

GALATIANS

Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AcBib	Academia Biblica
ASV	American Standard Version
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000 (Danker-Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich)
BDF	Blass, Friedrich, Albert Debrunner, and Robert W. Funk. <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHGNT	Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester
BLG	Biblical Languages: Greek
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary Series
BrillDAG	The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>

CSB	Christian Standard Bible (2017)
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research (formerly Currents in Research: Biblical Studies)</i>
CurTM	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
CTR	<i>Criswell Theological Review</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DBI	<i>Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation</i> . Edited by John Hays. 2 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999
DLNT	<i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i>
DNTB	<i>Dictionary of New Testament Background</i> . Edited by Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
DNTUOT	<i>Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming
EDNT	<i>Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Scheider. ET. 3 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1993
ESBT	Essential Studies in Biblical Theology
ESEC	Emory Studies in Early Christianity
ESV	English Standard Version (2001)
ET	<i>English Translation</i>
EvQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
ITC	International Theological Commentary
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Hohan J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2009)
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
KJV	King James Version
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGRChJ	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
JSJ	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>

<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
LD	Lectio Divina
LD Commentaries	Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LSJM</i>	<i>Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon with Revised Supplement</i>
LXX	Septuagint (early Greek translation of the Old Testament)
MM	Moulton, James H., and George Milligan. <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament</i> . London, 1930. Prepr., Peabody, MA: Henderson, 1997
NAC	The New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible (2020)
NET	New English Translation (2017)
NETS	A New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDNTT</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
<i>NIDNTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NIV1984	New International Version (1984)
NLT	New Living Translation (2015)
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
NTL	The New Testament Library
NTS	New Testament Studies
OT	Old Testament
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PRSt</i>	<i>Perspectives in Religious Studies</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1971)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)

<i>SBJT</i>	<i>The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.</i> Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976
<i>Tg</i>	Targum
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>TRENT</i>	Traditions of the Rabbis from the Era of the New Testament
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Workbook of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. Chicago: Moody Press, 1980
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZECNT</i>	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
<i>ZPEB</i>	<i>Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible.</i> Edited by Merrill C. Tenney. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>

INTRODUCTION

“Galatians is my favorite epistle, the one in which I place all my trust. It is my Katie von Bora.”¹ Martin Luther could think of no higher praise for Paul’s Letter to the Galatians than to compare it to his beloved wife. Few books of the Bible have had as much historical impact on the church as Galatians.

I. Author

The opening line of the letter unambiguously identifies the apostle Paul as the author of the letter, and even the most critical scholars rarely if ever challenge this.² Paul almost certainly wrote this letter through an amanuensis—a person trained in taking dictation for letters. In 6:11 Paul confirms that he used this common custom in the ancient world by noting: “Look at what large letters I use as I write to you in my own handwriting.” At this point Paul signals he has taken the pen from the scribe and is writing the final paragraph himself. Even when using an amanuensis, authors in the ancient world would often write the final lines of a letter in their own handwriting to authenticate the genuineness of the letter.³ Second Thessalonians 3:17 confirms that Paul did this: “I, Paul,

¹ Martin Luther, *Off the Record with Martin Luther: An Original Translation of the Table Talks*, trans. Charles Daudert (Kalamazoo, MI: Hansa-Hewlett, 2009), 311.

² A notable twist on this consensus may be found in J. C. O’Neill, *The Recovery of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1972), 1–15, 73–83; he concludes that Paul only wrote two-thirds of Galatians.

³ See E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition, and Collection* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 171–75.

am writing this greeting with my own hand, which is an authenticating mark in every letter; this is how I write.”

II. Recipients & Date

Because the questions surrounding the date and recipients of Galatians are so intertwined, they must be treated together. There are at least three key issues that must be addressed to determine who the Galatians were and when Paul wrote this letter to them: (1) how the terms “Galatia” and “Galatians” are used; (2) the relationship between the events in Acts (esp. the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:1–35) and the events recorded in Galatians (especially 2:1–14); and (3) proposed verbal and theological similarities between this letter and other Pauline Epistles (especially Romans).

Before we explore these issues, it should be emphasized that one’s conclusions on these matters do not necessarily result in radically different interpretations of the meaning of Galatians as a whole. But they do affect one’s understanding of specific passages (esp. Gal 2:1–14), the circumstances that form the historical context of the letter, and the effort to reconstruct the early history of the church. So to that end we will look at each of these issues individually before attempting a synthesis.

A. THE MEANING OF THE TERMS “GALATIA” AND “GALATIANS”

In Galatians 1:2 Paul indicates that he is writing to “the churches of Galatia” (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας). The noun Γαλατία was used in two primary ways.⁴ First, it could refer to an ethnic or tribal group from Gaul who migrated to the central plains of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) during the third century BC. They eventually settled in the towns of Tavium, Pessinus, and Ancyra, and were allowed to govern themselves even after the Romans gained control of the area in 189 BC.⁵ Known as the North Galatian theory, it was the virtual consensus of scholars until the nineteenth century and is still held by many today.⁶

⁴ The same is true of the adjective Γαλατικός (Acts 16:6; 18:23) and the noun Γαλάτης (Gal 3:1).

⁵ For a concise summary of the history of Galatia, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 2:1094–96.

⁶ Among the more recent commentaries, advocates of North Galatia include Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 1–5; James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson,

But, secondly, Galatia could refer to the Roman province created in 25 BC, which, in addition to the area where ethnic Galatians lived, included the area of Lycaonia, Isauria, and parts of Phrygia and Pisidia. As such it included the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, where Paul planted churches during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–14:28). This view is known as the South Galatian theory and is held by a number of scholars.⁷ So which sense does Γαλατία have here in Galatians 1:2?

From the internal evidence of Galatians itself, the most one can say is that evidence supporting both views yet not decisively excluding either may be found within Galatians itself. Advocates of North Galatia sometimes suggest that the lack of reference to persecution in Paul's description of his own preaching of the gospel when founding the Galatian churches cannot be easily squared with the mention of persecution Paul faced in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Derbe and Lystra recorded in

1993), 5–7; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 15–17; Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 3–5; in addition to the commentaries, see Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 277–307; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 468–77.

⁷ For the South Galatian view, see Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), xxi–xliv; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 3–18; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 1–3; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), lxi–lxxii; Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 40–46; Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 2–20; Simon Légasse, *L'épître De Paul Aux Galates*, LD 9 (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 28–30; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 22–31; Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2–18; A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 20–30; David A. DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 39–48; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 16–22. Also noteworthy is James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations: The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians*, WUNT 84 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1995). After an extensive survey of the table of nations in the OT, Jewish tradition, and in Paul, Scott turns to consider how this tradition might inform the destination of Galatians. He concludes that from this Jewish perspective Paul is “most likely sending his letter ... to the churches of Phrygia-Galatica, which he founded on his First Missionary Journey and then visited again on his Second Missionary Journey” (215). Although one may question the pervasiveness within Second Temple Judaism of viewing the world through the lens of the Table of Nations, Scott is to be applauded for approaching the issue from a unique angle, and his contribution deserves serious consideration.

Acts 13–14.⁸ South Galatia proponents note that the three references to Barnabas (Gal 2:1, 9, 13) suggest that he was known to the Galatian churches, which indicates that Barnabas was part of founding the Galatian churches. According to Acts, however, Barnabas only accompanied Paul during his first missionary journey, during which the churches in the South Galatia hypothesis were planted.⁹ But in both cases the arguments hinge upon the testimony of Acts and not the internal evidence of Galatians alone.

The other two occurrences of the noun Γαλατία in Paul’s letter do not settle the debate. Both 1 Corinthians 16:1 (“Do the same as I instructed the Galatian churches”) and 2 Timothy 4:10 (“Crescens has gone to Galatia”) could be understood in either an ethnic or provincial sense. When Peter addresses his first letter to those “living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1), he most likely refers to the province of Galatia. But even if that is so, it does not settle how Paul is using the term.

More significant is the evidence from Acts, where Luke twice uses the adjective Γαλατικός. After adding Timothy to his ministry team in Lystra (Acts 16:1–5), Paul and Timothy “went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia” (τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν) (Acts 16:6). Although the grammar of this expression is debated, the reference here is most likely to the southern portion of the province of Galatia, where Paul had planted churches during his first missionary journey.¹⁰ Geographical considerations further support a South Galatia view, as the territory represented by the North Galatia view was not as populous, had cities that generally lacked any Jewish population, and presented language barriers.¹¹

⁸ See, e.g., James Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (3rd ed.; New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1915), 99.

⁹ See Richard Bauckham, “Barnabas in Galatians,” *JSNT* 2 (1979): 61–70.

¹⁰ Burton (*Galatians*, xxxi–xxxii) notes that geographical names ending in -ια (such as Φρυγία) were regularly used as adjectives, strongly suggesting that Φρυγία here functions as an adjective modifying the noun χώραν. By bracketing Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν with the definite article and the singular noun χώραν, Luke signals he means one region instead of two. The expression “distinguishes the part of Galatia that is Phrygian (much of the southern region of the province of Galatia) from Galatian territory that is not” (Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, 4 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012–2015], 3:2324–25).

¹¹ For discussion of the geographical data, see Rainer Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 281–86; Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 2:3–4; Cilliers Breytenbach, “Probable Reasons for Paul’s Unfruitful Missionary Attempts in Asia Minor (a Note on Acts

Furthermore, even if one concludes that North Galatia is intended here, the text merely notes that Paul passed through the region and gives no indication that he engaged in ministry there, much less that he planted churches. At most Acts 16:6 allows for the *possibility* that Paul engaged in ministry in the northern regions of provincial Galatia, but given the importance of the issues addressed in Galatians, it seems strange that Luke would not mention the planting of these churches if the recipients of Galatians were churches in North Galatia.

Several years later, after spending some time in Antioch, Paul “set out, traveling through one place after another in the region of Galatia and Phrygia [τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν], strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23). Although the grammar of this expression is slightly different from that in Acts 16:6,¹² on the whole it seems most likely that Luke refers to the province of Galatia where Paul planted churches during the first missionary journey, and Phrygia refers to the part of that region located in the province in Asia toward Ephesus.¹³

Thus, although the use of the noun Γαλατία in the New Testament cannot determine decisively whether it is being used ethnically or provincially, the use of the related adjective Γαλατικός in Acts favors a provincial reference to South Galatia, where Paul and Barnabas planted churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Given the fact that ethnic Galatians were in Paul’s time only a small minority in any region of the province of Galatia, Oakes concludes that the apostle addressing them “would be such an unusual proceeding for Paul that, if

16:6–7),” in *Die Apostelgeschichte und die hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung: Festschrift für Eckhard Plümacher zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Jens Schroter (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 157–69. Some advocates of North Galatia object that South Galatia cannot be referred to in Acts 16:6 because that area has already been mentioned in 16:4–5. But 16:5 could be understood parenthetically, with 16:6 repeating the action of 16:4, removing this difficulty; see Moo, *Galatians*, 7 and Keener, *Acts*, 3:2325.

¹² Whereas the grammar of 16:6 (τὴν Φρυγίαν καὶ Γαλατικὴν χώραν) suggests that Paul refers to one region yet specifies a specific portion of it (i.e., the Phrygian area of Galatia, referring to the southern portion), the grammar of Acts 18:23 (τὴν Γαλατικὴν χώραν καὶ Φρυγίαν) seems to distinguish between Galatia and Phrygia as distinct regions. The difference is that in Acts 16:6 Luke places the noun Φρυγίαν and the adjective Γαλατικὴν (joined by καὶ) between the definite article and the one noun (χώραν) they both modify. Here the adjective Γαλατικὴν is placed between the definite article and the noun χώραν but is followed by καὶ and the noun Φρυγίαν.

¹³ See the discussions in Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, 120; Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*, 285–86; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1199–200.

he were doing it, we would expect to see much more obvious signs why his mission proceeded here along such *ethnically* specific lines—something radically at odds with his general religious ideas.”¹⁴ While some have objected that Paul would not have called people living in Lyconia and Pisidia “Galatians,”¹⁵ Das is correct that if Paul writes to the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, “the only term he could use that would include the entirety of his audience would be ‘Galatians.’”¹⁶

B. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTS AND GALATIANS

Once we accept that Acts provides historically reliable information about Paul’s ministry, we have another asset in determining the date and recipients.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the evidence from Acts is not clear cut and can be interpreted in different ways. The central issue is the number of post-conversion visits that Paul makes to Jerusalem. In Galatians Paul mentions two visits: three years after his conversion (1:18) and then “after fourteen years” (2:1). Acts mentions at least four visits: a post-conversion visit (9:26–30), the famine relief visit (11:27–30), the Jerusalem council (15:1–29), and the visit during which he was arrested in the temple (21:15–23:22). This last visit can safely be ruled out as too late in Paul’s life, leaving three visits in Acts to line up with the two in Galatians.¹⁸

¹⁴ Peter Oakes, *Galatians*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 18.

¹⁵ So de Boer, *Galatians*, 4.

¹⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 28

¹⁷ The historical reliability and value of Acts in reconstructing the early Christian movement in general and Paul’s life in particular remain hotly disputed issues that cannot be resolved here. I am persuaded that Acts contains independent and reliable information about Paul and his ministry, and will accordingly draw upon it when pertinent. For a defense of the historical reliability of Acts in general, see Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); W. Ward Gasque, *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989); Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*; Bruce W. Winter, ed., *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993–1996); and Keener, *Acts*, 1:90–220. With specific reference to the value of Acts for reliable information on Paul, see F. F. Bruce, “Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?,” *BJRL* 58 (1975): 282–305; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, AB 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 129–41; Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 430–38; Stanley E. Porter, *Paul in Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 205–6; Keener, *Acts*, 1:221–57. For an excellent survey of research on the use of the Acts material in constructing a Pauline chronology, see Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*, 1–28.

¹⁸ It is, of course, possible that neither Paul nor Acts mentions every trip that Paul made to Jerusalem. But it seems unlikely that in Galatians Paul would omit a visit to Jerusalem,

Since there is widespread agreement that the post-conversion visit Paul mentions in Galatians 1:17 corresponds to Acts 9:26–30, the main question is which visit mentioned in Acts corresponds to the one described in Galatians 2:1–10. Here is the first possibility:¹⁹

Table 1:

Option I		
Date (approx.)	Acts	Galatians
33–35	Paul's conversion (9:1–25)	"God ... was pleased to reveal his Son in me" (1:15–16)
35–38	Post-conversion visit (9:26–30)	"Then after three years..." (1:18)
44–47	Famine relief visit (11:27–30)	"Then after fourteen years..." (2:1–10)
Shortly before 48/49	PAUL WRITES GALATIANS	PAUL WRITES GALATIANS
48/49	The Jerusalem Council (15:1–29)	

In this scenario, Paul heard about the situation in Galatia sometime after he returned to Antioch from his first missionary journey (Acts 14:24–28), yet before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35).²⁰

Here is the second possible scenario:

since it would potentially undermine his argument that his authority comes directly from the risen Christ and not the Jerusalem church or its apostles. For a helpful discussion of the issue, see David Wenham, "Acts and the Pauline Corpus II: The Evidence of Pauline Parallels," in *The Book of Acts in Its Ancient Literary Setting*, ed. Andrew D. Clarke and Bruce W. Winter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 215–58, esp. 226–243.

¹⁹ For helpful comparisons of Gal 2:1–10 with both Acts 11:27–30 and 15:1–35, see Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxii–lxxxiii; Wenham, "Acts and the Pauline Corpus," 226–43; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 13–20; Moo, *Galatians*, 10–13. The dates in Table 1 are approximate, as it is difficult to determine fixed points in Paul's life due to the lack of data. On the challenges, see Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 29–32; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 390–402; Martin Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer, *Paul between Damascus and Antioch: The Unknown Years* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 1–23; Andrew Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011), 322–45. Arguably the only fixed point in a Pauline chronology is that he appeared before Gallio the proconsul of Achaia in the city of Corinth, who ruled from July 51 to July 52 AD. Yet even this "fixed point" allows for differing opinions regarding the dating of other events in Paul's life.

²⁰ See, e.g., Bruce, *Galatians*, 43–56; Fung, *Galatians*, 9–28; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 22–31; Moo, *Galatians*, 2–18; Das, *Galatians*, 36–42.

Table 2:

Option 2		
Date (approx.)	Acts	Galatians
33–35	Paul’s conversion (9:1–25)	“God ... was pleased to reveal his Son in me” (1:15–16)
35–38	Post-conversion visit (9:26–30)	“Then after three years...” (1:18)
44–47	Famine relief visit (11:27–30)	
48/49	The Jerusalem Council (15:1–29)	“Then after fourteen years...” (2:1–10)
Sometime after 48/49	PAUL WRITES GALATIANS	PAUL WRITES GALATIANS

Understood this way, Paul could have written the Galatians sometime in the 50s, perhaps as late as around the time he wrote Romans (ca. AD 57).²¹

So which is more likely? The place to begin is by identifying the similarities and differences between Paul’s visit to Jerusalem described in Galatians 2:1–10 with the possible parallels in Acts 11:27–30 and Acts 15:1–35. Table 3 lays out a summary.²²

As the data from this chart indicates, the evidence is not clear cut for either view. The main factor in favor of Galatians 2 = Acts 15 is the overlap in the “primary” issue discussed: whether or not gentile believers must be circumcised and required to observe the Mosaic law. Yet there are subtle differences as well. According to Galatians 2:1, Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem “according to a revelation,” whereas in Acts 15:1 it was men from Judea arriving in Antioch teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Galatians 2:1–10 describes a private meeting between Paul and the “pillars” (Peter, James, and John), while Acts 15 describes a meeting involving the apostles, elders, Paul, Barnabas, and the “whole assembly.”

Other factors favor identifying Galatians 2 with Acts 11:27–30. Paul going to Jerusalem “according to a revelation” (Gal 2:2) aligns well with Paul and Barnabas taking famine relief to Jerusalem because the prophet Agabus foretold a severe famine (Acts 11:27–28). The apostle’s comment that the “pillars” asked Paul and Barnabas to continue to remember the

²¹ See, e.g., Burton, *Galatians*, xliv–liii; Betz, *Galatians*, 9–12; de Boer, *Galatians*, 5–11; Oakes, *Galatians*, 19–22; Keener, *Galatians*, 7–13.

²² Adapted from Moo, *Galatians*, 13.

Table 3:

	Acts 11:27–30	Galatians 2:1–10	Acts 15:1–35
Location(s)	Antioch and Jerusalem	Antioch and Jerusalem	Antioch and Jerusalem
Immediate Occasion	Prophets foretold a famine	“according to a revelation”	Men from Judea teaching that circumcision is necessary to be saved
Participants	Paul and Barnabas; elders mentioned but their role is unclear	Paul, Barnabas, Titus, James, Cephas (Peter), John	Paul, Barnabas, “other” believers; Peter, James, “apostles and elders”; “the whole church”
Nature of the “meeting”	None specified	Private	Whole congregation led by the apostles and elders (specifically Peter and James)
Primary Issue	Famine relief	Circumcision of gentile believers	Circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic law for gentile believers
Format	No meeting mentioned	Paul sets forth his gospel message	Paul reports on his gentile mission; Peter confirms; James issues the decision
Result	Paul and Barnabas deliver the famine relief from the church in Antioch and then return to Antioch	The “pillars” extend the right hand of fellowship, recognizing different spheres of ministry. They ask that Paul and Barnabas continue to remember the poor	James decides not to require gentile believers to be circumcised or keep the Mosaic law, but asks them to avoid certain practices offensive to Jews. A letter is sent from the apostles, elders, and the whole church announcing the decision

poor makes good sense if the reason for their visit was to provide famine relief (Acts 11:27–30). But differences are all too apparent as well. Acts 11:27–30 says nothing at all about circumcision, let alone any efforts to force Titus to be circumcised. Nor does Acts 11:27–30 refer to any meeting

at all between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles; it simply states that Paul and Barnabas delivered the aid to the elders.

Since neither the famine relief visit (Acts 11:27–30) nor the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–21) lines up exactly with Galatians 2:1–10, a decision between the two is difficult. Although arguments from silence are not decisive and must be used with caution, one striking omission favors identifying Galatians 2 with Acts 11:27–30. If Galatians 2 = Acts 15, it is difficult to understand why Paul would not have mentioned the agreement reached during the Jerusalem Council.²³ Such an agreement would have undercut the opponents' two key arguments: (1) circumcision is required for justification; and (2) Paul is out of step with the leaders of the Jerusalem church. Furthermore, if Galatians 2 = Acts 15, then Paul does not mention the famine relief visit at all in Galatians. While it is true that Paul is under no obligation to mention every trip to Jerusalem, such an omission would seem to open Paul to the charge that he is withholding key information about his interaction with the Jerusalem church by not mentioning a visit to Jerusalem. In light of this consideration it seems more likely that Galatians 2:1–10 recounts a private meeting that Paul had with the “pillars” during the famine relief visit recorded in Acts 11:27–30.

C. VERBAL AND THEOLOGICAL SIMILARITIES TO OTHER PAULINE EPISTLES

Another consideration that some scholars use to date Galatians are parallels to other Pauline Letters.²⁴ Romans, written sometime between AD 55–57, covers similar subjects, including: justification by faith, circumcision, Abraham, the role of the Mosaic law in the life of the Christian, gentile inclusion, the relationship between Jew and gentile in the people of God, and the adoption of believers into God's family, etc. Yet even with such similarities, there are also noteworthy differences between Galatians and Romans. Similarities in language and subject are hardly a firm foundation for establishing a date for Galatians, as there are several other possible explanations for such similarities. Consequently, similarities with other Pauline Letters are not helpful in dating Galatians.

²³ For a helpful discussion of this issue, see F. F. Bruce, “Galatian Problems. 2. North or South Galatians?,” *BJRL* 52 (1970): 243–66.

²⁴ See the lengthy list in Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 45–48 and the summary in Moo, *Galatians*, 17–18.

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the evidence laid out above regarding the potential recipients of the letter and the date, there are three main possibilities. If Paul is writing to churches in North Galatia, he writes after the Jerusalem Council, sometime during the 50s. If South Galatia is the destination, the date could either be shortly before the Jerusalem Council (if Gal 2 = Acts 11:27–30) or any time after the Jerusalem Council (if Gal 2 = Acts 15:1–21), likely sometime in the 50s.²⁵

While we cannot be definitive, the overall weight of the evidence favors the South Galatia theory. Paul is writing to the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—planted during his first missionary journey with his ministry partner Barnabas (Acts 13:1–14:28). Paul writes sometime after returning to Antioch (Acts 14:26–28) and before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–21). Since the Jerusalem Council occurred in AD 48 or 49, a date shortly before that seems most likely.²⁶

E. THE CHURCHES OF SOUTH GALATIA

Working with the assumption that Paul is writing to the churches he and Barnabas planted on his first missionary journey, some brief discussion of the province of Galatia and these churches is necessary. By the time of Paul, the Roman province of Galatia had expanded from its origins consisting of Celtic tribes to a diverse region with a variety of ethnicities that was the product of Roman administrative convenience rather than natural geographical or ethnic boundaries. According to Breytenbach, Galatia “was inhabited by Paphlagonians, Galatians, Phrygians, Pisidians, Isaurians, Lycaonians, and Pamphylans, as well as Roman colonists.” Therefore, what follows is a brief summary of Paul’s experience planting churches in these communities based on Acts and supplemented by historical research.

Luke devotes the most attention to Paul’s time in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13–52), recording a lengthy summary of Paul’s synagogue sermon and the response. Originally established by Greek colonists sometime

²⁵ The latter possibility is a more modern development; for an extended defense of a South Galatia destination but a date after the Jerusalem Council, see Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 129–39 and Keener, *Galatians*, 7–13.

²⁶ So also Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxii–lxxxiii; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 22–31; Moo, *Galatians*, 8–18; Das, *Galatians*, 20–47.

in the fourth or third century BC, the city was reconstituted as a Roman military colony by the emperor Augustus.²⁷ As the original starting point of the Via Sebaste—a major Roman road that ran south to Perga (Acts 13:13–14) and was then extended east from Pisidian Antioch through Iconium and Lystra—the city was an important commercial center that attracted merchants. Although agriculture was central to the economy, inscriptions indicate the presence of a wide range of professions. In addition to the large temple to the emperor Augustus erected in the center of the city, a number of deities were worshiped, such as Zeus/Jupiter, Asclepius, Demeter/Ceres, and Dionysius. The Jewish population was apparently large enough and influential enough to stir up trouble for Paul and Barnabas.

Upon arriving in Pisidian Antioch, Paul was invited to preach in the synagogue. The initial response was encouraging: “As they were leaving, the people urged them to speak about these matters the following Sabbath. After the synagogue had been dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who were speaking with them and urging them to continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:42–43). But when they returned the following week the response was different. Because some of the Jews began to contradict Paul’s message, the apostle announced that he and Barnabas were turning their focus to preaching the gospel to the gentiles (Acts 13:44–49).²⁸ In the weeks that followed, the Jews continued to stir up trouble for Paul and Barnabas, even persuading some of the leading men of the city to make life difficult for them (Acts 13:50). Despite this persecution, the gospel spread throughout the region (Acts 13:49), and the disciples in Pisidian Antioch were “filled with joy and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52).

After traveling about ninety miles southeast along the Via Sebaste, Paul and Barnabas arrived in Iconium.²⁹ A major crossroads, Iconium had strong links to the emperor Claudius and was the most famous city of a fourteen-community tetrarchy. Although originally a Phrygian city, in

²⁷ Information on Pisidian Antioch in this paragraph is taken from Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1098–1103.

²⁸ It is worth noting that in Acts 13:47 Paul justifies this focus on the gentiles by quoting Isa 49:6, a text that he alludes to in Gal 1:15–16 when describing his conversion and commissioning as an apostle to the gentiles (see notes at 1:15–16).

²⁹ Information on Iconium in this paragraph is summarized from Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1111.

25 BC the emperor Augustus had granted the city the status of a full Roman colony. According to Schnabel, “the citizens of Iconium were divided into four tribes that were named after the deities worshiped in the city.”³⁰ The worship of a wide range of Roman, Greek, and Phrygian deities has been attested, along with the presence of the imperial cult. There was also a synagogue in Iconium, which is where Paul and Barnabas began their ministry in the city. As a result of their preaching, “a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1). Once again, unbelieving Jews stirred up trouble for them among the gentiles, eventually leading to a division in the city (Acts 14:2–4). Learning of a conspiracy between Jews, gentiles, and even the rulers of the city to mistreat and stone them, Paul and Barnabas fled the city (Acts 14:5–7).

Their next stop along the Via Sebaste was Lystra, a city about twenty miles southwest of Iconium.³¹ Before Augustus established it as a Roman colony in 25 BC, all that existed on the site was a small town. By the time Paul visited, the city had become much larger, housing a significant military veteran population. As with the other cities in the region, various gods and individuals were worshiped and venerated. The account in Acts 14:8–18 specifically highlights two deities that resulted in trouble for Paul and Barnabas. After healing a man who had been crippled from birth, the crowd exclaimed “The gods have come down to us in human form!” (Acts 14:11). The people began calling Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker (Acts 14:12). Such a reaction may have been prompted by a local legend that Zeus and Hermes had taken on human form and wandered through the region.³² According to this legend, no one showed them hospitality except an old couple, whom Zeus and Hermes richly rewarded while bringing judgment on the rest of the people. Perhaps not wanting to risk the wrath of the gods, the local priest of Zeus begins to make preparations to offer sacrifices to them (Acts 14:13). Paul and Barnabas tear their clothes in horror, explaining that it is the living God who has healed the crippled man (Acts 14:14–17). Even with this denunciation they barely prevented the crowds from offering them sacrifices (Acts 14:18). But when Jews from Pisidian

³⁰ Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1111.

³¹ Information on Lystra in this paragraph is summarized from Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1111–12.

³² For a helpful discussion of the possible mythical backgrounds to this story, see Keener, *Acts*, 2:2145–53.

Antioch and Iconium arrived in Lystra, they turned the crowds against Paul and Barnabas, leading to Paul being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Paul managed to survive but left with Barnabas the next day for Derbe (Acts 14:20).

Derbe was located about eighty miles southeast of Lystra and, perhaps more significantly, about eighteen miles from the main highway between Iconium and the Cilician Gates.³³ Paul may have chosen this city slightly off the beaten path to prevent the Jews who stirred up trouble for him from following him.³⁴ Not much is known about the city. Although originally a Hellenistic city, it came under Roman rule in 129 BC. Because of its close association with the emperor Claudius, the city received the honorary title “Claudioderbe.” Luke gives virtually no detail about Paul and Barnabas’ time in Derbe; he merely notes that “After they had preached the gospel in that town and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, to Iconium, and to Antioch” (Acts 14:21).

As this brief summary shows, Paul and Barnabas planted the churches in Galatia in the face of challenging circumstances. They faced opposition everywhere they went from both Jews and gentiles. When they passed through these same cities on the way back to their home base in Syrian Antioch, they appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). But given how young these churches were, it should have been no surprise that they were vulnerable to threats from both outside and inside the church.

III. The Circumstances Surrounding the Letter

So what happened between the time Paul left the Galatian congregations and the writing of the Letter to the Galatians? Determining those circumstances is no simple matter, and certainty is illusive. Further complicating matters is that we must attempt to reconstruct what happened using the information that Paul provides in this letter, a process that scholars refer to as mirror-reading.³⁵ As a result, the conclusions that different scholars

³³ Information on Derbe in this paragraph is adapted from Mark Wilson, “Galatia,” in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 529–30.

³⁴ Another possibility is that someone in Lystra referred Paul and Barnabas to a contact/friend in Derbe (so Wilson, “Galatia,” 530).

³⁵ For helpful discussions of mirror-reading, see the following: John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73–96; Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 103–12; Nijay Gupta, “Mirror-Reading Moral Issues in Paul’s Letters,”

EXPOSITION

I. Greetings and Astonishment (1:1–10)

Paul uses a broadly consistent format to begin his letters that he has adapted from his broader Greco-Roman culture: self-identification, identification of the recipients, a greeting, and a prayer of thanksgiving. The opening paragraph (1:1–5) contains the first three of these elements. Even within these opening lines several key themes of the letter are introduced: the divine origin of Paul's status as an apostle, the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ, and the dawning of the Messianic age that resulted from it. All of this was according to the will of God the Father, who deserves eternal glory.

But instead of the expected prayer of thanksgiving, Paul launches straight into a rebuke of the Galatians (1:6–10). The apostle expresses his astonishment that they are turning away from the God who called them through the true gospel for another so-called gospel. Paul reminds them that if anyone, regardless of who they are, preaches a different gospel, they are under God's curse. Final authority within the church rests in the one true gospel that God revealed to Paul, who rather than being a people pleaser is a servant of Christ. As with the previous paragraph, several key themes are introduced: the centrality of God's grace in calling people to himself, the incompatibility of the one true gospel with the message of the opponents, and Paul's identity as a servant of Christ.

A. GREETINGS IN THE GOSPEL (1:1–5)

¹ Paul, an apostle—not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia.³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.⁵ To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Context

The opening lines of New Testament letters usually introduce key themes and issues that are unpacked in the letter body, and Galatians is no exception. Paul's emphasis on the divine origin of his apostleship (1:1) anticipates the lengthy account of his conversion and commissioning as an apostle to the gentiles, a status that his opponents appear to have challenged (1:11–2:14). The central elements of the gospel are also highlighted: the self-sacrificial death of Jesus to rescue his people from this present evil age (1:3–4), and God the Father as the one who raised Jesus from the dead (1:1), planned this great work of redemption (1:4), and deserves eternal glory for it all (1:5). Each of these elements will be further explained in the lengthy argument at the center of the letter (3:1–5:1).

Structure

This opening paragraph contains several key elements of a typical Greco-Roman letter.¹ Paul begins the letter by identifying himself as the author (1:1–2a). Using three prepositional phrases, Paul describes himself as an apostle whose status and authority are not of human origin but divine, anticipating the extended defense of his apostolic status later in the letter. Both Jesus and the Father who raised him from the dead conferred this status upon him, and he is joined by an unspecified group of believers who are with Paul in sending this letter. Next Paul identifies the recipients, who are by contrast described simply as the churches of Galatia (1:2b). Finally,

¹ For helpful summary of these features in Greco-Roman letters, see William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 1–48; and Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis*, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 17–27. On these elements in Paul's letters, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 25–29; and Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Paul the Ancient Letter Writer: An Introduction to Epistolary Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 11–50.

the apostle greets them (1:3–5). He wishes them grace and peace that comes from both God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:3). Just as God the Father was further described in 1:1, Paul now further describes Christ as the one who gave himself for the sins of his people to deliver them from this present evil age, an act that was carried out in accordance with the will of the Father (1:4). The introduction culminates in a doxology of praise to the Father (1:5), which has the effect of setting Paul’s greeting within the context of worship.²

1:1. As is customary in first-century letters, Paul begins by identifying himself as the author. He refers to himself as an apostle (ἀπόστολος). Although this term can refer to a messenger in general, as Paul uses it here it has the sense of an authoritative witness of Jesus’ resurrection commissioned by Christ himself (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:15–26).³ Paul uses three prepositional phrases to stress the divine origin of his status as an apostle. He is an apostle “not from men” (οὐκ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων), meaning that the origin of his call was not from human beings. Nor is he an apostle “by man” (οὐδὲ δι’ ἀνθρώπου), indicating that his call to be an apostle did not come through the agency of another man. By shifting from the plural “men” to the singular “man” in these two phrases, Paul moves from the generic category (an apostleship that has human origins) to the specific (his apostleship did not come through any particular person, including the pillars in the Jerusalem church).⁴

Instead, Paul is an apostle “by Jesus Christ and God the Father” (διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς). In other words, his commission to be an apostle was given to him directly by Jesus Christ and God the Father working together. Paul may be drawing here on Old Testament texts such as 2 Samuel 7:12–17 and Psalms 2:7–9 and 89:26 that refer to the promised

² Martyn, *Galatians*, 87.

³ According to Longenecker (*Galatians*, 2), “Classical Greek writers usually used the term in an impersonal way, most often to refer to a naval expedition for military purposes—even, at times, of the boat used to transport such an expedition.” He goes on to note the common suggestion that the rabbinic concept of the *shaliach* lies behind this term, before rightly concluding that it cannot adequately account for all the features of a NT apostle (Longenecker, *Galatians*, 3). Martyn (*Galatians*, 93) suggests that both concepts may be rooted in the kings of Israel sending out servants for a task that he and he alone defined.

⁴ Similarly Moo, *Galatians*, 67–68. Betz (*Galatians*, 38) notes possible parallels with Amos 7:14–15 and Jer 1:5–6, as well as the self-descriptions of Greek poets (Hesiod, *Theog.* 21–34; *Erga* 1–10). Witherington (*Grace in Galatia*, 73) goes so far as to suggest Paul is in fact echoing Amos 7:14–15.

Messiah as God's Son.⁵ To emphasize the close relationship between the Father and the Son, Paul further describes the Father as the one "who raised him from the dead" (τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν).⁶ Whereas in the Old Testament God is often identified as the one "who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" (Exod 20:2), he is now identified as the one "who raised [Christ] from the dead" to restore his people from exile through the promised new exodus (Jer 16:14–15; 23:7–8; Ezek 37:1–14).⁷ At the heart of Paul's gospel was the resurrection of Christ; without it our faith is worthless and we as believers "should be pitied more than anyone" (1 Cor 15:17b–19). The resurrection of Jesus signaled that the last days had begun (Acts 2:14–40). Regardless, it was as a result of his resurrection that Christ commissioned apostles, including Paul (Acts 9:1–18), to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth.

By emphasizing the divine origin of his apostolic calling, Paul appears to be responding to criticism by his opponents in Galatia. Perhaps they argued that his apostolic calling originated with human beings (whether the apostolic circle in Jerusalem or the sending church of Antioch) and was mediated through a human being (again, perhaps the Jerusalem apostles, or Peter in particular). As such, Paul's authority was not on the same level as that of Peter and the rest of the Jerusalem apostles. But as Paul will further explain in 1:15–16, his apostolic calling came directly from Jesus Christ, whom the Father raised from the dead.

Paul's self-description reminds us that every believer's identity is ultimately determined by God, not ourselves. Although we are not apostles, God has shaped our identity by raising Christ from the dead and uniting us with his risen Son by faith. Regardless of who we were before we knew Christ, because we have been crucified and raised with Christ, we have a new identity (Gal 2:19–20; compare Rom 6:1–11).

1:2. Before identifying the recipients, Paul mentions "all the brothers who are with me" (οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοὶ). Since Paul is not

⁵ de Boer, *Galatians*, 25.

⁶ Das (*Galatians*, 78) notes the similarity of this phrase to a set of Jewish prayers known as the *Amidah* (also known as the *Eighteen Benedictions*), dating from the first century, which in part reads: "Thou art mighty ... that liveth for ever, that raiseth the dead ... that quickeneth the dead ... Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who quickenest the dead!"

⁷ Roy E. Ciampa, *The Presence and Function of Scripture in Galatians 1 and 2*, WUNT 102 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 46. Thus the mention of the resurrection here may foreshadow the return from exile and second exodus motifs that appear later in the letter; see further Biblical Theology §1.2.

more specific, we can only guess to whom he refers. If he writes this letter before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:6–29), Paul may be referring to “Barnabas and some others” who went with him from Antioch to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). If so, however, why not specifically mention Barnabas, whom the Galatians clearly know (Gal 2:2)?⁸ In light of the uncertainty, it seems best to see a general reference to other believers who share Paul’s understanding of the gospel and acknowledge his apostolic authority. Describing these believers as “brothers” (ἀδελφοί) also reminds the Galatians that they are part of the same spiritual family regardless of their physical proximity, a theme that is central to the letter.

Paul identifies the recipients as “the churches of Galatia” (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας). As used in Greco-Roman literature, ἐκκλησία referred to an assembly, or more specifically “a regularly summoned legislative body.”⁹ More importantly, the LXX often uses it to refer to the assembled people of God, especially when they are gathered for worship (e.g., Deut 4:10; 23:2–9; 2 Chr 1:2–5; 6:3–13).¹⁰ In the New Testament ἐκκλησία consistently refers to a specific group of believers in a particular location, though there are places where it has the broader sense of the people of God more universally considered (e.g., Eph 1:22; 3:10; Col 1:18, 24).¹¹ The plural here in 1:2 clearly indicates that specific congregations are in view.

The specific congregations that make up “the churches of Galatia” are those Paul and Barnabas established during their so-called first missionary journey in the towns of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13:1–14:28).¹² As the accounts in Acts make clear, Paul faced persecution of some kind at every stop. In Pisidian Antioch the Jews incited leading people of the city to drive Paul and his team out (13:50).

⁸ Longenecker (*Galatians*, 5–6) suggests that the brothers mentioned here are leaders of the church in Antioch. The reason that Paul doesn’t mention Barnabas is because of his failure during the Antioch incident (2:11–13); see further Bauckham, “Barnabas in Galatians,” 61–72.

⁹ BDAG s.v. ἐκκλησία 1.

¹⁰ In the LXX ἐκκλησία consistently translates לְהִקָּרָא, which often refers to the congregation of Israel assembled for divine worship (*HALOT* s.v. 1 לְהִקָּרָא.g).

¹¹ For more on the people of God in Galatians, see *Biblical Theology* §7.2.

¹² On the identity of these churches, see the Introduction, 2–6. The possibility that additional churches are included cannot be ruled out, since Acts is likely not comprehensive. Furthermore, since Paul’s practice was to proclaim the gospel in urban areas and then send out associates to smaller localities within the region, it is possible that additional cities may have been reached with the gospel.

Jews and gentiles joined together in Iconium to try to stone them, but Paul and his team fled before they could (14:5–6). In Lystra they managed to stone Paul and drag him out of the city, leaving him for dead (14:19). No wonder Paul told the disciples in these various cities when he passed back through that “it is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22)!

The resurrection of Jesus has not only brought in the last days, but created the eschatological people of God as well. Every local congregation is a particular expression of that larger people, strategically placed by God to be an outpost of his kingdom in this fallen world called to live worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27).

1:3. Now that the author and the recipients have been identified, Paul proceeds to the greeting. In Greek the standard greeting was *χαίρειν* (compare Acts 15:23; Jas 1:1), and Paul appears to have adapted this when he consistently uses *χάρις* (“grace”) in the greeting of his letters.¹³ Grace is one of the key motifs in Paul’s theology, as it encompasses God’s kindness shown to us in Christ despite our persistent rebellion against him. Not only have we been saved by grace, but God intends to display the riches of his grace to us for all eternity (Eph 2:4–7). Because the grace of God has appeared in Jesus Christ, we are empowered to obey God as we await the return of “our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11–13). Thus God’s grace is no mere static disposition of his character, but a dynamic power that achieves God’s purposes for his people.¹⁴ From first to last and every point in between, the Christian life is immersed based entirely on the grace of God shown to us in the gospel. Thus when Paul writes “grace to you” he is not only affirming that grace has already come to the Galatians but he is indirectly praying for them to experience fresh outpourings of grace in their lives as individuals and as a body.

Not only does Paul indirectly pray for fresh measures of grace, but peace (*εἰρήνη*) as well. This in turn may be an adaptation of the standard Jewish greeting “shalom” (*שָׁלוֹם*). Far more than a subjective feeling of calm, peace refers to the restored relationship that believers have with God because we have been justified by faith (Rom 5:1). Understood against

¹³ If, as I believe, Galatians is Paul’s first extant letter, it is worth noting that his standard salutation is established at the outset (see the other similar salutations in Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm 1:3).

¹⁴ Dunn, *Galatians*, 31.

its Old Testament background, peace is a one-word theological shorthand for the final state of well-being that will result from Yahweh's promised salvation. In particular, Isaiah 40–66 stands out as a significant framework for Paul's understanding of peace.¹⁵ The heralds sent out to preach the gospel proclaim peace (Isa 52:7), which is accomplished by the suffering of the Servant (Isa 53:5). The result of the Servant's work is a covenant of peace (Isa 54:10) that produces peace for God's people (Isa 54:13). When God consummates his purposes for human history, he will make peace flow like a river (Isa 66:12). Now that the suffering servant Jesus Christ has become our peace, we not only have peace with God but with fellow believers regardless of their ethnicity (Eph 2:11–22).¹⁶ Peace is the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Rom 8:6; Gal 5:22) and yet something that we should actively pursue (Rom 12:18; 14:19). Thus peace has an already/not-yet dynamic—it is something that God has already given to us, yet we still await its full consummation in a new heavens and new earth.

This combination of grace and peace may have its roots in another Old Testament passage: Numbers 6:25–26 (LXX).¹⁷ As part of the blessing that Aaron was to pronounce over the people of Israel, he was instructed to say, “May the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace.” The grace that God has shown us in Jesus Christ has changed us from rebels to sons and daughters who are at peace with God and each other. Together these two words form “a prayer which recognizes God as the source of the enabling (‘grace’) to live in mutually productive and beneficial harmony (‘peace’).”¹⁸

This grace and peace is “from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).¹⁹ In other words, God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ work together to provide us with the

¹⁵ See further Matthew S. Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free: Paul's Isaianic Gospel in Galatians*, BZNW 168 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 52–55.

¹⁶ Note that in this passage Paul combines citations of Isa 57:19 and Isa 52:7; see the discussion in Thorsten Moritz, *A Profound Mystery: The Use of the Old Testament in Ephesians* (New York: Brill, 1996), 23–55.

¹⁷ Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 48.

¹⁸ Dunn, *Galatians*, 32.

¹⁹ Here the CSB departs from the NA²⁸, which reads “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. ESV). Both readings are well supported, and a definitive decision is difficult. For a helpful summary of the textual witnesses, see Moo, *Galatians*, 74. The difference in meaning is negligible.

grace and peace we so desperately need.²⁰ Our familiarity with passages like this often blinds us to the profound statement Paul is making. Central to Judaism was the confession known as the *Shema*: “Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4). Yet in 1 Corinthians 8:6 Paul reinterprets this confession in light of Christ: “Yet for us there is one God, the Father. All things are from him, and we exist for him. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ. All things are through him, and we exist through him.” As Bauckham observes, “Thus, in Paul’s quite unprecedented reformulation of the *Shema*, the unique identity of the one God *consists* of the one God, the Father, *and* the one Lord, his Messiah.”²¹ The Father and Son work in concert to extend grace to God’s covenant people. By identifying Jesus as Lord, Paul is both affirming his identity as Yahweh and asserting Jesus’ universal dominion over all creation originally intended for Adam.²²

Regardless of our circumstances, as believers we can live in the joy that comes from knowing that God’s grace and peace rest upon us. Yet we also live with the eager anticipation of the full realization of that grace and peace when God consummates the new creation (Rom 8:19–25).

1:4. Having concluded the previous verse by mentioning “our Lord Jesus Christ,” Paul now describes what he did. Christ “gave himself for our sins” (τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν).²³ Paul uses the language of Isaiah 53 to describe the sacrificial death of Jesus for the sins of his people, probably with verse 10 particularly in view: “Yet the LORD was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and by his hand, the LORD’s pleasure will be accomplished.”²⁴ Within its original context, the

²⁰ The preposition ἀπό here indicates “the originator of the action” referred to (BDAG s.v. ἀπό 5.d).

²¹ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament’s Christology of Divine Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 28.

²² So Dunn, *Galatians*, 33. He suggests that the frequent allusions to Psa 8:6 and Psa 110:1 in the NT link the title Lord to Adam’s dominion over creation (compare 1 Cor 15:25–27).

²³ Instead of ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν some manuscripts read περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν. Although the external evidence is fairly even, the internal evidence favors ὑπὲρ as the original text; see further Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free*, 61n58.

²⁴ For more on this allusion, see Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free*, 56–66. The key phrase is “when you make him a guilt offering,” which in the LXX shares similar language to Galatians 1:4. Others have suggested different verses from Isaiah 53 as the source of Paul’s language. But the larger point of an allusion to Isaiah 53 is widely recognized even if scholars disagree on the particular verse. Oakes (*Galatians*, 40) suggests that the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) may also be in the background here. Another possibility is that Paul draws from an

fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13–53:12) explains the way in which God will accomplish the new exodus—through the death and resurrection of the suffering servant.²⁵ By suffering for the sins of his people, the Servant will justify them (Isa 53:11), restore the marriage between God and his people (Isa 54:4–8), and establish a new covenant with them (Isa 54:10; compare Jer 31:31–34). By using the language of Isaiah 53, Paul presents Jesus Christ as the promised suffering servant who has accomplished the new exodus through his death and resurrection. As such he anticipates his argument in Galatians 4:1–7, where new exodus language takes center stage in his argument.

This is not the only place Paul borrows language from Isaiah 53 to explain that Christ suffered the punishment that we deserved for our sins. By describing the work of Jesus in the language of the suffering servant here in the opening of the letter, Paul anticipates the key role that the crucifixion of Jesus plays at various points later in Galatians, several of which allude to Isaiah 53 as well.²⁶ Elsewhere in his letters Paul uses a form of either δίδωμι (“to give”) or παραδίδωμι (“to hand over”) to describe the self-sacrificial nature of Christ several times (e.g., Rom 4:25; 8:32; Eph 5:2, 25; 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:14), which likely stems from his understanding of Isaiah 53. This language emphasizes that, far from being a tragic accident (compare Acts 2:2–24), Christ as the Good Shepherd freely and willingly laid down his life for the sins of his people and took it up again (John 10:14–18). Without this glorious reality, there is no gospel (1 Cor 15:1–19).

In claiming that Christ gave himself for our sins (τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν), Paul highlights two things. First, our rebellion against God is so heinous that it required the horrific death of Jesus to reconcile us to him. Throughout Galatians Paul uses several different words to describe our alienation from God, many of which overlap in meaning.²⁷ The noun ἁμαρτία is a general term that refers to an offense against God, something that violates his character or his revealed will. By using the plural, Paul

early Jewish-Christian Christological confession; see Richard B. Hays, “Galatians,” in *New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 203.

²⁵ See Rikki E. Watts, “Consolation or Confrontation? Isaiah 40–55 and the Delay of the New Exodus,” *TynBul* 41 (1990): 31–59.

²⁶ See, e.g., Gal 1:10; 2:20; 3:2, 5, 13, 16; 4:1–7. For a helpful discussion of how Paul develops this theme of Jesus’ crucifixion in Galatians, see Robert A. Bryant, *The Risen Crucified Christ in Galatians*, SBLDS (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 163–94.

²⁷ For more on the ways that Paul describes humanity apart from Christ in Galatians, see *Biblical Theology* §7.1.

may have in view particular acts of sin that subject us to God's righteous judgment.²⁸ Second, by using the pronoun "our" (ἡμῶν), Paul captures both our personal responsibility for our rebellion against God, as well as the specific nature of Christ's work. In other words, Christ died for my sins as an individual believer, and our sins as the eschatological people of God, not merely for sin in general.

The purpose of Christ's self-sacrificial death for our sins comes in the next clause: "to rescue us from this present evil age" (ὅπως ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ).²⁹ Although the verb Paul uses here (ἐξαίρέω) can have the generic sense of "rescue," it is also used with specific reference to the exodus (Exod 3:8; 18:4, 8, 9, 10; Judg 6:9; Acts 7:9, 34) and eschatological salvation (Isa 31:5; 60:16; Ezek 34:27).³⁰ In Isaiah 40–66 this verb often highlights the contrast between impotent idols and Yahweh as the only one who can truly deliver God's people in a new exodus from their bondage to sin (Isa 42:22; 43:13; 44:17, 20; 47:14; 48:10; 50:2; 57:13; 60:16). Just as the original exodus was the definitive act of redemption in the Old Testament, so the cross (which, as we will see later in Gal 4:1–7, is portrayed as a new exodus) is the definitive act of redemption in the New Testament. The "us" that are rescued are believers, Jew and gentile alike.

The realm from which believers are rescued is "this present evil age" (τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ). The present evil age was a Jewish way of referring to the current time period that was dominated by sin, death, and the devil as a result of the fall. On the day of the LORD the Messiah would come and bring about the age to come (compare Eph 2:7), when God would consummate all his promises to his people through his Messiah and usher in a new heavens and new earth where all remnants of sin, death, and the curse were gone forever. The defining mark of this age to come would be the gift of the Holy Spirit to all of God's people.

²⁸ Alternatively, Paul may have in view the sins of the community considered as a whole; see Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 60n100.

²⁹ When used with a subjunctive verb, the conjunction ὅπως indicates purpose (BDAG 2.a.α).

³⁰ On this verb, see François Bovon, "Une formule prépaulinienne dans l'épître aux Galates (Ga 1, 4–5)," in *Paganisme, judaïsme, christianisme: Influences et affrontements dans le monde antique: Mélanges offerts à Marcel Simon*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Paris: Éditions E. de Boccard, 1978), 97–105.

The advent of Jesus Christ inaugurated the age to come but did not consummate the end of the present evil age. Thus believers participate in the age to come while still living in a world under the present evil age. So when Paul says that Christ rescued us from this present evil age, he means that believers are no longer slaves to the powers that dominated the present evil age.³¹

This rescue from the present evil age was accomplished “according to the will of our God and Father” (κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν). The preposition κατὰ indicates that the will of God the Father was the norm/standard that governed Christ’s redemption of his people.³² By mentioning the will of God, Paul reinforces that the self-sacrificial death of Jesus the suffering servant was the predetermined plan of God long before it happened (Isa 53:10; Acts 2:22–24).

This is now the third time in these opening verses that God has been identified as “Father.” By using this title Paul may be drawing on Old Testament passages that consistently link the fatherhood of God to either the original exodus from Egypt or the promise of a second exodus.³³ Consider, for example, Jeremiah 31:9: “They will come weeping, but I will bring them back with consolation. I will lead them to wadis filled with water, by a smooth way where they will not stumble, for I am Israel’s Father, and Ephraim is my firstborn.” An additional possibility is that Paul is drawing on Jewish traditions stemming from 2 Samuel 7:14 that anticipated God “adopting” the Messiah and his people in the age of restoration.³⁴ In any case, the association between God as Father and the redemption of his people likely serves as the background of Paul’s emphasis on the fatherhood of God in 1:1–5.

By mentioning both the resurrection (1:1) and crucifixion (1:4) of Jesus, Paul is highlighting the redemptive work of Jesus as the long promised new exodus and the inauguration of the age to come. The suffering

³¹ For more on the present evil age, see Biblical Theology §1.3.1.

³² See BDAG s.v. κατὰ 5.a.a. This is the first of several occurrences of κατὰ with this sense in Galatians (e.g., 2:2; 3:29; 4:23, 28–29).

³³ Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 40–44. In addition to Jer 31:9, see Exod 4:22; Deut 32:5–20, 36–43; Isa 1:2; 63:16; 64:4–12; Jer 3:12–19; Hos 11:1–11.

³⁴ James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Υιοθεσία in the Pauline Corpus*, WUNT 48 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), 96–117.

servant has come at last to lead his people out of their bondage to the powers of this present evil age into the eschatological grace and peace foretold in the Old Testament.

1:5. The only appropriate response to Christ giving himself for the sins of his people is worship, so it should not be surprising that Paul erupts in doxology: “To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (ὡς ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν).³⁵ In Greek this sentence has no verb; woodenly it reads “to him glory”; so in English a verb must be supplied. Although it makes little difference in meaning, on the whole it seems more likely that it should be rendered “to him is the glory” rather than “to him be the glory” based on the parallel expression in 1 Peter 4:11.³⁶ Glory (δόξα) refers to the visible display of God’s character and fame. All that God does is ultimately motivated by his commitment to displaying his glory (Rom 11:33–36).

Such glory is to be ascribed to God “forever and ever” or, more woodenly, “into the ages of ages” (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων). Although it is understandable why nearly all English translations render it “forever and ever,” doing so prevents the English reader from connecting this expression (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων) to the “present evil age” (τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ) in the previous verse. The point is that God’s glory will be recognized in every age, regardless of how many ages there are! Adding “amen” to the end of this clause adds a final solemn note of “let it be so.” It invites the reader to echo this resolve to see God glorified for all eternity.

The display and recognition of God’s glory is the ultimate goal of all that God has done in creation and redemption. God is working all things toward the day when every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11). As we await that day, God commands us that whatever we do, “in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17). But he does not leave us to our own strength; God provides the Spirit to empower us to “put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). Yet when we inevitably sin, God displays his unique glory by forgiving our sin without compromising his justice (Exod 34:6–7;

³⁵ That this doxology is found word for word also in 4 Macc 18:24; 2 Tim 4:18; and Heb 13:21 may suggest this was “a well-known liturgical formula in the ancient Jewish and Christian communities” (Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 63–64).

³⁶ See BDF 128.5. Moo (*Galatians*, 74) suggests that Paul may have had both in mind.

Rom 3:21–26). No wonder Paul exclaims in Romans 11:36 that “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” By inviting the Galatians to say “amen,” Paul displays “his conviction that his own words can and will become the active word of God, because God will be present as the letter is read to the Galatians in their services of worship.”³⁷

Bridge

“Who am I?” is one of the fundamental questions in life. The world around us seeks to define who we are based on status, wealth, privilege, and pedigree. Our sinful hearts tempt us to seek our identity in these and other dead ends. But as believers, our identity is determined by God himself. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are brothers and sisters in the family of God, recipients of God’s grace and peace. Jesus Christ the suffering servant has delivered us from our slavery to sin and the powers of this present evil age and led us in the new exodus the Old Testament prophets had foretold. As a result, we are the eschatological people of God who live to glorify God in all that we say, think, do, and feel. That is our identity as believers. Is that how you think of yourself? Is that how you view your fellow believers? The extent to which we embrace this identity in large part determines our experience of the joy that comes from knowing the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.

B. PAUL’S ASTONISHMENT AND THE DANGER OF DEPARTING FROM THE TRUE GOSPEL (1:6–10)

⁶I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!⁹ As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

³⁷ Martyn, *Galatians*, 106.

Context

Instead of the customary thanksgiving section that normally follows the Pauline greeting, the apostle expresses his deep concern for the Galatians. For the first time Paul mentions the opponents stirring up trouble in Galatia who are distorting the true gospel the apostle preached to them. This tension between the true gospel preached by Paul and the distorted “gospel” (which is in fact no gospel at all!) proclaimed by the opponents establishes the larger context for the letter. It prompts Paul to explain how the gospel he received through a revelation of Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, the means by which a person is declared righteous before God, the end of the Mosaic law covenant, and the inauguration of the promised new creation in which the eschatological people of God (composed of Jew and gentile) are indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit (2:14–6:10). Any who depart from this one true gospel—regardless of who they are—stand under God’s curse. And it is this one true gospel that has made Paul a servant of Jesus Christ, the suffering servant.

Structure

There are three smaller units within this paragraph.³⁸ First, Paul begins with a statement of astonishment that the Galatians are so quickly abandoning the one true gospel for a different gospel that is in fact no gospel at all (1:6–7). Second, using two conditional clauses, Paul then explains that anyone (even if it is he or an angel from heaven!) who preaches a different gospel is under God’s curse (1:8–9). Finally, the apostle concludes the paragraph with an assertion that he is not a people-pleaser but a servant of Christ (1:10). The sharp tone of this paragraph establishes the dire situation in Galatia and prepares the reader for Paul’s robust defense of the true gospel in contrast to the false teaching of his opponents.

1:6. After greeting the recipients of the letter, Paul typically moves to a section where he thanks God for the fruit that the gospel has produced in them.³⁹ But he is so concerned about the situation in the Galatian

³⁸ See similarly de Boer, *Galatians*, 37–38.

³⁹ Every other Pauline Letter except for Titus contains a section where Paul thanks God (Rom 1:8–15; 1 Cor 1:4–9; Eph 1:15–23; Phil 1:3–8; Col 1:3–8; 1 Thess 1:2–10; 2 Thess 1:3–10; 1 Tim 1:12–17; 2 Tim 1:3–7; Phlm 4–7) or praises God (2 Cor 1:3–14) near the beginning, usually with a form of the verb εὐχαριστέω. By itself the absence of a thanksgiving section

churches that he suddenly launches right into a rebuke.⁴⁰ Paul begins by stating “I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away” (Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε). By itself the verb rendered “I am amazed” (θαυμάζω) is neutral; only the context can determine whether the amazement or wonder is in a good or bad sense. Thus in the Gospels it often expresses the wonder of the disciples or the crowds at the words or works of Jesus (e.g., Matt 8:27; 9:33; 22:22; Luke 9:43; John 7:15, 21). Here in 1:6, however, the context clearly shows that Paul’s amazement expresses his shock, frustration, and disappointment with the Galatians.⁴¹

That amazement is rooted in the fact that “you are so quickly turning away” (οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε). In this context the verb “turn away” (μετατίθημι) has the sense of “to have a change of mind in allegiance.”⁴² It was sometimes used in philosophical discussions to refer to someone who turned away from one philosopher/philosophy to another. For example, the third-century author Diogenes Laërtius used this verb to refer to “one who runs from one philosophical school to another.”⁴³ Closer to Paul’s day, 2 Maccabees 7:24 recounts the efforts of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV to persuade a Jewish man to “turn from the ways of his fathers [μεταθέμενον ἀπὸ τῶν πατρῶν]” and embrace Greek life, culture, and thought.⁴⁴ The present tense of the verb, along with the larger context here in 1:6, suggest that the “turning away” is an ongoing process. Thus, from Paul’s perspective, the Galatians are not merely tweaking or improving Paul’s gospel message, but they are in the process of turning away from the gospel to another system of thought and way of life altogether.

does not necessarily signal Paul’s consternation, but replacing it with a stinging rebuke certainly does!

⁴⁰ Betz (*Galatians*, 46–47) suggests that Paul uses here a rhetorical device common in law courts and politics, designed to rebut and attack the actions of an opposition party. The suddenness of the rebuke is further intensified by the lack of a particle or conjunction that connects this sentence with the previous one, a feature known as *asyndeton*. Besides signaling emphasis, *asyndeton* can be used to indicate a sudden change in topic as it does here; see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 658.

⁴¹ Paul may be drawing from rebuke letters of his day, in which authors often used the verb θαυμάζω “to shame the recipients into adopting a new course of action” (Das, *Galatians*, 99).

⁴² BDAG s.v. μετατίθημι 3.

⁴³ Christian Maurer, “μετατίθημι, μετάθεσις” in *TDNT* 8:161.

⁴⁴ It would be quite ironic if Paul had this text in mind, since the Galatians are turning away from the gospel to embrace “the ways of the fathers” (i.e., distinctively Jewish markers such as circumcision, food laws, etc.)!

From Paul’s perspective this turning away has happened “so quickly” (οὕτως ταχέως).⁴⁵ The adverb rendered “quickly” (ταχέως) refers to “a very brief extent of time, with focus on speed of action.”⁴⁶ If indeed Paul is writing to the churches planted during his first missionary journey (Acts 13:6–14:28)—in cities such as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—shortly before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–21), less than a year had passed between the time he left these churches and received news of their turning away.⁴⁷ So quickly indeed!

The remainder of the verse specifies who/what the Galatians are turning from and what they are turning to. They are turning away “from him who called you by the grace of Christ” (ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ]). By turning away from the gospel that Paul preached, the Galatians were in fact turning away from the living God himself. It was through the true gospel that God “called” (καλέσαντος) the Galatians to himself. Paul regularly uses the verb καλέω (along with its cognate noun κλησις and adjective κλητός) to describe the effectual summons of God, whether to a relationship with him or to a task to be accomplished.⁴⁸ He may have drawn this theological sense of the word from its use in Isaiah 40–66 (LXX), “where it becomes closely equivalent to ‘choose’ (and commission) [Isa 41:8–9; 42:6; 43:1; 45:3–4; 48:12; 49:1; 51:2].”⁴⁹

This calling took place “by the grace of Christ” (ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ]), or perhaps more likely “in the grace of Christ.”⁵⁰ The realm in which God’s call took place is that of “grace” (χάρις), God’s undeserved goodness and kindness. Although the term occurs just seven times in Galatians, grace is

⁴⁵ The first adverb (οὕτως, “so”) intensifies the force of the second (ταχέως, “quickly”).

⁴⁶ BDAG s.v. ταχέως 1.a.β.

⁴⁷ For discussion of the dates and timetable, see Introduction, 2–10.

⁴⁸ See, e.g., Rom 8:30; 9:11, 24; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 4:1, 4; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 2:13–14. This is no mere invitation, but an act of God in which he provides the recipient with the desire and ability to respond. See further *NIDNTT* 1:275.

⁴⁹ Dunn, *Galatians*, 40. For more on the Isaianic background of καλέω, see *TDNT* 3:490. Ciampa (*Presence and Function*, 78–79) suggests that in light of the exodus overtones present in Galatians, Hosea 11:1–2 may serve as background here as well.

⁵⁰ The prepositional phrase ἐν χάριτι [Χριστοῦ] can be understood in at least three different ways: (1) adverbially, “graciously” (BDAG s.v. ἐν, 11); (2) instrumental, “by the grace of Christ” (Longenecker, *Galatians*, 15; *CSB*) or (3) sphere/realms, “in the sphere/realms of the grace of Christ” (e.g., Betz, *Galatians*, 48; Das, *Galatians*, 102). In a twist on this final option, Moo (*Galatians*, 77, 85–86) translates this expression “to live in the grace of Christ,” arguing that “Paul’s point here is to remind the Galatians that God has called them to *continue to live* and to *remain* in the grace associated with the decisive, epoch-changing Christ event.”

an important theme in this letter written to counteract the false teaching that insists individuals must add works to what God has done for us in Christ. Paul makes this clear by referring to this as the grace “of Christ” (Χριστοῦ).⁵¹ Writing to the Corinthians, Paul states, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: Though he was rich, for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). All of God’s blessings come to his people through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and his work on our behalf.

In turning away from the God who called them in the grace of Christ, the Galatians are turning “to a different gospel” (εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον). The Greek noun for “gospel” (εὐαγγέλιον) and the cognate verb “preach the gospel” (εὐαγγελίζω) are key terms in the letter, appearing a combined fourteen times.⁵² The early Christians used this word family as a summary term for the message of what God had done for his people in Christ and the proclamation of that message. Paul seems especially dependent on the use of this word family in Isaiah 40–66, where it refers to God establishing his reign over all the nations through the redemptive work of the servant of Yahweh.⁵³ According to Paul, the message of the false teachers is fundamentally “different” (ἕτερος) from the gospel he proclaimed. It is not even a distant cousin of his gospel, but rather from another family entirely.⁵⁴

⁵¹ The word Χριστοῦ is missing from a few of the earliest manuscripts of Galatians (P⁴⁶vid F^{vid} G H) and references in some of the early church fathers (Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrosiaster, Pelagius). But its presence in other early witnesses (P⁵¹ ⳨ A B F^c Ψ) as well as a number of later manuscripts tips the scales of the external evidence in favor of its inclusion. The internal evidence further supports Χριστοῦ as the original text, since every other place in Paul’s letters where χάρις is modified by a reference to Christ in the genitive reads either “Lord Jesus Christ” or “Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; 13:13; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; 1 Tim 1:14; Phlm 25). The uniqueness of the expression here (“grace of Christ”) makes it unlikely that a scribe added Χριστοῦ but possible that some scribes omitted it because it was unprecedented elsewhere in Paul (so Moo, *Galatians*, 86). See also the discussion in Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002), 520–21.

⁵² For εὐαγγέλιον, see 1:6, 7, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14; εὐαγγελίζω occurs in 1:8 (2x), 9, 11, 16, 23; 4:13; and προεὐαγγελίζομαι in 3:8.

⁵³ On the Isaianic background to εὐαγγέλιον/εὐαγγελίζω, see Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free*, 67–70. Bruce (*Galatians*, 81–82) singles out Isa 61:1 (LXX) as especially important for the NT background.

⁵⁴ Not only does the context suggest this, but the use of the adjective ἕτερος may also. In some contexts, ἕτερος has the sense of “being dissimilar in kind or class from all other

Paul's language here suggests the possibility that the events in Galatia remind him of the golden calf incident in Exodus 32–34.⁵⁵ Not long after God sealed his covenant with the Israelites at Mount Sinai (Exod 24:1–11), the Israelites “turned aside quickly out of the way” that Yahweh commanded them and made a golden calf to worship (Exod 32:8 *ESV*; compare Deut 9:16). Just as the Israelites' departure from the way of Yahweh jeopardized their status as the people of God, so now, if the Galatians depart from the God who called them in the grace of Christ, their status as the new covenant people of God is jeopardized.

As believers today, we are just as susceptible to turning away from the God who called us. Even though we have been born again and have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us, the sinful inclination to turn away from God to other things remains until Christ returns or we die. As long as we cling to the person and work of Jesus Christ as our only hope to stand before a holy God, we can be confident that despite our being prone to wander, God will bring us safely home to his heavenly courts.

1:7. Lest his reference to “another gospel” in the previous verse be misunderstood, Paul hastens to qualify “not that there is another gospel” (ὁ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο).⁵⁶ Regardless of what the false teachers claimed, their message of faith in Christ plus keeping the Mosaic law was not good news at all.⁵⁷ Paul makes it clear from this opening salvo that the issue in Galatia

entities” (BDAG 2). Thus, for example, Paul uses this adjective in 1 Cor 15:40 to distinguish between the splendor of heavenly bodies and that of earthly ones.

⁵⁵ See especially Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 71–78. According to Exodus 32:8 (LXX), the Israelites turned away “quickly” (ταχὺ) from the way God commanded them. Longenecker (*Galatians*, 14) notes a possible link to Judges 2:17 (LXX), which notes that during the period of the judges the Israelites “quickly” (ταχὺ) turned away from the way of their fathers.

⁵⁶ Some (e.g., Burton, *Galatians*, 420–22; Bruce, *Galatians*, 80–81; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 15; George, *Galatians*, 93) have argued that Paul draws a subtle but important distinction by his choice of vocabulary in 1:6–7. In 1:6 he refers to a “different” (ἕτερον) gospel, whereas in 1:7 he speaks of “another” (ἄλλο) gospel. In some contexts, ἕτερος has the sense of “another of a different kind,” whereas ἄλλος can mean “another of the same kind”; for examples, see MM, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), 257. But in several places Paul uses ἕτερος and ἄλλος interchangeably (see, e.g., 1 Cor 12:8–10; 2 Cor 11:4), making a hard and fast distinction unlikely here in Gal 1:6–7. After a helpful survey of the data, Moo (*Galatians*, 86–87) rightly concludes: “The difference in vv. 6 and 7 is not ‘different in kind’ versus ‘another of the same kind,’ but ‘a gospel in contrast to the true gospel’ or ‘a competing gospel’ versus simply ‘another.’”

⁵⁷ For a summary of the false teachers' message, see Introduction, 15–21. That Paul uses the word “some” (τινές) may indicate his uncertainty as to the identity of these false teachers.

is not one on which believers can reasonably disagree; the very nature of the Christian faith is at stake.

At this point Paul makes his first specific reference to the false teachers, and he describes them in two ways.⁵⁸ First, he refers to them as the ones “who are troubling you” (οἱ ταρασσοῦντες ὑμᾶς). Although the verb ταρασσω can mean literally to stir or shake something (e.g., John 5:7), the figurative meaning of “cause inward turmoil” is far more common in the New Testament.⁵⁹ These opponents are doing more than merely confusing the Galatians; “they are frightening them out of their wits, intimidating them with the threat of damnation” if they do not follow their teachings.⁶⁰ Notably this is the same verb used in Acts 15:24. To communicate their decision that gentiles did not need to keep the Mosaic law in order to be saved (cf. Acts 15:1), the Jerusalem apostles in their letter to the gentile churches identify the problem as people who “went out from us and troubled [ἐτάραξαν] you with their words” (Acts 15:24). No doubt Paul would have agreed with the words of Sirach 28:9: “a sinful man will disturb [ταράξει] friends and inject enmity among those who are at peace.”

More intriguing is the possibility that Paul is echoing the story of Achan, who in 1 Chronicles 2:7 is referred to as the one “who brought trouble on Israel when he was unfaithful by taking the things set apart for destruction.”⁶¹ While it is legitimate to wonder whether the Galatians would have noticed such a subtle echo, there should be little question that, as a man steeped in the Jewish Scriptures, Paul may have seen the false teachers in Galatia as modern-day Achans who, through their departure from the gospel, threatened to bring the Galatians under God’s curse (see Gal 1:8–9).

Second, these false teachers “want to distort the gospel of Christ” (θέλοντες μεταστρέψαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ).⁶² While it appears

⁵⁸ Paul signals the close relationship between these two descriptions by using one definite article to govern these two present active participles (οἱ ταρασσοῦντες ... καὶ θέλοντες).

⁵⁹ BDAG 2. In some secular writings the term can refer to political unrest (LSJM).

⁶⁰ Martyn, *Galatians*, 112.

⁶¹ See Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 79–82. While it is true that neither 1 Chr 2:7 nor the account of Achan’s sin in Joshua 7 use the verb ταρασσω, Ciampa demonstrates how pervasive the association between Achan and trouble was within the Jewish tradition, as well as the typological connection between exodus and conquest within Jewish literature. Furthermore, it should be noted that 1 Chr 2:7 does use the word ἀνάθεμα, which is prominent in Gal 1:8–9.

⁶² The genitive τοῦ Χριστοῦ is probably objective; i.e., the gospel about Christ.

that the false teachers presented themselves as adding to or completing what Paul taught, the apostle sees it as an attempt to “distort” (μεταστρέφω) the gospel. The only other New Testament occurrence of μεταστρέφω is in Acts 2:20, where in quoting from Joel 3:4 (ET=2:31) the apostle refers to sun being “turned into darkness.” In the LXX the verb is often used in contexts where the change is sudden, unexpected, or even dramatic. Consider, for example, Deuteronomy 23:5: “Yet the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam, but he turned the curse into a blessing for you because the LORD your God loves you.”⁶³ Far from improving Paul’s message, the false teachers were distorting it into something entirely different.

False teachers troubling God’s people by distorting the gospel are just as dangerous today as they were in Paul’s day. Regardless of whether it is the more obvious errors of cults such as the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses or the more subtle lures of the prosperity gospel, every generation faces the danger of troublemakers who distort the gospel for their own ends. Jesus himself promised that this present evil age would be characterized by false teachers (Matt 24:10), so we must remain vigilant to protect the purity of the true gospel.

1:8. To make it clear that his attack on the false teachers is not personal, Paul poses a hypothetical situation in the form of an “if ... then” statement to illustrate the final authority of the gospel itself rather than any person or angel.⁶⁴ At issue is anyone who “should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you” (εὐαγγελίζεται ὑμῖν) παρ’ ὃ εὐηγγελισάμεθα ὑμῖν).⁶⁵ Thus Paul has in view any message that contradicts the gospel he originally preached to the Galatians.

It does not matter whether “we” (i.e., Paul and his ministry associates) or “an angel from heaven” (ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ) proclaim this different gospel.⁶⁶ As Dunn notes, “the angelic interpreter was a standard element

⁶³ See further examples in Exod 14:5; 1 Sam 10:9; 1 Macc 9:41; 3 Macc 5:8; Pss 65:6 (ET=66:6); 77:44 (ET=78:44); 104:29 (ET=105:29); Amos 8:10.

⁶⁴ Paul uses a third-class conditional statement, which raises a hypothetical for consideration without indicating how likely the hypothetical actually is. The ἀλλά that introduce this verse introduces additional information for further consideration; see David Arthur DeSilva, *Galatians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 8.

⁶⁵ The textual evidence for the presence (ℵ² A 81. 104. 326. 1241 d; Tert^{pt} Ambst) and absence (ℵ* F G Ψ ar b g; Mcion^t Tert^{pt} Lcf Cyp) of ὑμῖν in this clause is evenly split; see the discussion in Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 121.

⁶⁶ Some see the “we” here as a stylistic device (“editorial we”) Paul uses to refer to himself alone (so Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 396). But the use of the emphatic pronoun ἡμεῖς

in Jewish apocalypses—the heavenly messenger (the word is the same in the Greek) who gave the stamp of heavenly authority to the message he delivered [Ezek 8:2ff.; Dan 10:5ff.; 1 Enoch 1:2ff.; 2 Enoch 1:4ff.; Apoc. Zeph. 2:1ff.; 4 Ezra 2:44ff.; 4:1ff.].”⁶⁷ Whether the false teachers were actually claiming angelic revelation is beside the point, and Paul’s language should not be pressed beyond its limits.⁶⁸ Perhaps all that Paul intends is a bit of hyperbole to emphasize that the gospel they first received from Paul is the final arbiter of what is true, and everything—even the subsequent preaching/teaching of Paul himself—was to be evaluated by it. Anything contrary to the gospel “that was delivered to the saints once for all” (Jude 3), regardless of its source, is to be rejected.

As for anyone who does preach a contrary gospel, Paul writes “a curse be on him!” (ἀνάθεμα ἔστω). The severity of departing from the gospel is reinforced by Paul’s use of the word ἀνάθεμα. While this word was used in Greco-Roman literature with a variety of senses,⁶⁹ there is little doubt that the LXX provided the backdrop for his use of it here. Of the twenty-six occurrences of ἀνάθεμα in the LXX, twenty-two of them translate a form of the root חרם.⁷⁰ Although this root can refer to something devoted to the service of the Lord (Lev 27:28), it most often refers to “a ban for utter destruction, the compulsory dedication of something which impedes or resists God’s work, which is considered to be accursed before God.”⁷¹ The paradigmatic example is Joshua 7, where Achan “took some of what was set apart [LXX τοῦ ἀναθέματος], and the LORD’s anger burned against the Israelites” (7:1). As a result, God’s anger burned against the Israelites,

along with the reference in 1:9 to a similar warning issued previously suggest Paul has his ministry team (especially Barnabas) and perhaps even “all the brothers who are with me” (1:2) in view.

⁶⁷ Dunn, *Galatians*, 45.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Martyn (*Galatians*, 113), who suggests the false teachers claimed angelic authority. Longenecker (*Galatians*, 17) reads too much into the language here when he suggests that Paul has in view the Judaizers’ claim of approval from the Jerusalem apostles.

⁶⁹ It could have the generic sense of anything devoted to the gods, the more specific sense of something that was under the curse of the gods, or even the curse itself (LSJM; *NIDNTT* 1:413). For examples of its use in Greco-Roman literature, see MM, 33 and Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, trans. Lionel Richard Mortimer Strachan (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 95–96.

⁷⁰ Of the four that do not render a form of חרם, three are not translations of Hebrew texts (Jdt 16:19; 2 Macc 2:13; 9:16). The fourth (Num 21:3) translates the name of the city of Hormah, which does come from the Hebrew root חרם.

⁷¹ *TWOT* 324–25.

and they were defeated in their next battle (7:2–5). When Joshua asks the Lord why they were defeated (7:6–9), God explains that the Israelites have broken the covenant by keeping for themselves objects set apart for destruction (7:10–15). Once Achan is revealed as the guilty party, he and his entire family are burned and stoned (7:16–26). As noted in the previous verse, Paul may have this very event in mind as he thinks of the false teachers troubling the Galatians. Like Achan before them, the false teachers were endangering God’s covenant people by departing from the one true gospel.

Paul may also have in mind the covenant curses pronounced on those who try to lead God’s people to worship other gods (Deut 13:1–18).⁷² As he reflects on the false teachers, Paul classifies them as false prophets who are trying to lead the Galatian churches to worship other gods through their different so-called gospel. Under the Mosaic covenant, the divinely appointed punishment for false prophets was to be placed under God’s ἀνάθεμα (Deut 13:12–18). Just as the Israelites faced the danger of being led away from the God who delivered them from their slavery in Egypt to worship other gods, so now the Galatians face the threat of being led away from the God who delivered them from this present evil age (Gal 1:4) to embrace another gospel.⁷³ Thus when Paul invokes “a curse” (ἀνάθεμα) on anyone proclaiming a gospel contrary to the one he first preached to the Galatians, he is asking for God’s judicial wrath to be executed.⁷⁴ While modern readers might be quick to scoff at the notion of curses, the Galatians would not have done so. They lived in a culture where curses “were regarded as an evil, poisonous substance which occupies humans, destroys them from the inside, and makes them a threat to their environments.”⁷⁵ It was even common to wear amulets or other objects believed

⁷² Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul - One of the Prophets? A Contribution to the Apostle’s Self-Understanding*, WUNT 43 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1991), 71–73.

⁷³ Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 83n45.

⁷⁴ The NET captures this well: “let him be condemned to hell!” As an alternative to this view, Betz (*Galatians*, 54) argues that Paul refers to excommunication from the church. But several factors mitigate against limiting Paul’s words to excommunication from the church: (1) the use of ἀνάθεμα elsewhere in Paul with this meaning (e.g., Rom 9:3; 1 Cor 12:3; 16:22); (2) the context here in Galatians; (3) the possible echo of the Achan story; and (4) possible echoes of OT covenant curse texts.

⁷⁵ Kjell Arne Morland, *The Rhetoric of Curse in Galatians: Paul Confronts Another Gospel*, ESEC 5 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 158, cited in Das, *Galatians*, 107. For a helpful discussion of inscriptions that shed light on the religious environment of Galatia and curses, see Clinton

to ward off the efforts of others to curse them. Paul’s pronouncement of a curse on those proclaiming a different gospel would not have been dismissed lightly.

In an age that prizes “tolerance” above all things, Paul’s words of condemnation may sound harsh. But when the truth of the gospel and people’s eternal destinies are at stake, the apostle has no room for niceties. Those who seek to teach must pay careful attention to their life and doctrine (1 Tim 4:16), since teachers “will receive a stricter judgment” (Jas 3:1).

1:9. To emphasize the gravity of what he is saying, Paul repeats his sober warning, though not without some subtle changes. He begins “as we have said before” (ὡς προειρήκαμεν). While the verb προλέγω can refer to something that has been stated earlier in the same letter (e.g., 2 Cor 7:3), here it likely refers to a warning “we” issued on a previous occasion when Paul was with the Galatians.⁷⁶ Just as in the previous verse, Paul uses the first-person plural to remind the Galatians of what he and Barnabas said when with them.⁷⁷ Acts 14:22 notes that when Paul and Barnabas were passing back through these Galatian churches, they were “strengthening the disciples by encouraging them to continue in the faith and by telling them, ‘It is necessary to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’” It is this previous warning that Paul has in mind when he writes “I now say again” (ἄρτι πάλιν λέγω).

Paul now repeats the content of the warning from 1:8, but in a slightly different form:

E. Arnold, “‘I Am Astonished That You Are So Quickly Turning Away’ (Gal 1.6): Paul and Anatolian Folk Belief,” *NTS* 51 (2005): 429–49.

⁷⁶ For the view that Paul refers back to the warning of 1:8, see D. J. Armitage, “An Exploration of Conditional Clause Exegesis with Reference to Galatians 1, 8–9,” *Bib* 88 (2007): 381. Paul uses προλέγω nine times (Rom 9:29; 2 Cor 7:3; 13:2 [2x]; Gal 1:9; 5:21 [2x]; 1 Thess 3:4; 4:6). The expression “now again” (ἄρτι πάλιν) that follows stresses the temporal focus (Moo, *Galatians*, 82). The two occurrences in Gal 5:21 also confirm that Paul speaks of warning them on a previous occasion. After his list of the works of the flesh, he writes: “I tell you about these things in advance [προλέγω]—as I told you before [προεἶπον]” (HCSB). Paul uses the present tense to refer to the current warning in 5:19–21, and the aorist tense to indicate the warning he gave while with them. The perfect tense of προλέγω here in 1:9 likely stresses the abiding significance of that previous warning.

⁷⁷ So also Dunn, *Galatians*, 44. Some have argued that the first-person plural here is simply an “editorial we” that Paul uses for effect; see, e.g., Martyn, *Galatians*, 114–15 and Moo, *Galatians*, 81. But if indeed Paul is referring to something he communicated to the Galatians on a previous occasion (as the verb seems to suggest), it makes sense that Paul would (indirectly) include Barnabas.

Table 4:

1:8	ἐάν	ἡμεῖς ἢ ἄγγελος ἐξ οὐρανοῦ	εὐαγγελίζεται [ὑμῖν]	παρ' ὃ εὐηγγελισάμεθα ὑμῖν	ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.
	if	we or an angel from heaven	should preach to you	a gospel other than what we have preached to you	a curse be on him!
1:9	εἴ	τις	ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται	παρ' ὃ παρελάβετε	ἀνάθεμα ἔστω.
	if	anyone	is preaching to you	a gospel contrary to what you received	a curse be on him!

There are three noteworthy differences. First, there is a shift from the specific (“we or an angel from heaven”) to the general (“anyone”). Thus the warning in 1:8 is a specific application of the more general warning Paul issued when with the Galatians. Second, the gospel that was “preached” (εὐηγγελισάμεθα) in 1:8 becomes the gospel that “you received” (παρελάβετε) here in 1:9. The verb παραλαμβάνω was often used in both Greek and Jewish literature to refer to the receiving of tradition, whether from a philosopher, the mystery religions, or the rabbis.⁷⁸ Paul uses it to refer to passing along the theological content of the gospel and its related ethical and ecclesiological entailments (1 Cor 11:23; 15:1–3; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1). The interplay between the gospel being preached and received is also found in 1 Corinthians 15:1: “Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached [εὐηγγελισάμην] to you, which you received [παρελάβετε], on which you have taken your stand.” Once Paul and his team preached the gospel to the Galatians, it became something that they received and were now responsible for safeguarding.

The third difference is likely the most significant yet the hardest for the English reader to see. Whereas in 1:8 Paul used a third class conditional statement (a hypothetical for consideration), here in 1:9 he uses a first class conditional statement (a situation presented as true for the sake of argument).⁷⁹ Thus Paul moves from the (unlikely) hypothetical situation of he or an angel from heaven preaching a different gospel to

⁷⁸ See BDAG s.v. παραλαμβάνω 2.γ and NIDNTT 3:748.

⁷⁹ For helpful discussions of conditional clauses, see Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, BLG 2 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 254–67 and Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 679–712. Moo (*Galatians*, 82) cautions against making a sharp distinction between the third

the very real present situation of someone (i.e., the ones “troubling” the Galatians, 1:7) preaching “a gospel contrary to what you received.”⁸⁰ In both cases, the result is the same: “a curse be on him!” (ἀνάθεμα ἔστω).

Paul’s words here in 1:8–9 make it clear that final authority in the church does not rest in any person (or angel for that matter!) but in the truth of the gospel revealed in the person and work of Christ. Not even an apostle or those who have “credentials” from trusted church leaders have the authority to alter or “improve” the message, no matter how well-intentioned they may be. Consider how Paul describes himself in 1 Corinthians 4:1–2: “A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful.” All who proclaim the gospel will one day answer to God for their stewardship of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1–5); the question is, Will we be found faithful (compare Matt 25:14–30)?

1:10. Paul now brings this section (1:6–10) to a close by applying the principle of the ultimate authority of the gospel (1:8–9) to himself.⁸¹ The main thrust of this verse is to emphatically state that he is in no way motivated in his life and ministry by a desire to be a “people-pleaser.” He shows this by asking two questions and offering a conditional statement.

The first question is, “For am I now trying to persuade people, or God?” (Ἄρτι γὰρ ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἢ τὸν θεόν).⁸² While the verb translated “persuade” (πείθω) usually has the sense of “persuade, convince” in the New Testament, the context here makes such a meaning unlikely.⁸³ Instead,

and first class conditionals here yet agrees that the difference in view is the move from a general warning to a specific one.

⁸⁰ The present tense of the verb “preaches” (εὐαγγελίζεται) suggests the action is ongoing.

⁸¹ The γάρ that links this verse to the previous verses can be understood in various ways: (1) cause/reason (Burton, *Galatians*, 31; Dunn, *Galatians*, 48; DeSilva, *Handbook*, 10); (2) clarification/explanatory (Das, *Galatians*, 110); or (3) inferential (Longenecker, *Galatians*, 18; Martyn, *Galatians*, 141; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 88–89). On the whole, inferential stating a conclusion seems most likely.

⁸² The context makes it clear that the present tense verb πείθω is conative, indicating an action that is attempted but unsuccessful. For a helpful discussion of the difficulties of this clause, see Das, *Galatians*, 111–12.

⁸³ BDAG s.v. πείθω 2.c. It is true that elsewhere Paul uses πείθω to refer to persuading people to believe the gospel (2 Cor 5:11). But nowhere else in the LXX or NT does θεός occur as the direct object of πείθω. There are two occurrences in Josephus (*Ant.* 4:123; 8:256), and they clearly have the sense of trying to “persuade God” to do something. Betz (*Galatians*, 55) argues that the expression “persuade God” was “a polemical definition of magic and

as the next question shows, Paul refers here to gaining approval from either people or God.⁸⁴ The adverb “now” (ἄρτι) may suggest that Paul is (perhaps sarcastically) responding to a charge by the false teachers that he was seeking the approval of people (especially gentiles) by preaching his Torah-free gospel. Calling down God’s curse on any (including himself!) who preach a different gospel than the one he first preached to the Galatians is clear evidence that Paul is far more concerned about pleasing God than he is about pleasing people.

The second question clarifies the first: “Or am I striving to please people?” (ἢ ζητῶ ἀνθρώποις ἀρέσκειν). The verb rendered “striving” (ζητέω) means “to devote serious effort to realize one’s desire or objective.”⁸⁵ By itself the verb “please” (ἀρέσκω) has a neutral meaning, and it can even refer to pleasing God in a good sense (Ps 68:32 [ET=69:31]; Rom 8:8; 15:3; 1 Thess 4:1). But the context here clearly indicates the negative sense of “act[ing] in a fawning manner” in an attempt to win someone’s approval.⁸⁶ Dunn is probably correct when he suggests that Paul’s devout Jewish opponents in Galatia drew the conclusion that “someone who was preaching faith in the Jewish Messiah Jesus, to Gentiles, but without making clear the covenant obligations of that faith, was guilty of softening or cheapening the gospel.”⁸⁷ Paul draws a similar contrast between pleasing people or God in 1 Thessalonians 2:4: “Instead, just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please [ἀρέσκοντες] people, but rather God, who examines our hearts.” Thus the expected answer to Paul’s question of whether he is striving to please people is an emphatic “Absolutely not!”

To highlight the absurdity of the claim that he is a people pleaser, Paul uses a conditional statement that makes it clear he is not: “If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (εἰ ἔτι ἀνθρώποις ἤρεσκον, Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἦμην).⁸⁸ In effect Paul says, “If I were really motivated in my gospel ministry by a desire to please

religious quackery.” Thus Paul would be denying that he was a religious charlatan. But the clauses that follow suggest that πείθω is parallel in meaning to ἀρέσκω (“please”).

⁸⁴ Similarly Moo, *Galatians*, 84.

⁸⁵ BDAG s.v. ζητέω 3.d.

⁸⁶ BDAG s.v. ἀρέσκω 1.

⁸⁷ Dunn, *Galatians*, 49.

⁸⁸ Paul uses a second class conditional statement, which assumes that the protasis (the “if” part) is not true for the sake of the argument; see further Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 694–96.

people (and it is obvious that I am not!), I definitely would not be a servant of Christ!” In referring to himself as a “servant of Christ” (Χριστοῦ δοῦλος), Paul uses imagery that would have been familiar to everyone in the first century. Slavery was an integral part of Greco-Roman culture; according to some estimates nearly two-thirds of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves in the first century.⁸⁹ To be a slave is to be under the ownership and authority of another person—in Paul’s case, Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

But there is likely more to the expression “servant of Christ” than its first-century cultural significance. In several other places Paul identifies himself as a slave/servant of Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:1); indeed, it appears to be one of his favorite self-designations.⁹¹ He likely drew this title from the Old Testament, where it can refer to someone (such as Abraham, Moses, David, etc.) who has a special relationship with God and/or a special task to perform for him.⁹² This title is especially prominent in Isaiah 40–55, where, among other things, it refers to an unspecified figure called by God to accomplish his purposes. Since Paul draws upon the servant language from Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1:15–16 and again in 1:24 to portray his apostolic calling and ministry, it is likely that here in 1:10 he refers to himself as a “servant of Christ” (Χριστοῦ δοῦλος) to anticipate that description.⁹³

One need not look far to find those in ministry who are more concerned about pleasing people than they are about pleasing God. Indeed, every minister of the gospel faces the temptation to alter the message to tickle people’s ears (cf. 2 Tim 4:3). But as servants of Christ we have no authority to do so. We serve at the pleasure of our Lord Jesus Christ, who himself took the form of a servant to free us from our slavery to sin and death (Rom 6:1–11; Phil 2:6–8; Heb 2:14–16).

⁸⁹ For a helpful summary of slavery in the Greco-Roman world, see James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 220–36.

⁹⁰ On this theme, see Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*, NSBT 8 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 107–25.

⁹¹ See Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 54–61, 139–56.

⁹² See further Ciampa, *Presence and Function*, 93–95 and especially Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free*, 70–75, 103–15. The Hebrew word most frequently used is עֶבֶד, which is rendered by several different terms in the LXX, including δοῦλος (e.g., Isa 49:3).

⁹³ On this important theme in Galatians, see Biblical Theology §3.0.

Bridge

From this paragraph three points of application warrant careful reflection. First, the tendency of the human heart to wander away from God and the true gospel does not disappear when a person professes faith in Christ. The eighteenth-century hymnist Robert Robinson captured this reality well in the fourth verse of his hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”:⁹⁴

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above

Even though we have been born again and have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside us, the sinful inclination to turn away from God to other things remains until Christ returns or we die. No wonder that in the next verse of the hymn Robertson pointed to that very reality:

O that day when freed from sinning,
I shall see Thy lovely face;
Clothed then in blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,
Take my ransomed soul away;
Send thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless day

Our hope does not rest in our determination but in the hope of seeing Christ face to face on the last day and his power to bring us safely home to his heavenly courts.

Second, persevering in the true gospel is not without its challenges. Just as in Paul's day, there are many varieties of false teachers leading people astray from the true gospel today. Such false teachers and their

⁹⁴ Robert Robinson, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” *Indelible Grace Hymn Book*, accessed March 11, 2021, <http://hymnbook.igracemusic.com/hymns/come-thou-fount-of-every-blessing>.

errors must be clearly identified and condemned. In an age when “tolerance” is prized as the ultimate virtue, such clear condemnation will often be resisted. But when people’s eternal destinies are at stake, ministers of the gospel must speak with boldness and clarity. For the gospel itself is the final authority for the life of the individual believer and the church as a body. The status or reputation of the person proclaiming error ultimately does not matter.

Third, those who serve in gospel ministry will inevitably face the temptation to be a people pleaser. For some the temptation takes the form of refusing to preach/teach hard truths that may offend certain people; for others it may look like saying or doing certain things to win the approval of certain key people. Regardless of the form, however, people-pleasing not only undermines the advance of the gospel but enslaves a person to what others think of us. The solution is to embrace our identity as servants of Christ and make our ambition to please him, knowing that we must one day appear before him to give an account of our life and ministry (2 Cor 5:9–10).

II. Paul’s Conversion and Apostolic Commission (1:11–2:21)

The first major section of Galatians focuses on the divine origin of the gospel Paul preaches and his commission as an apostle to the gentiles. It begins with a thesis statement about the divine origin of Paul’s gospel message (1:11–12). The apostle is at pains to emphasize that he received it directly through a revelation of Jesus Christ, rather than receiving it or being taught it by another person. To bolster his claim that he received the gospel directly through a revelation of Jesus Christ, Paul recounts four events/periods from his life and concludes with a summary of that divine gospel message.

The first event is Paul’s conversion and commission as an apostle to the gentiles (1:13–17). Whereas his life in Judaism was characterized by his persecution of the church and zealous commitment to the traditions of his ancestors (1:13–14), that all changed when God revealed his Son Jesus in Paul to commission him to preach the gospel to the gentiles (1:15–16a). In response, Paul did not consult with anyone, including the Jerusalem apostles (1:16b–17).