole. The same can be said of the similar position of A. E. Harvey,<sup>14</sup> who identifies Paul's opponents as "not Jews by birth, but Gentiles who have only recently become Jewish proselytes, or who are still contemplating doing so."<sup>15</sup> The uniqueness of Harvey's view is that he argues that these proselytes were pressuring fellow Christians to avoid persecution from the synagogue by adopting Jewish practices, not Jewish theology. Harvey reasons that this is so because of the Jewish emphasis on strict adherence to Jewish practices, rather than to Jewish orthodoxy.<sup>16</sup> Paul's tactic was to show the theological consequences of embracing Jewish practices (Gal. 6:12-13).

#### THE TWO-OPPONENT VIEW: JUDAIZERS AND ANTINOMIANS

In reaction to Baur's dominant reconstruction of the early church, Lutgert<sup>17</sup> opposed the one opponent/Judaizers view by arguing for the additional resistance of a second group in Galatia. While conceding the existence of the Judaizers, Lutgert was convinced that an even more threatening group was the primary focus of Paul's attack in Galatians. Like Luther before him,<sup>18</sup> though seeing them more as an organized party, Lutgert identified this second group of Christians as the antinomians who "*die Freiheit zum Antrieb für das Fleisch*

<sup>11</sup> Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1959), pp. 87-134.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>14</sup> A. E. Harvey, "The Opposition to Paul," *Studio Evangelica* 4 (1968): 319-32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 327-29.

<sup>17</sup> Wilhelm Lutgert, *Gesetz and Geist: Eine Untersuchung zur Vorgeschichte des Galaterbriefes. Beiträge zur Forderung christlicher Theologie*, vol. 22, book 6 (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1919).

<sup>18</sup> Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, pp. 325-29.

*gebrauchen*."<sup>19</sup> The thread that holds Galatians together as Paul addressed this two-front battle is the subject of the Law.<sup>20</sup> Paul's arguments with both the Judaizers and the antinomians involve the Law and its relationship to the Christian life. Therefore, Lutgert argued, Paul vacillated between addressing these two groups as he wrote Galatians. For example while Galatians 3-4 is primarily concerned with the Judaizers, Paul's focus on them ends at 5:6 and he began to address the antinomians' abuses of the Law in 5:7.<sup>21</sup> The majority of Galatians 5-6 is no longer seen as Paul's defensive limitation of the boundaries of freedom in light of possible Judaizers' criticism, but rather as a much more aggressive and overt attack on the antinomians' real abuses.<sup>22</sup>

Lutgert's views were not broadly disseminated until Ropes championed them in a small monograph in 1929.<sup>23</sup> Ropes made only minor adjustments to Lutgert's thesis and sought to demonstrate it by briefly but systematically going through Galatians chapter by chapter. Interestingly enough, he perceived the break from the lengthy Judaizers' discussion of Galatians 3-4 to be at 5:10, not 5:6 as Lutgert had argued. Ropes suggests that Paul began the practical section with 5:11. "The transition to the next topic is an important one, sharper than any other transition in the epistle. Our theory requires the break to be made after verse 10, not after verse 12."<sup>24</sup> As Douglas Fletcher has wryly noted, "For such a sharp division, it does not seem that it would be necessary to rely upon one's presuppositions to discern it."<sup>25</sup> Weaknesses like this have hindered acceptance of Lutgert's and Ropes's two-opponent view. Nevertheless their emphasis on the presence of libertinistic "pneumatici" or "spiritual persons"<sup>26</sup> helped shape the next reaction to the traditional view.

#### THE Gnostic/SYNCRETISTIC JEWISH CHRISTIAN VIEW

Though the identification of Gnostics as Paul's opponents in Galatia tends to be associated with Walter Schmithals, other scholars

<sup>19</sup> Lutgert, *Gesetz und Geist*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-19.

<sup>23</sup> James H. Ropes, *The Singular Problem of the Epistle to the Galatians*, Harvard Theological Studies 14 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>25</sup> Douglas K. Fletcher, *The Singular Argument of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1982), p. 42.

<sup>26</sup> Ropes, *The Singular Problem of the Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 10.

had previously written of a Gnostic presence in Galatia.<sup>27</sup> However, it is Schmithals who firmly ties Paul's ministry to the combating of some form of first-century Gnosticism.<sup>28</sup> Schmithals follows the Corinthian/Galatian epistles' order of Lutgert's study and his identification of Gnostics in both communities. Like Lutgert, Schmithals considers that "the picture of the Galatians heresy is to be filled out in details from the Corinthian epistles."<sup>29</sup> While building on Lutgert's and Ropes's identification of libertine pneumatic in Galatia, Schmithals (and others after him) significantly deviates from that theory by positing a single battlefront in Galatia. The questionable audience theory of the two-opponent view is rightly criticized and rejected as unsatisfactory.<sup>30</sup> In its place is offered a single group of opponents who manifest both sets of characteristics previously attached to the Judaizers and antinomian pneumatics.

Rather than refuting the traditional view of Judaizers in Galatia, Schmithals's strategy is to develop a coherent picture of Gnostics in Galatia and demonstrate how this best explains the details in Galatians. To do this, however, involves some question-begging on his part. For example in the traditional view Galatians 3-4 is seen as the heart of the argumentation against the Judaizers. Rather than contesting the particulars of the Judaizer interpretation of this section, however, Schmithals virtually ignores it and alleges that Paul did not really understand his Gnostic opponents or he would not have argued in this manner.<sup>31</sup> Others who adhere to this Gnostic identification find that they too must assert that their knowledge of the Galatian opponents exceeds Paul's because in Galatians 3-4 he argued about the Law "in such a way as he might have done if his opponents had been Pharisaic Judaists, which they obviously were not."<sup>32</sup> It is possible that a critic's knowledge can exceed an author's

<sup>27</sup> As noted by Bernard H. Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 65 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1982), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Schmithals, *Paul and James*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton, Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 46 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1965), pp. 103-17; idem, *Paul and the Gnostics*, pp. 13-64; and idem, "Judaisten in Galatien?" *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 74 (1983): 27-58.

<sup>29</sup> Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, p. 59, n. 134.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Willi Marxsen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. G. Buswell (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 53. In fairness to Marxsen, it should be noted that he changed his view in the fourth edition of *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1978), pp. 56-71 to one similar to Hans Dieter Betz (to be discussed shortly).

knowledge of the *subject matter*, but this is not to be confused with the critic's thinking that his knowledge of the author's *meaning* is superior.<sup>33</sup> Schmithals and some who have followed him seem to lapse into this hermeneutical error at times.

Before looking at support for this view of Paul's opponents, the closely related identity of syncretistic Jewish Christians should be discussed. This view came into particular prominence through the writing of Frederic R. Crownfield.<sup>34</sup> He identified Paul's Galatian opponents as a group that combined Christianity with a mystical understanding of following Torah and Jewish legal practices.<sup>35</sup> The "Judaizers" and "spirituals" were actually the same group. The leaders of this group are theorized to have been early converts to Christianity, and although not followers of the earthly Jesus, were nonetheless connected with Jerusalem. Crownfield conjectured that they were adherents of Jewish mystery cults seeking spiritual illumination through legalism. As he built on Lutgert's thesis to develop his view, Schmithals also built on Crownfield's work and specified it to Gnostic groups. Both writers tended to correlate the Colossian errorists with those of Galatia who combined some Jewish rites with laxity in morals.<sup>36</sup> A similar view is held by Heinrich Schlier in his commentary on Galatians.<sup>37</sup> He embraces an identity for the opponents that explains their nomism coupled with their libertine tendencies as an early stage of Gnosticism demonstrating a sort of Jewish apocalypticism similar to that found at Qumran.<sup>38</sup> This is not far from the view of Brinsmead, who sees Paul's opponents as possessing an Essene theology and ethics that espoused a "nomistic enthusiasm."<sup>39</sup> Brinsmead's elaborate picture of the Galatian intruders has been devastatingly criticized by several scholars.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>33</sup> See Edwin D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 19-23.

<sup>34</sup> Frederic R. Crownfield, "The Singular Problem of the Dual Galatians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1945): 491-500.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 492-93.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 493, and Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, pp. 44-46.

<sup>37</sup> Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 5th ed., *Kritischexegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* 7 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1971).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 21-24.

<sup>39</sup> Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents*, pp. 164-78.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., David E. Aune, "Review of Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46 (1984): 145-47; E. A. Russell, "Convincing or Merely Curious? A Look at Some Recent Writing on Galatians," *Irish Biblical Studies* 6 (1984): 156-76; and Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," pp. 81-83.

Following this trajectory is Dieter Georgi, who sees the troublers of the Galatian churches as pneumatics using Christian elements as the ultimate completion of a Jewish syncretism previously enriched with Gentile motives.<sup>41</sup> Against Schmithals, who sees Paul's opponents as Jews who were never baptized,<sup>42</sup> Georgi views these false brethren as a faction within the Jerusalem church pressing for the circumcision of Gentile Christians. This faction viewed the Law as a source of speculative wisdom, not simply for the Jews, but as the norm for the universe. However, their goal was the attainment of pneumatic completion through individualistic and ascetic religious experiences.<sup>43</sup> Wegenast holds a view similar to that of Georgi and underscores the importance of circumcision and the Law to these opponents.<sup>44</sup> This represents a basic following of the general thesis of Crownfield in this area against Schmithals, while still working within the general Gnostic identity championed by the latter.

Both the Gnostic and the syncretistic Jewish Christian identifications consider that Paul was primarily addressing the sarkic conduct of his opponents and that this libertine lifestyle, not the legalistic theology, was the basic threat facing the Galatians.<sup>45</sup> Following Lutgert, Schmithals focuses on passages like Galatians 4:9 and 5:1 that seem to point to this threat. However, of particular importance are these verses.

"And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law" (5:3).

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (5:13).

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh" (5:16).

"For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh" (6:13).

Following Schmithals's basic identification Betz asserts that the fundamental problem facing the churches of Galatia was the conflict of the Spirit and the flesh. He proposes that the churches were wrestling with how being *ἐν πνεύματι* conflicted with life's daily realities: "How can the *πνευματικός* coexist with 'trespasses'

<sup>41</sup> Dieter Georgi, *Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem*, Theologische Forschung, vol. 38 (Hamburg: Evangelischer Verlag, 1965), p. 35.

<sup>42</sup> Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Georgi, *Die Geschichte der Kollekte des Paulus für Jerusalem*, p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> Klaus Wegenast, *Der Verstandnis der Tradition bei Paulus und in den Deuteropaulinen*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, no. 8 (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962), p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> E.g., Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, pp. 51-55.

in his daily life?"<sup>46</sup> Paul's opponents were answering this question with the security that Torah offered. By accepting Torah and circumcision, the Galatians would then become partakers of the safety offered by the Sinai Covenant.<sup>47</sup> One can see with this reconstruction and emphasis that Galatians 5-6 becomes the specific recommendation that Paul made to the Galatians. The focal point of Galatians in Galatians 3-4, associated with the traditional view of Judaizing opponents, has shifted to a focal point in Galatians 5-6 in this third major view. Methodologically the procedure is to seek to wrap the remainder of Galatians around the primary core in chapters 5-6. While Betz essentially subscribes to this third view (though not emphasizing the opponents' identity in his exposition), his masterful literary analysis of Galatians locates the body of the epistle in chapters 3-4.<sup>48</sup> This runs contrary to his belief that chapters 5-6 have real force for the Galatians' problems. The mere polemic against accepting circumcision and Law in 2:15-5:12 "does not do justice to the Galatian trouble."<sup>49</sup> However, the force of Betz's identification of the problem in Galatia is offset by the weight of his literary analysis, as Fletcher has noted.<sup>50</sup> A similar problem is shared by Schlier. He accepts a conservative version of the Gnostic identity, but interprets Galatians as if Paul were addressing Judaizers.<sup>51</sup>

### Solving the Identity Crisis

The goal in identifying Paul's opponents in Galatia is to account for all the particulars of the epistle in the most comprehensive way. In seeking to do this, Barclay has delineated three major problems in this kind of "mirror-reading": (1) Paul did not directly address his opponents but talked to the Galatians about the opponents. (2) Galatians is a fierce polemic and the intense rhetoric may tend to distort the opponents' actual positions. (3) Readers encounter the linguistic distortion of hearing only one partner in the conversation.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermenia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 154.

<sup>47</sup> First set forth in Hans Dieter Betz, "2 Cor. 6:14-7:1: An Anti-Pauline Fragment?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 88-108, and in idem, "Spirit, Freedom, and Law: Paul's Message to the Galatian Churches," *Svensk exegetisk arsbok* 39 (1974): 154-55.

<sup>48</sup> Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, pp. 14-25.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>50</sup> Fletcher, *The Singular Argument of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, pp. 82-83.

<sup>51</sup> Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, pp. 20-24.

<sup>52</sup> Barclay, "Mirror Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," pp. 74-79.

Barclay goes on to describe four dangerous pitfalls in recent attempts to mirror-read Galatians. (1) The danger of *undue selectivity* (deciding which of Paul's statements are particularly revealing about the opponents' message). (2) The danger of *overinterpretation* (imagining that every statement of Paul rebuts an equally vigorous opponents' counterstatement). (3) The danger of *mishandling polemics* (making more out of Paul's attacks than is warranted with polemical language). (4) The danger of *latching onto particular words and phrases* (using these brief bits of data as the flimsy pegs on which the whole thesis should hang).<sup>53</sup>

Keeping in mind the seven methodological criteria that Barclay suggests,<sup>54</sup> this writer will attempt to weigh the particulars of Galatians and to sift through the three major views.

In agreement with the first and third views, it seems that the problems raised by Paul's opponents are of a unitary nature. Gordon's observation is on target when he states:

An examination of the variety of connecting terms and particles reveals that Galatians is, essentially, a single argument. We do not find in this epistle indicators of a shift in topic such as we find in First Corinthians. One does not have to agree with every dimension of Betz' argument to recognize the validity of his claim of unified rhetoric. At least by literary canons, Galatians is not a series of arguments about different matters but a series of sub-arguments about essentially one matter (which itself may, of course, have many ramifications).<sup>55</sup>

In lieu of in-depth analysis, two significant structural observations will suffice at this point. The first is the bracketing of the epistle to the Galatians with the prescript (1:1-5) and the postscript (6:11-18). Bullinger noticed the similarity between 1:1-5 and 6:17-18 and labeled it "complex correspondence of repeated alteration."<sup>56</sup> Betz calls it "the epistolary framework" and notes that "it appears almost as a kind of external bracket for the body of the letter."<sup>57</sup> Betz observes the structural ramifications of this bracketing effect when he comments on the nature of the prescript (1:1-5): "It is also interesting that at several points there are interrelations between the preface and the body of the letter. It is at these points that the theological tendencies and the purpose of the letter can be ob-

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 84-86.

<sup>55</sup> David T. Gordon, "The Problem at Galatia," *Interpretation* 41 (1987): 33-34.

<sup>56</sup> E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible Explained and Illustrated* (London: Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 388.

<sup>57</sup> Hans D. Betz, "The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1975): 355.

served."<sup>58</sup> He notes that the postscript (6:11-18) serves a similar purpose: "It contains the interpretive clues to the understanding of Paul's major concerns in the letter as a whole and should be employed as the hermeneutical key to the intentions of the Apostle."<sup>59</sup>

Given the significance of these beginning and ending paragraphs for determining the purpose of Galatians and Paul's intentions, noting their three common topics should prove insightful.

First, the issue of Paul's threatened apostolic authority occurs in both passages. He used several Greek prepositions in describing his apostleship in 1:1: Παῦλος ἀπόστολος, οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρός. Such a definitive description of his apostleship is unique among the salutations of the traditional 13-epistle Pauline corpus. Paul ended on an even more picturesque note of his authoritative identity in 6:17, in which he flatly stated that he bore in his body the **στίγματα του Ἰησοῦ**. He began and ended Galatians with unique claims of association with both the Person and ministry of Jesus.

Second, the fatherhood of God is emphasized in both the prescript and postscript of Galatians. Again among the salutations of the Pauline corpus this emphasis is unique in that **θεοῦ πατρός (ἡμῶν)** is mentioned three times. In the salutations of 11 of the epistles God's fatherhood is mentioned only once, and 2 Thessalonians has two occurrences (1:1-2). But Galatians is unusual with its three-fold repetition within the opening verses (1:1, 3-4).

Apparently the underscoring of God's fatherhood over the Galatian ἀδελφοί (v. 2) weighed heavily in Paul's thoughts as he began this epistle. If the Galatians questioned Paul's apostolic status, and therefore his gospel, then they probably questioned if Paul's gospel really did bring them into the family of God. It seems that Paul began to provide reassurance of God's paternity from the very beginning of this epistle. It is from **θεοῦ πατρός ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ** that "grace and peace" come, in Paul's typical salutation (v. 3). In 6:16 the conditional blessing of "peace and mercy" is on those who walk by the rule (**τῷ κανόνι**) that Paul just explained in 6:14-15. It is also these who are appositively called **τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ**. They deserve this term denoting God's chosen people. He is their Father.

Third, *deliverance from the present evil age* (**αἰῶνος**) is associated with the death of Jesus Christ and promised to His people in both the prescript and postscript. In 1:4 Christ's giving of Himself was for the purpose (**ὅπως** as a conjunction with the subjunctive) of delivering people from the present aeon. In 6:14-15 Paul associated

<sup>58</sup> Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, p. 39.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 313.

deliverance from the *κόσμος* with the cross of Christ and having a new life (6:12-13). Apparently Paul's opponents offered an alternative means of deliverance from the tug of the aeon or cosmos. That means was apparently connected to being identified with Israel by means of circumcision. In contrast the deliverance Paul preached identified the Galatians primarily with the death of Christ that created a new creation. As both Martyn<sup>60</sup> and Brinsmead<sup>61</sup> have observed, bracketing the epistle with this apocalyptic language gives the epistle an apocalyptic tone. "Thus the subject of his letter to the Galatians is precisely an apocalypse, the apocalypse of Jesus Christ, and specifically the apocalypse of his cross."<sup>62</sup>

The point of this sketchy picture of prescript and postscript parallelism is that Paul began and concluded his letter by expressing concerns about his threatened apostolic authority, the fatherhood of God, and the deliverance from this present age. If these are reflecting Paul's major concerns in the letter as a whole, then the body of the letter between these brackets must give primary attention to the development of these three points. This in turn should reflect the major questions of the Galatians and should thereby give some indication of the identity of the opponents who raised those questions.

If the first structural clue comes from the bracketing effect of the prescript and postscript that underscores the unity of the problem in Galatia, then the second structural clue flows out of the first and also helps establish the identity of Paul's opponents. This second structural insight is simply that Galatians 3-4 must be considered a significant part of Paul's argument. These two chapters cannot be brushed aside as Schmithals does when he says Paul did not really understand his opponents' theology so that "it is indeed characteristic that this middle section of the Galatian epistle [3:1-5:12], in contrast to all other sections, contains hardly any direct references to the situation in Galatia."<sup>63</sup>

Betz realized that this section was the core of Paul's argument. Galatians 3-4 was the *probatio* that followed the *propositio* of 2:15-21 and preceded the *exhortatio* of 5:1-6:10.<sup>64</sup> Betz had no other alternative in light of the structure of the epistle that emerged from

<sup>60</sup> J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 410-24.

<sup>61</sup> Brinsmead, *Galatians-Dialogical Response to Opponents*, pp. 58-67.

<sup>62</sup> Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," p. 421.

<sup>63</sup> Schmithals, *Paul and the Gnostics*, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup> Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, pp. 16-23.

his rhetorical analysis. Therefore he was left to criticizing the persuasive value of rhetoric itself since "no kind of rational argument can be adequate with regard to the defense Paul must make."<sup>65</sup> Betz's solution is to see the epistle as a "magical letter," since Paul began it with a curse and ended it with a conditional blessing.<sup>66</sup> Since Paul allegedly "does not leave things to be decided by the reasonableness of the Galatians,"<sup>67</sup> then the value of Galatians 3-4 in his argumentation is greatly diminished in Betz's analysis. However, at best, this seems to be a questionable view of chapters 3-4. Is it legitimate to appeal to the genre of a magic letter that is supposedly acting as some "supra-genre" at the real level of the persuasion of the Galatians? Indeed, is this legitimate when Betz himself admits that "no satisfactory investigation of the genre [of magical letter] exists"?<sup>68</sup> Is this not similar to Schmithals's response that final appeal rests with an extratextual entity to which there is no access?

Would not a simpler and more credible conclusion be that Galatians 3-4 is important in Paul's argumentation, since it is the structural middle of his epistle? Even more importantly it contains significant discussions of two of the three bracketing themes: the fatherhood of God and deliverance from the present evil age. The fatherhood of God permeates chapters 3-4 as the metaphoric umbrella of the section that covers the themes of sonship (3:15-29), heirship (4:1-7), and line of blessing (4:21-31). While the deliverance theme receives in-depth treatment in chapters 5-6, it is also a central part of Paul's argument in chapters 3-4 as he discussed possible perfection by the flesh (σαρκὶ ἐπιτελείσθε, 3:3). However, rather than deliverance, such a flesh-strategy will lead to the bondage of slavery in various forms (3:22-23; 4:1-11, 21-31). Without Galatians 3-4 Paul's beginning and ending concerns with the themes of God's fatherhood and deliverance from the present evil age would be dealt death blows. These chapters must be considered as primary data in the identification of Paul's opponents. If that is the case, then Jewett's assertion (following H. J. Holtzmann's) is probably correct "that their mottoes were σπέρμα Ἀβραάμ [3:16] and Ἰερουσαλήμ ἥτις ἐστὶν μήτηρ ἡμῶν [4:26]."<sup>69</sup> Both mottoes represent opposition to Paul's viewpoint about the three bracketing themes of apostolic au-

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Robert Jewett, "Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1971): 200-201.

thority, God's fatherhood, and present deliverance. Both mottoes are discussed by Paul in depth in chapters 3-4.

Some who hold the Gnostic /syncretistic Jewish Christian identity of Paul's opponents may be able to embrace all that has been proposed in reference to the three bracketing themes and the centrality of Galatians 3-4 in Paul's argumentation. However, this writer must part company with those holding the Gnostic/syncretistic view. First, the Gnostic identification is inadequate because it seems highly unlikely and extremely ill-fitting to assume the presence of Gnostics in Galatia.<sup>70</sup> Second, the more generic reason for separating from those who hold this third view is that this writer perceives the theory of the presence of antinomian or libertine elements in Paul's opponents to be fundamentally wrong. Therefore rooting the identity of Paul's opponents and centering the primary issue of Galatians around antinomianism and libertinism is fallacious. If this is true, then both the two-opponent view of Lutgert and Ropes and the third view that flowed out of it must be rejected.

In view of some widespread recent acceptance of the third view, how can it be so readily discarded? The answer is that the Gnostic/syncretistic Jewish Christian view is built on several verses that are all interpreted from the same faulty perspective. In particular, fundamental to this third view is the premise that these opponents of Paul did not want to keep all the Law, but only that part of it that served their purposes—circumcision and sacred days. Hence Paul reminded the Galatian believers of the unity of the Mosaic Law and the obligation to the whole Law if one places himself in submission to any part of it.

"For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them'" (3:10).

"And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law" (5:3).

However, this is where the opponents apparently were caught in a serious conflict, since they did not want to keep the Law because of their basic antinomian and libertine desires.

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (5:13).

<sup>70</sup> R. McL. Wilson, "Gnostics—in Galatia?" *Studia Evangelica* 4 (1968): 358-67, and Jewett, "Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," pp. 199-200. They both point out that the meager information about these late first-century and early second-century syncretists represents a later stage of development in Gnosticism and should not be read back into the mid-first century. Also the later Gnostic interest in circumcision as a symbol of transcendence over the bodily sphere is not comparable to the Judaizers' emphasis of it as an ethnic identifier essential for salvation.

"For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised, that they may boast in your flesh" (6:13).

The evidence *seems* plain. These opponents mixed nomistic theology with antinomistic lifestyles. But is this what Paul was really saying? This writer thinks not. Paul never said his opponents lacked a desire for obedience to all the Law. In fact he said just the opposite. Paul's opponents apparently held forth the ideal of a whole life under the protection of the Law, in that the Galatians could be described as wanting to be under Law (4:21). They were considering taking up the yoke (ζυγός) of the Law, which Paul derisively described as a "yoke of slavery" (5:1). To take up a yoke is a New Testament phrase for a life of submission. In Matthew 11:28-30 it refers to identification with and submission to Jesus. In Acts 15:10 Peter referred to identification with and submission to the Law as "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear." The term ζυγός itself is neutral and was used throughout rabbinical literature as a symbol of obedience, not of oppression.<sup>71</sup> The yoke of the Law was referred to as a gracious blessing compared to other possible yokes. The following statement about the yoke of the Torah from *Pirque Avot* 3:5 is attributed to Rabbi Nehunia ben Haqqaneh, who supposedly was a disciple of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai (A.D. 1-80):

Whosoever accepts the yoke of the Law from him shall be removed the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of mundane care, but he that casts off from him the yoke of the Law upon him shall be laid the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care.<sup>72</sup>

While the final form of this saying was probably completed about A.D. 250,<sup>73</sup> scholars have no difficulty accepting that the basic thrust of the original saying is at least as old as the first century A.D.<sup>74</sup> Therefore Paul's reminder that the whole Law is binding was probably not a negative statement within first-century Judaism, and it certainly would not be a surprise to his opponents. But was it not

<sup>71</sup> See R. Travers Herford, ed., *The Ethics of the Talmud: Sayings of the Fathers*, 3d ed. (Cincinnati: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1945; reprint, New York: Schocken Books, 1962), p. 70, and I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*. First and Second Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917, 1924; reprint, New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1967), pp. 4-14.

<sup>72</sup> Translation from Philip Blackman, ed. and trans., *Mishnayoth*, 7 vols., 2d ed. (New York: Judaica Press, 1977), 4:508.

<sup>73</sup> Jacob Neusner, ed. and trans., *Scriptures of the Oral Torah* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p. 71.

<sup>74</sup> E.g., Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, p. 7, and M. B. Lerner, "The Tractate Avot," in *Literature of the Sages*, Part One, ed. Shmuel Safrai, *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, vol. 2.3a (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), pp. 265-66.

necessary if these opponents did not keep the Law (6:13)? Yes, it was necessary to make his point, but for reasons different from those assumed by the advocates of the third view.

They assume that reminders about the whole Law's binding nature were because of the opponents' desire to disobey much of the Law (e.g., 5:3 and 6:13). However, Paul explained why the opponents did not obey the Law. It was not from lack of desire to obey, but rather from an inherent inability to obey. Their failure was due to identifying with a community that was not aided by God's Spirit (3:1-5). Therefore they were unable to meet the demands of the Law. In 3:19-4:11 Paul attributed this inability to an earlier, preparatory, more immature period in God's redemptive program in which enslavement to sin and failure were the norm (3:23; 4:3, 8-11).

The opponents of Paul in Galatia wanted to revert in an anachronistic fashion to this period by their intense nomistic emphasis. With their commitment to Torah-observance came the accompanying failure of the Law era—its shutting up under sin (3:22), its keeping in custody (3:23), its childish, slavlike state (4:1-3), and its enslavement to the elemental things of the world (4:8-10; cf. 4:3). Those who preferred this kind of childish failure, evidenced by receiving circumcision (5:2), needed to realize they were subjecting themselves again to a yoke of slavery (5:1), were putting themselves under the obligation of the whole Law (5:3), and were severing themselves from Christ, the only One who could set them free from the Law and failure (2:15-21; cf. Rom. 8:1-4).

Therefore the "opportunity for the flesh" in Galatians 5:13 is not turning the freedom in Christ into license or libertinism, but it is the *continued fleshly failure that characterized the Law era*. Paul explained further in 6:13 that his opponents could not keep the Law themselves, but they still wanted the Galatians to join them in this fleshly failure for the purpose (ἵνα) of "boasting in your σαρκί." The Law era and ἡ σὰρξ go together as an inseparable twosome. This was expressed repeatedly by Paul in Galatians (e.g. 5:13-14; 5:17-18; 5:19-21, 23; 6:12-13). The failure to tie νόμος and σὰρξ together has needlessly bred this third view of Paul's opponents and has almost hopelessly muddied the waters about their identity. This failure has also greatly hindered a correct understanding of the σὰρξ/πνεῦμα duality. An accurate, contextual understanding of the opponents should go a long way toward unraveling the second issue.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Several writers accurately see the continuity in Paul's argument from Galatians 1-4 to 5-6 in addressing the fleshliness of the Judaizers. These include Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia*, pp. 11-17; Brinsmead, *Galatians—Dialogical Response to Opponents*, pp. 164-92; and D. J. Lull, *The Spirit in Galatia: Paul's Interpretation of PNEUMA as Divine Power*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 49

### The Identity of the Galatian Opponents

The traditional view seems correct: Paul's opponents were Jewish Christians who sought to "Judaize" the Gentile Christians of Galatia. In over 70 years of scholarly attacks, this identification of Paul's opponents has not been effectively overturned. The Judaizers' identity best satisfies the "mirror-reading" criteria and limitations, Barclay concludes that the troublers were probably Jewish Christians who also questioned the adequacy of both Paul's apostolic credentials and the gospel he preached.<sup>76</sup> They apparently made circumcision the central issue among the Gentile Christians of Galatia because it was the classic symbol for one who was choosing to live like a Jew (Ἰουδαϊκῶς ζῆς and Ἰουδαίειν, Gal. 2:14). "In fact Paul's concern about 'works of the law' (3:1-10) and his extended arguments to prove the temporary validity of the law (3:6-4:11), taken together with remarks like 4:21, make it highly probable that the opponents wanted the Galatians to observe the law as circumcised proselytes."<sup>77</sup> Barclay concludes, "Taking the argument of the letter as a whole, there is sufficient evidence that the Galatians were informed of (and responded warmly to) the requirements of Torah-observance as the hallmark of the people of God."<sup>78</sup>

Such a conclusion and the lack of viable support for a Gnostic or libertine identity make assuming the presence of such opponents in Galatia or the presence of a dual nomistic/libertinistic threat<sup>79</sup> totally unwarranted and unnecessary. The struggles over ethics and law in Galatians 5-6 can be explained more naturally and holistically within the context of Galatians with a unified Judaizers' threat in the background. As students of Galatians are tying Galatians 5-6 more closely and logically to Galatians 3-4, the underscoring of this traditional identification gets even stronger. Increasingly it is becoming apparent that rather than stepping back and defensively clarifying and limiting the boundaries of Christian freedom in Galatians 5-6, Paul was actually continuing his attack on the Judaizers in an overt and aggressive manner, but (in chaps. 5-6) in the area of ethics and behavior. This heightened sense of continuity

(Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), pp. 113-30.

<sup>76</sup> Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," pp. 86-90, and idem, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians*, Studies of the New Testament and Its World, ed. John Riches (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), pp. 36-74.

<sup>77</sup> Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," p. 86.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>79</sup> E. Jewett, "Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," pp. 209-12.

greatly aids the Judaizer identity. Such continuity also serves to undercut the predominant understanding of the *σάρξ/πνεῦμα* internal duality which arose in part due to a failure in understanding the proper linkage of chapters 3-4 with chapters 5-6 in Paul's argument.

These conclusions do not mean that all questions about the Judaizers' origin and motivation have been satisfied. Because of the emphasis in Galatians 1-2 and 4 on Jerusalem and Judea, it is possible to suspect some link to the Jerusalem church. Jewett asserts that Jewish Christians in Judea, stimulated by Zealot pressure in the forties and fifties, responded to this threat of persecution (Gal. 6:12) and launched a nomistic campaign among Gentile Christians in areas that included Galatia.<sup>80</sup> As Barclay points out, the weakness of this thesis is the slender thread of Galatians 6:12 from which it hangs.<sup>81</sup> Fung more pointedly refutes it, based on the sharply antithetical relationship between the Zealots and the church at the outbreak of the Jewish War and based on the Zealots' lack of interest in bringing Gentile Christians to the "perfection" mentioned in 3:3.<sup>82</sup>

Perhaps a more viable origin and motivation is that the Judaizing threat came from a Law-observant mission among the Gentiles by Jewish Christian "Teachers" (not "opponents"):

In the main it is not they who are reacting to Paul's theology, but rather he who is reacting to theirs. To be sure, the Galatians heard Paul's gospel first and only later that of the Teachers. But the finely formed theology of the Teachers is best understood on the hypothesis that the order of events in Galatia is for them atypical. Elsewhere they will have worked in virgin fields, impelled not by a desire to correct Paul, but by a passion to share with the entire world the only gift they believed to have the power to liberate humankind from the grip of evil, the Law of God's Messiah. In the full sense of the expression, therefore, they represent a law-observant mission to Gentiles, a mission inaugurated not many years after the death of Jesus.<sup>83</sup>

While this attractive thesis lessens the malevolence of the Judaizers' motives, it does not lessen their theological error. Nor can the thesis be validated based on first-century data, because it is reading from second-century Jewish Christian documents back into the first.<sup>84</sup> Therefore it must remain in the category of an attractive possibility. It does, however, highlight the fact that, whatever

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., pp. 204-8.

<sup>81</sup> Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>83</sup> Marten, "A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians," p. 323.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 310-12.

the specific motivation of these Jewish Christian opponents, they obviously viewed their cause as righteous and biblical. Their apparent use of the Abraham and Sarah-Hagar narratives seems to point to such a perspective, as numerous writers have observed.<sup>85</sup>

Given that the Judaizers considered it imperative that Gentiles be saved in continuity with Israel and in accord with the Law and customs of Moses by becoming Jewish proselytes, the issue of their geographical origin is worthy of some focus. There is no overwhelming consensus about their origin. Lake identified them as local Jews who were proselytizing the Gentile Christians.<sup>86</sup> Tyson correctly identifies the opponents as Jewish Christians, but follows Lake's lead in arguing that they were native to Galatia.<sup>87</sup> Munck's view of Judaizing Gentile Christians also places the opponents' origin within Galatia from within Paul's own ministry.<sup>88</sup> The difficulty with the Galatian origin, as many have observed,<sup>89</sup> is that it seems Paul referred to the agitators as coming into the churches of Galatia from outside (e.g., 3:1-5; 4:8-16; 5:7-8) and that he underscored their "outsider" identity by referring to them in third person pronouns, while he referred to the Galatians in the second person (e.g., 4:17).

Based on the sketchy external and internal evidence, the best choice of the origin of these mistaken Jewish Christians is Jerusalem or possibly Judea. Externally, two passages in Acts point to the presence of these strong Law-observant attitudes in the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and Judea. Paul arrived in Jerusalem on his collection visit after his third missionary journey (Acts 21:17-26). The next day James and the Jerusalem leaders told Paul of the local Jewish Christians' animosity toward him because of his perceived threat to traditional Jewish Christianity: "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk

<sup>85</sup> E.g., C. K. Barrett, "The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians," in *Essays on Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), pp. 154-70, and Daniel H. King, "Paul and the Tannaim: A Study in Galatians," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (1983): 361-69.

<sup>86</sup> Kirsopp Lake, "Paul's Controversies," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1920—1933; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 5:215.

<sup>87</sup> Joseph B. Tyson, "Paul's Opponents in Galatia," *Novum Testamentum* 10 (1968): 252-54.

<sup>88</sup> Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, pp. 87-100, 130-34.

<sup>89</sup> E.g., Martyn, "A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians," p. 313.

according to the customs. What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come (Acts 21:20-22, italics added).

In light of the chronological work of Knox,<sup>90</sup> Jewett,<sup>91</sup> Luedemann,<sup>92</sup> and Hoehner,<sup>93</sup> Paul's final visit to Jerusalem is dated between A.D. 54 and 57. This visit could have been as much as eight years after the Jerusalem Conference of Acts 15. It demonstrates the continuation of a powerful, Law-observant wing in the Jerusalem church. Apparently these same Jewish Christians, who were "zealous for the Law," had caused trouble in Antioch a few years earlier. "And some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'" (Acts 15:1).<sup>94</sup>

After Paul and Barnabas disputed with these teachers (Acts 15:2), the Jerusalem Conference was convened to settle the issue. The discussion continued at the conference. "But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, 'It is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses'" (v. 5). After the conference decided against such a notion, the church leaders recorded their decision and addressed it to the Gentiles in the churches of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (v. 23), purposely distancing themselves from the troublers. "We have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls" (v. 24). While admitting to being home to these Pharisaic Jewish Christians, the Jerusalem church disavowed any authorization of them or their teaching. Considering that this external data sounds much like the problems in Galatia, it is reasonable to conclude that the Acts 15 and 21 troublers and the Galatian troublers shared a common origin and that "they represent a wider group of ritually strict Jewish Christians."<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, rev. ed., ed. Douglas R. A. Hare (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 68.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Jewett, *A Chronology of Paul's Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), foldout page.

<sup>92</sup> Gerd Luedemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology*, trans. E. Stanley Jones (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 262-63.

<sup>93</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, "A Chronological Table of the Apostolic Age," 2d rev. ed. (1989), from "Chronology of the Apostolic Age" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965), pp. 1-4.

<sup>94</sup> The Western text of Acts 15:1-5 makes the Pharisaic identity even stronger with several extensive additions. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), pp. 426-28.

<sup>95</sup> E. Earle Ellis, "Those of the Circumcision and the Early Christian Mission," *Studia Evangelica* 4 (1968): 391. See also F. F. Bruce, "The Church of Jerusalem in the Acts of the Apostles," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*

Internally, the Epistle to the Galatians strongly supports such a correlation. Given Paul's recurring emphasis on Jerusalem and Judea in Galatians 1-2 and 4, it is not difficult to conclude that the Pharisaic troublemakers from Jerusalem and Judea kept going past Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia into Galatia. So Paul persistently struck at their home base and at those Jerusalem pillars (*στυλοὶ*, 2:9) to whom they fallaciously appealed for support of their position (cf. Acts 15:24). This may also explain why Paul recounted the confrontation in Antioch that was so embarrassing to Peter and Barnabas (Gal. 2:11-21). His point is that the Judaizers' view had already been rejected at one of their prior stops, the most prominent Gentile church, Antioch of Syria. That rejection was *public in scope* (*ἐμπροσθεν πάντων*, 2:14), *apostolic in authority* (involving both Peter and Paul), and *apparently accepted as legitimate* (otherwise Paul would not have appealed to it as authoritative for the Galatian situation).

Another point to be made about these Jerusalem/Judea-based opponents involves the motive for their apparent claims against Paul. As King observed in his fine analysis of the situation,<sup>96</sup> these Pharisaic Judaizers made three main claims against Paul:

1. Paul was on their side but trimmed the demands of the gospel to please his hearers (1:10)... .
2. He received his gospel from the same Jerusalem authorities who supported their mission (1:18–2:9; and 1:11)... .
3. In Paul's work as a representative of the "pillars" (1:12, 15-19) he began a work which they had come to complete (3:3)...<sup>97</sup>

As King notes, these Jewish Christians from the sect of the Pharisees expressed a concept of revelation typical of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>98</sup> According to this view, revelation flowed from the seat of authority (Jerusalem), where Rabbi Jesus had left His disciples (the Jerusalem apostles) to carry on the line of tradition. Paul was a *tanna*, a rabbi, who had broken the chain of Jewish traditions by not faithfully or accurately passing on the tradition. Assuming that Paul was a pupil of the Jerusalem apostles, the Judaizers apparently accused him of failing in his duty to transmit the exact words of Jesus' tradition as it had been mediated to Paul by the apostles. Such "iterative incompetence" was viewed as one of the gravest offenses according to ancient rabbinical rules (e.g., m.'Ed. 1.3; b. Sabb. 15a; 'Avot 3:8 and 6:6). The Judaizers had to correct and complete Paul's breach of the Jesus tradition among the Galatians. It is to this at-

67 (1985): 641-61.

<sup>96</sup> King, "Paul and the Tannaim: A Study in Galatians," pp. 349-61.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 351.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 352-54.

tempt to correct and complete his gospel that Paul responded in Galatians. In light of these charges against him, Paul's purpose in Galatians 1–2 is now quite understandable:

Contra the insinuations of the agitators, he maintained that his gospel was not of human origin; Christ had communicated it to him in person. He was also careful to assure his readership the pillars of the church in Jerusalem had recognized its truth and his right to preach it in its present form. He denied the charge of tanna-oriented dependency, but also maintained consistency with Jerusalem on all important matters.<sup>99</sup>

Paul's reasoning in Galatians 1:11-2:14 also reveals that in the 14 to 17 years following his conversion he spent time in Arabia and Damascus (1:17) and Syria and Cilicia (v. 21). He had three contacts with some of the Jerusalem apostles' in Jerusalem (1:18-20; 2:1-10) and Antioch (2:11-14). These contacts were too infrequent and too brief for the tannaitic process of tedious repetition and memorization to occur. This obvious fact coupled with Jesus Christ's direct teaching of Paul (1:11-12) and the Jerusalem acceptance of Paul's gospel (1:22-24; 2:7-10) powerfully refutes the Judaizers' claims against him. All the particulars of Galatians 1–2 can most simply and coherently be explained in light of this reconstruction.<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

The identity of Paul's opponents in Galatia is a crucial issue in interpreting Galatians. While the last 70 years of scholarly study about the identity of these opponents have given rise to a more balanced view of their identity, it has not effectively overturned the traditional Judaizer identification. Bible students can rest secure that this identification is, in fact, the correct one.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>100</sup> The epistemological and hermeneutical maxim of "simplicity" is worth noting at this point. It is that the "simplest" hypothesis fitting the facts is the best hypothesis. This goes back to William of Ockham (1285-1349), author of "Ockham's Razor," which is widely paraphrased as "entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity" (W. F. Bynum, E. J. Browne, and Roy Porter, eds., *Dictionary of the History of Science* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981], pp. 386-87). While fully recognizing the complexities of persons and communities, the principle of simplicity can still be applied in a nonreductionist manner. In hypothesizing about the identity of Paul's opponents in Galatia, the traditional Judaizer identity is the simplest hypothesis and yet allows for the human complexities associated with the clash of cultures and traditions. There is no need to multiply other entities or identities.

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