

GALATIANS 1 COMMENTARY SAMPLE – Baker Exegetical Commentary (BECNT)

Link to Amazon: <http://bit.ly/GalatiansCommentary> - Approximately \$35.

DAY 1

A. Prescript (1:1–5)

The first five verses of Galatians form the prescript of the letter—the somewhat formalized introductory elements. The standard form of this introduction in ancient letters is quite simple, usually taking the form of “X to Y, greetings” (see Acts 15:23). Most of Paul’s Letters follow this pattern with minimal adaptation and elaboration. In Galatians, however, as in some of his other letters (e.g., Romans and Titus), Paul adds quite a lot of material to this simple opening formula. These elaborations in Galatians, like the omission of the thanksgiving, probably reflect the situation in focus. Thus his typical identification of himself as an apostle is followed immediately by a defense of the divine authority of his office (v. 1)—an initial hint of an important argument in the letter (1:11–2:10). Another signal about the course of the argument comes in verse 4, where Paul describes Christ as the one who “gave himself for our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age” (v. 4). The cross, and especially the epochal significance of the cross, is the fulcrum of Paul’s strategy for persuading the Galatians to reject the overtures of the false teachers (see esp. 2:19–20; 3:1, 13; 6:14). More surprising is the brief reference at the end of verse 1 to the resurrection of Christ. Only in Romans, among the other Letters of Paul, is there any reference to the resurrection (1:4), and there is no further reference to the resurrection in Galatians. Paul may be reminding the Galatians of the “gospel” that he preached among them (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–3). But the allusion probably also serves to underline the fundamental break in salvation history that the coming of Christ has created, for resurrection, against the background of the OT and Jewish theology, also signals the arrival of the new age.

¹ Paul—an apostle chosen not by human beings nor by a human being but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers and sisters who are here with me to the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from [†] God our Father and the Lord [‡] Jesus Christ, ⁴ who has given himself [†] for [‡] our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1:1 Paul begins his Letter to the Galatians by identifying himself, as he does in all his letters, with his hellenized “Roman” name, Paul (Παῦλος, *Paulos*). Paul’s “Hebrew” name, Σαῦλος (*Saulos*, Saul), used in the early narratives about Paul in Acts, is never used by Paul himself in his letters. It has been theorized that Paul first took his Greek name in honor of his high-ranking convert, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:6–12; Luke first uses “Paul” in 13:13). But it is much more likely that “Paul” was the apostle’s Latin *cognomen* (see, e.g., Bruce 1974: 38). Paul also typically designates himself an “apostle” in his letter openings (although the title is absent in Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon). The word “apostle” (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) means “one who is sent,” an envoy; as Origen puts it, “Everyone who is sent by someone is an apostle of the one who sent him” (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 32.17; quoted by H. D. Betz, *ABD* 1:309). Paul can use the word in a simple nontechnical sense (e.g., Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:23) and to denote Christians who have been sent as accredited missionaries (e.g., Rom. 16:7). But when describing himself, he uses *apostolos* to claim equal status with the original twelve apostles (e.g., Luke 6:13; see esp. 1 Cor. 9:1–5 and Gal. 1:17, 19). When he claims apostolic status in his letter openings, Paul will often also trace that status to the call of God, but only here in Galatians does Paul set that divine calling in contrast to any possible human derivation.²

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

Comm. Jo. Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*

ABD The Anchor Bible Dictionary

² Note a similar contrast in Philo’s (*Virtues* 63) representation of Moses: “I, indeed, myself, did neither undertake the charge of caring for and providing for the common prosperity of my own accord, nor because I was appointed to the office by any human being; but I undertook to govern this people because God manifestly declared his will by visible oracles and distinct commandments, and commanded me to rule them.”

Paul has been chosen to be an apostle (the idea “chosen” [“sent” in NRSV and NIV; “appointed” in NLT] is implied in the word “apostle”) “by Jesus Christ and God the Father,” and not “by human beings” (ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων, *ap’ anthrōpōn*) nor “by a human being” (δι’ ἀνθρώπου, *di’ anthrōpou*). The denial of any human involvement in Paul’s apostolic status is echoed in his later claim that his gospel was not of human origin (1:11–12). The most likely reason for this concern is that the agitators were attempting to undermine Paul’s authority with the Galatians by arguing that his status and teaching depended on the Jerusalem apostles, whose views (as represented by the agitators) should therefore trump Paul’s.³ Paul not only highlights this denial by placing it before his reference to his divine commissioning; he also repeats the point for emphasis.

This repetition has sparked discussion because of the way Paul shifts the wording. He moves from the preposition *apo* to *dia* and from the plural *anthrōpōn* to the singular *anthrōpou*. The latter change may signal a move from general to particular: Paul does not owe his apostolic status to “human beings” in general; nor does he owe it to any particular human being—perhaps someone such as James or Peter (e.g., Martyn 1997: 84). Such a distinction is possible, but it is perhaps more likely that the shift from plural to singular is simply stylistic. The change from *apo* to *dia* might also be stylistic, since the two prepositions have a semantic overlap in the idea of “ultimate origin” (on both prepositions, see BDAG 105–7, 223–26). However, *dia* more often refers to an intermediate agent: “through” rather than “from” or “by” (see the careful distinction in 1 Cor. 8:6: “For us there is but one God, the Father, from [ἐξ, *ex*] whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through [διὰ, *dia*] whom all things came ...”).

Paul therefore is probably making two slightly different points in these phrases: the ultimate source of his apostleship was not human; nor did he receive it from, or through, any human being (“source” vs. “agency” [A. Robertson 1934: 567]; “fountain-head” versus “channel” [Lightfoot 1881: 71]; see also R. Longenecker 1990: 4; Silva 2003: 6). This interpretation fits Paul’s general use of the two prepositions (see the additional note on 1:1) and satisfactorily explains why he uses both phrases. Of course, Paul does not intend to deny all human involvement in his calling and ministry, such as Ananias’s laying hands on Paul when he was converted (Acts 9:10–19) or the church at Antioch’s commissioning him and Barnabas for their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–3). Paul’s point, rather, is that his apostolic status and authority do not depend on human beings in any essential way.⁴

An assertion of the divine origin of his apostleship is typical in Paul’s letter openings, but the particular way he puts it here is again unique. Usually Paul attributes his apostleship simply to God: “called to be an apostle ... by the will of God” (1 Cor. 1:1; cf. Rom. 1:1, “called to be an apostle”); “by the will of God” (2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). Here, however, he attributes his calling to both “Jesus Christ” and “God the Father.” Paul does this also in 1 Tim. 1:1 (“by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope”), but putting Christ before God still makes Galatians distinct. Paul reverses the usual order so that he can add to God’s name a reference to his raising Christ. It is probably because Christ’s name comes first that Paul uses the preposition *διὰ* (rather than, e.g., ἀπό, *apo*, from/by) before both divine names.

To be sure, as we have seen above, this preposition can refer to ultimate agency, and a number of scholars think this must be its meaning here (Bruce 1982b: 73). But it is more likely that the preposition retains its usual instrumental meaning and that Paul is already thinking of the revelation of Jesus Christ to him as the point of his apostolic calling: he was chosen as an apostle “through” Jesus Christ as he was manifested to him on the road to Damascus (see 1:15–16; e.g., Dunn 1993a: 27–28; C. Campbell 2012: 244–45). The difficulty then is to understand what this preposition means when it governs “God the Father”—for God is the originator rather than the mediator of Paul’s apostleship.

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

NIV New International Version

NLT New Living Translation

³ The polemical thrust of this denial has been dismissed by some who read Paul’s argument in Gal. 1–2 very differently (e.g., on 1:1–5, J. Vos 1993: 14–15). See the introduction to 1:13–2:14. Voorst (2010: 167) has noted how unusual it is to have this extended description of the origins of Paul’s apostolate in a letter opening.

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

⁴ It is unlikely (contrary to de Boer 2011: 22–23) that Paul contrasts two different kinds of apostles here.

One option is to think that the meaning of the preposition shifts from instrumental agent to ultimate agent.⁵ But it is more likely that the preposition has the same instrumental sense in relation to both Christ and God the Father. Without denying that the Father is the ultimate agent of his apostleship, the Father is, along with the Son, the instrumental agent as well (Lightfoot 1881: 72; Dunn 1993a: 27). Moreover, we should refrain from insisting on too much precision in Paul’s language. Note, for instance, that in verse 3 Paul can use the preposition ἀπό to govern both the Father and the Son (Lagrange 1918: 3). The introduction of a second and different preposition in either verse would detract from Paul’s obvious concern to associate the Father and the Son as closely as possible. In such verses we find the building blocks of an incipient trinitarian theology.

The distinctive nature of Paul’s apostolic identification is seen again at the end of verse 1. Only in Galatians does Paul attribute his apostolic status to “God the Father”; and only here does he mention the resurrection with that status. (Paul does allude to the resurrection in the prescript of Romans [1:4], but it is not connected to Paul’s apostleship.) Some scholars think that the reference to God the Father here and twice again in the letter’s salutation (vv. 3 and 4) reflects an emphasis in the letter as a whole on God as the Father who adopts children to be his own (see 4:1–7; Betz 1979: 39; Martyn 1997: 84). Yet the fatherhood of God does not play that great a role in Galatians; it is, for instance, far more prominent in Ephesians. Perhaps, then, calling God “Father” reminds the readers of the ultimate authority from which Paul derives his apostleship (Dunn 1993a: 27). The reference to God as “the one who raised him [Jesus Christ] from the dead” might serve a similar purpose (e.g., Martyn 1997: 85).⁶

But there is a further and perhaps more important reason for mentioning the resurrection at the outset of this letter. Most Jews (esp. in the “apocalyptic” movement) believed that the ultimate establishment of God’s kingdom would be marked by the resurrection of people from the dead (e.g., 2 Bar. 50.2: “the earth will surely give back the dead at that time”). Paul therefore alludes here to what will become the key theological argument of the letter: in Christ, God has inaugurated a new age in salvation history, a situation that “changes everything”—including especially the evaluation and application of the law (see, e.g., Cook 1992: 514–15).

DAY 2

¹ Paul—an apostle chosen not by human beings nor by a human being but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers and sisters who are here with me to the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from ^Γ God our Father and the Lord ^Γ Jesus Christ, ⁴ who has given himself ^Γ for ^Γ our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1:2 Along with himself, Paul includes as senders of Galatians “all the brothers and sisters who are with me” (οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοί, *hoi syn emoi pantes adelphoi*).⁷ It is not unusual for Paul to include others in his letter openings: Sosthenes in 1 Cor. 1:1; Timothy in 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philem. 1; Silas and Timothy in 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1. But Galatians is again unique in Paul’s inclusion of such a large and undefined group. The personal and even emotional tone of the letter reveals that Paul is the sole author. He undoubtedly includes this wider group to lend strength to his appeal: the views he is teaching in the letter are not his alone but are widely shared.

⁵ R. Longenecker (1990: 5) suggests that we should assume the preposition ἀπό (*apo*, from) before “God the Father,” producing a neat chiasm in the verse: Paul’s apostleship is not “from” human beings or “through” a human being, but “through” Jesus Christ and “from” God the Father. However, as Bligh (1969: 61) points out, if Paul had intended this, he undoubtedly would have used the preposition (contra Longenecker, then, Bligh in fact dismisses the chiasmic interpretation).

⁶ As is typical in the NT, Christ’s resurrection is described as a resurrection “from among dead persons” (ἐκ νεκρῶν, *ek nekron*; see John 2:22; 21:14; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 13:30; Rom. 4:24; 6:4, 9; 7:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:12, 20; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2 Tim. 2:8; Heb. 11:19; 1 Pet. 1:21; cf. ἀπὸ νεκρῶν, *apo nekron*, in Matt. 27:64; 28:7).

² Bar. 2 Baruch (Syriac Apocalypse)

^Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

^Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

^Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

^Γ Textual variants in the Greek text

⁷ The inclusive “brothers and sisters” (see NIV, NLT, CEB; NRSV, “all the members of God’s family”) appropriately brings out the intended breadth of the Greek ἀδελφοί, (*adelphoi*, traditionally, “brothers”). See LN 125.11.23: “a close associate of a group of persons having a well-defined membership (in the NT ἀδελφός [*adelphos*] refers specifically to fellow believers in Christ).”

On the basis of the apparent distinction in Phil. 4:21–22 between οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ ἀδελφοί, and πάντες οἱ ἅγιοι (*pantes hoi hagioi*, all the saints), “all the brothers and sisters” here are often identified with Paul’s ministry associates (see, e.g., Lightfoot 1881: 72; Burton 1921: 8; Bruce 1982b: 73–74; Betz 1979: 40).⁸ Assuming an early date and a South Galatian destination (see the introduction), these associates may be specifically located in Syrian Antioch. But a reference to a general group of fellow Christians may accord better with Paul’s usual use of ἀδελφοί (e.g., Dunn 1993a: 30; Mell 2006: 354–55). In the ancient world this word was widely used by various associations to stress the intimacy of relationship within these associations; members called one another ἀδελφός as a way of indicating that the association was a “second home” (see esp. Harland 2005; Aasgard 2004). Because this language is so common in the NT, we can easily overlook its significance. It is a reminder that believers are members of the same family and should adopt the attitudes and actions necessary to maintain familial unity (see esp. Horrell 2005: 110–15).

Paul’s identification of the recipients of the letter is, compared with his other letters, quite brief: ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας (*tais ekklesiiais tēs Galatias*, the churches of Galatia). Missing is any further description of his readers, such as ἅγιοι (*hagioi*, saints, or God’s people). The abruptness of the address probably signals Paul’s displeasure with the Galatians (Lightfoot 1881: 73), though caution on this point is called for: the description of the recipients of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, two other letters from Paul’s earliest period, is also quite brief (“the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”). As we argue in “The Destination and Date of the Letter,” in the introduction, “Galatia” probably refers to the Roman province of that name, and the churches are likely those that Paul established in the southern part of the province on his first missionary journey (e.g., Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, Derbe; see Acts 13–14).

DAY 3

¹ Paul—an apostle chosen not by human beings nor by a human being but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers and sisters who are here with me to the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from [†] God our Father and the Lord [‡] Jesus Christ, ⁴ who has given himself [†] for [‡] our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1:3 In contrast to other elements in the prescript, the “grace and peace” wish of verse 3 follows the usual Pauline pattern. He prays that his readers might experience “grace” (χάρις, *charis*) and “peace” (εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*) from “God our Father” (θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, *theou patros hēmōn*) and “the Lord Jesus Christ” (Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *kyriou Iēsou Christou*).⁹ “Grace” is a fundamental aspect of NT revelation and of the gospel that Paul defends in Galatians (see also 1:6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18); indeed, Paul can use “grace” to sum up the Christian message (e.g., Rom. 5:2). In addition to its importance for the Christian message, Paul may also refer to grace in the prescripts of his letters because of its similarity to the usual Hellenistic letter greeting, χαῖρεν (*chairein*, greetings). The other key word, εἰρήνη, has its roots in OT and Jewish soil. The OT prophets looked forward to the day when God would put his creation in the right again, when he would institute *shālōm*, “well-being.” Paul’s wish that his readers experience “peace,” then, is not a wish that they enjoy a quiet, happy life or that their souls may find rest but that they might experience the full measure of God’s eschatological *shālōm*. At the end of the letter, Paul pronounces εἰρήνη and ἔλεος (*eleos*, mercy) on the “Israel of God” (Gal. 6:16). The grace and peace wish of 1:3 and this pronouncement of blessing form an *inclusio* in the letter as a whole (Garlington 2003: 28). The letter will explain to the Galatians how they can remain “the Israel of God” and so continue to experience the grace, peace, and mercy that God showers on his people. The grace and peace wish, then, while standard epistolary practice for Paul, also taps into important themes in the letter (Voorst 2010: 169). Paul again conjoins God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ closely together in the provision of this grace and peace.¹⁰

⁸ Bauckham (1979: 65) suggests that Paul’s vague reference may be due to his embarrassment at not being able to include Barnabas (who worked with Paul in these churches) as a wholehearted endorser of the theology of the letter (see Gal. 2:11–14).

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

⁹ The only exceptions are Col. 1:2, which omits reference to Christ, and 1 Thess. 1:1, where God the Father and Jesus Christ are mentioned in the previous clause.

¹⁰ The preposition ἀπό (*apo*, from) governs both names, accentuating their close relation (Harris, *NIDNTT* 3:1178; Bruce 1982b: 74).

DAY 4

¹ Paul—an apostle chosen not by human beings nor by a human being but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers and sisters who are here with me to the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from ⌈ God our Father and the Lord ⌋ Jesus Christ, ⁴ who has given himself ⌈ for ⌋ our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1:4 In yet another departure from his typical letter opening, Paul now describes the “Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 3) as the one who, through his sacrifice on the cross, “rescued” believers from “the present evil age.” And we can see, yet again, how this addition anticipates the argument of the letter. By portraying the work of Christ as an “apocalyptic rescue operation” (Hays 2000: 202), Paul “strikes the keynote of the epistle” (Lightfoot 1881: 73; see also B. Longenecker 1998: 36–46; Smiles 1998: 68–69).¹¹ Central to Paul’s attempt to woo the Galatians back to the true gospel is his insistence throughout the letter that the cross of Christ is the decisive and uniquely sufficient means to rescue sinners from death. Embracing Christ’s cross through faith is all that is needed to effect this rescue and to bring believers into the “new creation” (6:15). The law program advocated by the agitators effectively underplays the decisive turning point in all of human history.

The adjectival clause τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν (*tou dontos heauton hyper tōn hamartiōn hēmōn*, “who gave himself on behalf of our sins”) resembles language used elsewhere in the NT to characterize the death of Christ (“giving [with a form of δίδωμι] himself” in Mark 10:45//Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; “on behalf of sins” in 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; in a slightly different sense, Heb. 5:1; 7:27; 10:12). These similarities, coupled with the facts that Paul never elsewhere uses the verb ἐξαίρέω (*exaireō*, rescue) and only rarely refers to “sins” (plural; he mostly uses the singular),¹² have led many scholars to identify part or all of verse 4 as the fragment of an early Christian hymn or confession (e.g., Martyn 1997: 95–97; R. Longenecker 1990: 7; Vouga 1998: 19; Bryant 2001: 120–23). This is possible, but it is perhaps more likely that Paul is simply reflecting language that was being widely used in the church of his day to refer to Christ’s death. And this language itself is rooted in the application of the Isaiah “servant” prophecies to Christ and his death. Isaiah 53 (esp. in the LXX) resembles Gal. 1:4 in portraying the Servant as “giving himself” for sins at the will of the Lord.¹³ It was Jesus himself who pointed the early Christians to this background by applying the language of Isa. 53 to his own death (see esp. Mark 10:45//Matt. 20:28). While the preposition ὑπὲρ (*hyper*) means, generally, “on behalf of,” it sometimes also takes on the nuance of substitution, and this is probably the case here (Harris 2012: 214; Wallace 1996: 383–89 [though he does not explicitly include Gal. 1:4]; Garlington 2003: 36). As we noted above, however, what is particularly distinctive and therefore striking about Paul’s portrayal of Christ’s work in this verse is the focus on “rescue” “from the present evil age” (ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ, *ek tou aiōnos tou enestōtos ponērou*). The verb ἐξαίρέω, while used only here in the Pauline Letters, occurs several times in the book of Acts and frequently in the LXX to denote “rescue” or

⌈ Textual variants in the Greek text

⌋ Textual variants in the Greek text

⌈ Textual variants in the Greek text

⌋ Textual variants in the Greek text

¹¹ Matera (1993: 286) notes that only here in his letter openings does Paul refer to the death of Christ and that Christ’s death will figure prominently in the letter.

// textual parallels

¹² Many scholars exaggerate the rarity of Paul’s use of the plural “sins” because they dismiss as Pauline several letters that, in our estimation, should be considered to be Paul’s. Apart from Gal. 1:4, Paul uses the plural of ἁμαρτία (*hamartia*, sin) nine times (apart from OT quotations): Rom. 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:3, 17; Eph. 2:1; Col. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Tim. 5:22, 24; 2 Tim. 3:6.

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

¹³ See esp. Isa. 53:6 LXX: κύριος παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν ταῖς ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν (*kyrios paredōken auton tais hamartiais hēmōn*, the Lord gave him over to [for?] our sins [NETS]), on which see esp. Ciampa 1998: 51–60. Also, Isa. 53:10: καὶ κύριος βούλεται καθαρῖσαι αὐτὸν τὴν πληγῆς· ἐὰν δῶτε περὶ ἁμαρτίας ἡ ψυχὴ ὑμῶν (*kai kyrios bouletai katharīσαι auton tēs plēgēs; ean dōte peri hamartias hē psychē hymōn*, and the Lord desires to cleanse him from his blow; if you offer for sin, your soul [NETS]), on which see Garlington 2003: 34; Harmon 2010: 56–66. And Isa. 53:12: παρεδόθη εἰς θάνατον ἡ ψυχὴ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη· καὶ αὐτὸς ἁμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνῆνεγκεν καὶ διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη (*paredothē eis thanaton hē psychē autou, kai en tois anomois elogisthē; kai autos hamartias pollōn anēnenken kai dia tas hamartias autōn paredothē*, his soul was given over to death, and he was reckoned among the lawless, and he bore the sins of many, and because of their sins he was given over [NETS]), on which see Hays 2000: 203.

// textual parallels

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

“deliver,” usually from danger or from an enemy (typical are Nebuchadnezzar’s words to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Dan. 3:15: “But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue [ἐξέλθειται, *exeleitai*] you from my hand?” See also Acts 7:10, 34; 12:11; 23:27; 26:17).

New Testament scholars generally recognize that the NT language of a “present age” (Mark 10:30) versus “the age to come” (Matt. 12:32) reflects apocalyptic Judaism, which divided history sharply into two phases and looked for a decisive intervention of God to end the present age and usher in the new age of salvation.¹⁴ In keeping with the typical NT perspective of inaugurated eschatology, Paul claims that, though this present evil age continues in force, believers are rescued from this present age of evil, sin, and death and find their true identity in the new age that has broken into history through Christ’s epochal death and resurrection. This fundamental NT perspective on the “times” in which we live bookends Galatians. “This evil age” in 1:4 corresponds to the “world” of 6:14; both of which stand in contrast to the “new creation” (6:15). And Paul’s point is that believers, with their sins forgiven through Christ’s self-giving and identified with Christ in his triumphal resurrection (v. 1), belong to a whole new state of affairs.

In keeping with the portrayal of the mission of the servant in Isa. 53, Paul adds that Christ’s giving of himself to effect their rescue was “according to the will of our God and Father” (κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, *kata to thelēma tou theou kai patros hēmōn*). This addition, as well as reflecting Isa. 53, may act as an implicit response to the agitators: God’s “judgment” on the present evil age, a central element in the preaching of Paul, was willed by God himself (Silva 2003: 11). God has invaded human existence in Christ in order to rescue people from this evil world. He acts “on behalf of” sinful people, hinting perhaps at the idea of “grace” that plays a pivotal role in the argument of the letter (see esp. 2:21; 5:4; and the exposition of 1:3; cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2000: 142).

DAY 5

¹ Paul—an apostle chosen not by human beings nor by a human being but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers and sisters who are here with me to the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from [†] God our Father and the Lord [‡] Jesus Christ, ⁴ who has given himself [†] for [‡] our sins in order that he might rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father—⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

1:5 Paul occasionally uses a doxology to end a section of a letter (Rom. 11:36; Eph. 3:21; 1 Tim. 1:17) or a letter as a whole (Rom. 16:27; Phil. 4:20; 2 Tim. 4:18), but only here does he conclude a prescript with a doxology. The unprecedented placement of this doxology leads some to think that it was part of the confession that Paul is quoting (e.g., Witherington 1998: 77; R. Longenecker 1990: 9 [hesitantly]), but as we have seen, it is unlikely that Paul is actually using preexisting material. Others suggest that the doxology may be Paul’s substitute for the missing thanksgiving, but the rebuke of 1:6–10 is better seen as the formal equivalent of the thanksgiving (Silva 2003: 11). The doxology is best seen, then, as a natural addition to the christological/soteriological assertion of verse 4. It is quite natural to ascribe glory to God for planning and putting into effect the rescue of sinners from this present evil age (e.g., Lightfoot 1881: 74; Bruce 1982b: 77).

DAY 6

B. Rebuke: The Occasion of the Letter (1:6–10)

This paragraph forms the second part of the letter opening (de Boer 2011: 36–37). Based on Paul’s other letters, at this point we would expect to find a thanksgiving (and usually prayer) for the readers. Such a thanksgiving, with a form of the verb εὐχαριστέω (*eucharisteō*, give thanks), occurs in seven of Paul’s Letters (Rom. 1:8; 1

¹⁴ The NT references to “this age/the present age”: Matt. 13:22, 39, 40, 49; 24:3; 28:20; Mark 4:19; Luke 16:8; 20:34, 35; Rom. 12:2; 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Titus 2:12; to the coming age: Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30; Heb. 6:5; and to both: Matt. 12:32; Eph. 1:21. See esp. de Boer 2011: 31–35 for the significance of “apocalyptic eschatology” in Galatians.

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; Philem. 4). Three others have generally comparable language (with χάρις [*charis*, thanks] in 2 Tim. 1:3; and with a “blessing” of God for his work among the readers in 2 Cor. 1:3 and Eph. 1:3; only 1 Timothy and Titus lack this feature entirely). The absence of any thanksgiving section here in Galatians is thus surprising.

But even more startling is what Paul puts in its place: instead of a thanksgiving for the readers’ faith, we find Paul severely rebuking them for a potential defection from the faith (Silva 2003: 16). While we must exercise caution in inferring too much from unusual formal features (esp. if Galatians is the first letter Paul wrote), it seems justified to conclude, with most commentators, that Paul is signaling his extreme distress at the situation of the Galatian Christians. He cannot thank God for them when their spiritual status is so uncertain. Why is it so uncertain? Because “some people” have confused the Galatians about the meaning of the true gospel of Christ.

Paul says nothing here about the specific way in which these people are “perverting” the gospel. But specific references elsewhere in the letter (see esp. 5:2–4) as well as the general argument reveal that these false teachers were insisting that the Galatian Gentiles be circumcised and submit to the law of Moses in order to be counted among the true people of God and to achieve the righteous standing that they would need to go free in the judgment (see “Occasion and Purpose” in the introduction for more on the false teaching). At this point Paul’s concern is not to describe or engage in detailed criticism of the false teaching. Rather, his purpose, encapsulating the central rhetorical thrust of the letter, is to warn the Galatians not to succumb to this teaching. He accomplishes this by using the strongest language he can muster to paint the false teachers as people who have perverted the gospel of Christ and who are thereby destined for eternal condemnation (vv. 8–9). In the beginning of the letter, the threat of divine judgment for following false teaching stands in antithetical contrast to the blessing promised for those who continue to follow the apostolic “rule” at the end of the letter (6:16; Betz 1979: 50–51; Wilson 2007: 26–27). Paul concludes the paragraph by contrasting himself, as a true servant of Christ, with these false teachers (see our comments on v. 10 for a discussion of the place of this verse in Paul’s argument).

⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ to another gospel, ⁷ which is really not another gospel—it is just that there are some people who are troubling you and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one that we proclaimed, let that person fall under God’s curse! ⁹ As I said before, so now I say again: if anyone should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person fall under God’s curse.

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ.

1:6 Paul begins by expressing his amazement at the sudden turn of events in Galatia. Some interpreters have downplayed the significance of θαυμάζω (*thaumazō*, I am astonished), suggesting that it functions as a literary marker (see the first additional note on 1:6; Paul uses the word elsewhere only in 2 Thess. 1:10). But there is no good basis for ignoring the force of the word; as Dunn (1993a: 39) puts it, it expresses “more passion than artifice.” Paul is genuinely surprised and chagrined that his converts in Galatia are so quickly being tempted to exchange the true gospel that he preached to them for a substitute and false gospel. It is unclear, however, just what Paul means by saying that the Galatians have turned “so quickly” from the true gospel: so quickly after the arrival of the false teachers (Bligh 1969: 83; Hyldeahl 2000: 428)? or so quickly after their conversion (Betz 1979: 47–48)? Or is Paul focusing on the rashness of their decision (BDAG 992; Lightfoot 1881: 75)? Paul can use ταχέως (*tacheōs*, quickly) in this latter sense (see esp. 1 Tim. 5:22, where Paul warns Timothy “Do not be

⁶ Textual variants in the Greek text

⁷ Textual variants in the Greek text

⁸ Textual variants in the Greek text

⁹ Textual variants in the Greek text

¹⁰ Textual variants in the Greek text

¹¹ Textual variants in the Greek text

¹² Textual variants in the Greek text

¹³ Textual variants in the Greek text

hasty [ταχέως] in the laying on of hands”; and also 2 Thess. 2:2). But this meaning is rare in Paul and in the NT, and a temporal focus is probably intended.

If so, it probably makes better sense to think that Paul is referring to the brief interval between their acceptance of the true gospel that he preached and their dalliance with the false teachers. On our reading of the circumstances of the letter, Paul is writing within a year or so of his initial evangelizing trip through South Galatia. But the “so quickly” language might have another function also: to convey an OT allusion. Perhaps the most famous apostasy in the OT is the decision of the Israelites to fashion and worship a golden-calf image—an apostasy all the worse since it occurred “so quickly” after they had heard God’s word at Sinai. Note Exod. 32:8—“They have been quick [ταχύ, cognate to the adverb ταχέως] to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt’ ”—and Deut. 9:16—“When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. You had turned aside quickly [nothing equivalent in LXX] from the way that the LORD had commanded you” (e.g., R. Longenecker 1990: 14; Ciampa 1998: 71–77).

Nevertheless, if Paul had intended to allude to this incident, we might have expected him to use the verb used in the LXX of these texts for “turn aside” (παραβαίνω, *parabainō*) rather than the verb that he does use (μετατίθημι, *metatithēmi*). This verb, which was occasionally used to refer to a change of philosophical or political belief (see Betz 1979: 47; Martyn 1997: 108), was also used to describe Jews who apostatized from the faith at the time of the Maccabean rebellion (see esp. 2 Macc. 7:24: “The youngest brother being still alive, Antiochus not only appealed to him in words, but promised with oaths that he would make him rich and enviable if he would turn from [μεταθέμενον] the ways of his ancestors”; see Dunn 1993a: 39–40). Paul uses the present tense of this verb to indicate that the apostasy is still being contemplated (R. Longenecker 1990: 14).

Paul’s description of what the Galatians are being tempted to apostatize from is significant for the direction of his argument in the letter: “the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ.” “The one who called” (τοῦ καλέσαντος, *tou kalesantos*) is God the Father (always the subject of the verb καλέω [*kaleō*, call] when used in a theological sense in Paul). But particularly significant is Paul’s addition: that God has called them “to live in the grace of Christ” (on the question of whether “Christ” should be included, see the third additional note on 1:6). Our translation “to live in” represents the Greek preposition ἐν (*en*, in). This preposition is usually taken to indicate means (“by”; see NASB, NAB, HCSB, NET, NLT, CEB; R. Longenecker 1990: 15) or “sphere” (“in”; see RSV, NRSV, ESV, NKJV, NJB; Betz 1979: 48; Fee 2007b: 228). But a comparison with similar constructions in Paul favors our translation (see NIV and the second additional note on 1:6); and it fits the argument of the letter very well. Of course God has called the Galatians “in” and “through” the grace of Christ. But 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 (see also Ridderbos 1953: 47; Fung 1988: 44; Schütz 2007: 117).

The word χάρις (*charis*, grace) appears only seven times in the letter (1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18) but nevertheless touches on a key issue in Paul’s argument. God has decisively manifested himself in Christ, thus sidelining the law, and his saving work in Christ is completely a matter of grace, to which humans can only respond with faith, not works of any kind. The positive assertion that the Galatians have been “called to live in the grace of Christ” matches, as Silva (2003: 17) notes, the twofold warning in the rhetorical climax of the

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

NASB New American Standard Bible

NAB New American Bible

HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible

NET New English Translation

NLT New Living Translation

CEB Common English Bible

RSV Revised Standard Version

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

ESV English Standard Version

NKJV New King James Version

NJB New Jerusalem Bible

NIV New International Version

letter: “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (5:4). “The grace of Christ” is the touchstone of Paul’s argument against the agitators.

Paul introduces another key word in the argument of Galatians at the end of this verse: εὐαγγέλιον (*euangelion*, gospel). Paul uses this word seven times in the opening section of Galatians (see also 1:7, 11; 2:2, 5, 7, 14) and the cognate verb also seven times in the letter (1:8 [2x], 9, 11, 16, 23; 4:13). It is “the truth of the gospel” (2:5, 14) for which Paul is contending in Galatians (on the importance of this theme in Galatians, see, e.g., Bryant 2001: 140–41; G. Hansen 1989: 83–84). The language of “gospel,” or “good news,” is rooted in the OT, especially in Isaiah, who foretells a day when God would proclaim “good news” to his people (40:9; 52:7; 60:6; 61:1; cf. also Joel 3:5 LXX; Nah. 1:15 [2:1 LXX]). This “good news” involves the establishment of God’s reign—“Your God reigns!” is the good news in Isa. 52:7. Some recent interpreters mention this point and then also note that the idea of “good news” was common in the Roman world of Paul’s day, where the reign of the emperor was sometimes said to be “good news” for the world. They therefore conclude that Paul’s message of “good news” is basically the announcement of the reign of the Lord Jesus (in contrast to the reign of “Lord Caesar”; see esp. N. Wright 1994: 223–32; Hays 2000: 205). This focus on the reign of Christ is an attempt to correct an impression sometimes given that the “good news” involves simply “getting saved,” with little regard for the lordship of Christ.

But Wright and Hays have overreacted. Both in the OT and in the Roman world of Paul’s day, the news proclaimed by heralds was “good” because it meant the establishment of a beneficent reign. So Paul uses the language to focus not so much on the fact of God’s reign or Jesus’s lordship but on the wonderful benefits that the coming of Christ as Lord brings to his people. In Galatians, at least, this is certainly the case. The “truth of the gospel” that Paul contends for over against the agitators (1:7–9) and which he defends before the Jerusalem authorities (2:2, 5, 7) is not the lordship of Christ, over which there is apparently no disagreement. What is at stake, rather, is how the blessings of that lordship over individuals will be established and maintained. The “good news” that Paul has proclaimed in Galatia and over which there has arisen so much controversy is the message that God has in Christ made a way for sinners to be accepted before him and that this way, being an act of God’s grace, is to be entered into and lived out by faith alone (see esp. P. O’Brien 2004a: 293–94; Piper 2007: 81–91; Kim 2008: 3–71; de Boer 2011: 44).

DAY 7

⁶ I am [†] amazed [‡] that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you [†] to live in [‡] the grace [†] of Christ [‡] to another gospel, ⁷ which is really not another gospel—it is just that there are some people who are troubling you and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should [†] proclaim to you a gospel [‡] other than the one that we proclaimed, let that person fall under God’s curse! ⁹ As I said before, so now I say again: if anyone should proclaim to you a gospel other than the one you received, let that person fall under God’s curse.

¹⁰ For am I now trying to persuade human beings or God? Or am I trying to please human beings? If I were yet trying to please human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ.

1:7 Paul immediately “corrects” himself. The “other” (ἕτερος, *heteros*) gospel (1:6) that the Galatians are attracted to is not really a gospel at all, for there is no “other” (ἄλλος, *allos*) gospel—except in the sense that the agitators are trying to present their message as one. A striking and much discussed feature of this passage is the shift from ἕτερος to ἄλλος to express the idea of “another.” Many interpreters argue that, at least in this context, the two words have distinct nuances of meaning. Usually this distinction is said to be between “other” in the sense of “different in kind” (ἕτερος) and “other” in the sense of “another of a similar kind” (ἄλλος): the gospel

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

LXX Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek)

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

[†] Textual variants in the Greek text

[‡] Textual variants in the Greek text

to which the Galatians are attracted is a gospel of an entirely different kind than Paul's (v. 6b), yet that gospel is not another gospel that is anything like Paul's (v. 7a; "He admits ἕτερον, but refuses ἄλλο" [A. Robertson 1934: 747]; see also, e.g., Trench 1989: 357; Lightfoot 1881: 76; Burton 1921: 23–24, 420–22; R. Longenecker 1990: 15).¹

Other scholars, however, cite instances in which the two words appear to have no difference in meaning in the NT and conclude that we would be forcing matters to insist on a difference in this text (BDF §306.4; Turner 1963: 197; Dunn 1993a: 38; Bruce 1982b: 81; Martyn 1997: 110). These scholars are probably right: there is good reason to see the two as semantically equivalent here. However, there may be a stylistic reason for Paul to shift words. The word ἕτερος often has a basic "dual" sense, comparing one thing with one other. Paul probably uses this word in verse 6b because he is thinking of the "false" gospel in contrast to the "true" gospel that he has proclaimed. In verse 7a, however, he shifts to the more general "enumerative" word, ἄλλος, because he is now denying that this false gospel has any claim to be a gospel (however many gospels one might want to consider;² see the additional note on 1:6–7 for more detail).

As we suggest above in our translation, the second part of verse 7 qualifies Paul's claim that the gospel to which the Galatians are attracted is not, in fact, "another gospel." The other gospel to which the Galatians are tempted to transfer their allegiance is a gospel only in the sense that some "agitators" (οἱ ταρασσόντες, *hoi tarassontes*) are claiming it to be a gospel. Rather than being adversative, then (BDAG 277–79; BDF §448.8; Betz 1979: 49), εἰ μὴ (*ei mē*, but/except) probably retains its normal "exceptive" significance (Lightfoot 1881: 76; Burton 1898: 274). Paul calls the false teachers in Galatia those who "agitate," "confuse," or "trouble" others (all within the semantic range of ταρασσω; cf. BDAG 990–91) both here and in 5:10 (with a generic singular), and the language has been widely adopted by recent scholars as a way of describing the false teachers (note also that the verb is applied to Jewish Christians who insist that Gentiles be circumcised and observe the law of Moses in Acts 15:24). Paul adds a second coordinate participle to his description, which probably explicates the former one: those who are "agitating" the Galatians are doing so by "trying" (θέλοντες, *thelontes*) to "pervert" or "distort" (μεταστρέψαι, *metastrepσαι*) "the gospel of Christ" (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *to euangelion tou Christou*).³

Paul puts both participles in the present tense, an obvious indication that the false teachers' work is ongoing as well as that they have not yet succeeded in winning the Galatians over to their view. The genitive qualifier τοῦ Χριστοῦ after τὸ εὐαγγέλιον has attracted the usual debate: is it "objective," meaning "the gospel about Christ," or "the gospel that proclaims Christ" (cf. NLT, "the truth about Christ"; Ridderbos 1953: 49)—or is it "subjective," meaning "the gospel that Christ preached" (Zahn 1907: 47–48)? Some interpreters suggest that it is both (e.g., Mussner 1988: 58; R. Longenecker 1990: 16), but it is better to view it as a "general" genitive: Paul identifies the only true gospel as the gospel that is connected with, or defined by, Christ (Schlier 1989: 39; Rohde 1989: 42; Silva 2003: 33–34).¹

¹ Interestingly, however, William Ramsay (1900: 260–66) argues that the distinction worked exactly the opposite way.

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)

² Silva (2001: 54–56) suggests a different stylistic reason for the shift, noting that ἄλλος might be a more natural word than ἕτερος to use before the exceptive εἰ μὴ (*ei mē*, except/but) clause. But there is little evidence for this tendency (εἰ μὴ is preceded by ἄλλος once elsewhere in the NT [John 6:22] and by ἕτερος once elsewhere [Gal. 1:19]).

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

BDF *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by F. Blass and A. Debrunner, translated and revised by R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961)

BDAG *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000)

³ Both ταρασσόντες and θέλοντες are substantival participles, governed by οἱ (*hoi*, the) and standing in attributive relationship to τινές (*tines*, some): "There are some who are agitating ... and troubling" (cf. BDF §412.4).

NLT New Living Translation

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 66–80.*