

## Not Salvation History, but Salvation Territory: The Main Subject Matter of Galatians

SIGURD GRINDHEIM

*Fjellhaug International University College, Sinseneien 15, NO-0572 Oslo, Norway.*  
email: [sgrindheim@gmail.com](mailto:sgrindheim@gmail.com)

This article argues that the central question of Paul's letter to the Galatians is not 'what time is it?', but 'what has Jesus done for you?' In Paul's explanation of Christ's work, spatial categories are more important than temporal ones, as he impresses upon the Galatians that they have been delivered from the domain of slavery and transferred into the realm of freedom. The purpose of the letter is to urge the Galatians to remain in Christ's domain and not return to slavery by submitting to the law of Moses.

**Keywords:** Galatians, salvation history, Paul and the law

Thanks to the influence of J. Louis Martyn, NT scholars have learned to read Paul's letter to the Galatians as an argument concerning correct time-keeping. According to Martyn, the purpose of the letter is to answer two questions: 'What time is it?' and 'In what cosmos do we actually live?'<sup>1</sup> To him, the first question is the most important,<sup>2</sup> and in Martyn's reading, the answer is: the time of the new creation, brought into this world in apocalyptic fashion through God's invasion, without any kind of continuity with preceding history. This interpretation leaves no room for salvation history, understood as 'a linear history of the people of God prior to Christ'.<sup>3</sup>

1 *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 23.

2 Cf. J. L. Martyn, 'Apocalyptic Antinomies', *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) 121–2; *Galatians*, 104, 573.

3 'Events in Galatia: Modified Covenantal Nomism Versus God's Invasion of the Cosmos in the Singular Gospel: A Response to J. D. G. Dunn and B. R. Gaventa', *Pauline Theology 1: Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon* (ed. J. M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 174. Martinus C. de Boer follows Martyn in arguing that the law was not given by God (cf. Gal 3.19), and that 'there is a huge chasm between God's promise to Abraham... and the law of Moses' (*Galatians: A Commentary* [NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011] 236). J. Christiaan Beker goes so far as to say: '[t]he "Jewish" dispensation of 91

Many scholars take issue with Martyn's emphasis on discontinuity between the old and the new, and find instead a focus on a historical continuity that stretches from Israel under the old covenant to Christ-believers in the new. To James Dunn, for example, the gospel of Galatians marks 'the line of continuity with God's saving purpose for Israel'.<sup>4</sup> Despite these differences,<sup>5</sup> Dunn and many other scholars agree with Martyn that the main argument of Galatians is to affirm the dawn of the eschatological age.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the error of Paul's

---

circumcision and the Torah has only been a curse and an obstacle' (*Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980] 51). Although he does not follow Martyn's apocalyptic interpretation of Galatians, G. Walter Hansen also finds that Paul's argument in Galatians 'bypasses the Mosaic law and the Jewish nation as channels for the reception of the promises to Abraham' (*Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts* [JSNTSup 29; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989] 129). Occupying a mediating position, Bruce Longenecker nevertheless concludes that 'it may be that, on the basis of Galatians, a notion of a linear salvific history...must be relegated to the position of a peripheral extra in Pauline theology' (*The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998] 175).

- 4 J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993) 41; similarly N. T. Wright, 'Gospel and Theology in Galatians', *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (ed. L. A. Jervis and P. Richardson; JSNTSup 108; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994) 232; R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3.1-4.11* (Biblical Resource Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 2001) xxxvii; cf. also A. H. Wakefield, *Where to Live: The Hermeneutical Significance of Paul's Citations from Scripture in Galatians 3.1-14* (Academia Biblica 14; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 55, 64-5.
- 5 For an overview of the debate regarding salvation history, see Longenecker, *Triumph*; cf. also several of the essays in B. W. Longenecker, ed., *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002). J. Christiaan Beker, whose understanding of discontinuity resembles that of Martyn, also sees salvation history as an important heuristic category in the interpretation of Galatians. To him, 'Galatians 3 focuses on the fundamental principles of salvation-history', even though 'the hermeneutical key is the discontinuity of salvation-history' (*The Triumph of God: The Essence of Paul's Thought* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990] 50, 53).
- 6 A most diverse band of scholars follows Martyn in identifying 'What time is it?' as the central question of Galatians, e.g., F. Vouga, *An die Galater* (HNT 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 115; B. Witherington, III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 345; R. B. Hays, 'The Letter to the Galatians', *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000) 224, 292; M. Rastoin, *Tarse et Jérusalem: La double culture de l'Apôtre Paul en Galates 3,6-4,7* (AnBib 152; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003) 80; Wakefield, *Where to Live*, 175; T. R. Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (WUNT 2/272; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 108; D. I. Starling, *Not My People: Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics* (BZNW 184; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 44.

opponents may be described as an attempt 'to turn the clock back to a previous stage of God's purpose'.<sup>7</sup>

In this article, I will argue that time lines, whether linearly or disruptively perceived, are not the controlling metaphor of Paul's argument in Galatians. Any concept of a new era is subordinated to the concept of a transfer from one domain to another: the Galatians have been liberated from slavery and given adoption to sonship. More fundamental metaphors are therefore the concepts of space and realm. These metaphors represent identity and relationships. The Galatians belong to Christ and have a new identity in him. The debate concerning salvation history and the place of Israel in Galatians is therefore something of a wild-goose chase, as it asks questions that Paul is not concerned to answer.

The purpose of Paul's letter is to persuade the Galatians not to undergo circumcision. Paul maintains that if they are circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to them (5.2). Faith in Jesus Christ and works of the law mutually exclude each other (2.16). Paul's argument in Galatians is not intended to describe the progress or disruption of salvation history, but to delineate these two alternatives.

### 1. Spatial Categories

To this end, Paul makes use of spatial imagery. From the very opening of his letter, Paul presents his gospel as the inbreaking of Jesus Christ into this world. He is the one who gave himself for our sins, so that he might deliver us from, as it is usually translated, 'the present evil age' (1.4). The Greek phrase, however, is capable of broader connotations than what this strictly temporal translation communicates. Paul claims that Jesus has delivered us ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ. The modifying participle ἐνεστώτος derives from the verb ἐνίστημι, which means 'to be here, be at hand, arrive, come' (BDAG). The participle may refer to anything that is right here in front of you. Polybius, for example, uses it with reference to a resolution that is presented before a governing body (*Histories* 9.30.5). In such cases, the word has little to do with time. In other cases, the word refers to events that are taking place right now, at the present time. The participle ἐνεστώτος may therefore refer to something that is present in the local sense: it is here; and it may also refer to something that is present in the temporal sense: it is now. The term that is modified by the participle will determine which one of these two meanings applies.<sup>8</sup>

7 J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993) 209; similarly Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians*, 132; Hays, *The Faith*, xli; S. M. Lee, *The Cosmic Drama of Salvation: A Study of Paul's Undisputed Writings from Anthropological and Cosmological Perspectives* (WUNT 2/276; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 204.

8 In Pauline usage elsewhere, the participle is clearly used in a temporal sense when it is contrasted with μέλλον (Rom 8.38; 1 Cor 3.22). Temporality is also most likely in view when Paul speaks of the present crisis (τὴν ἐνεστώσαν ἀνάγκην; 1 Cor 7.26).

In Gal 1.4, the participle ἐνεστῶτος modifies the noun αἰών. Once again, we are confronted with ambiguity. Αἰών is usually translated ‘age’. BDAG lists ‘a long period of time, without reference to beginning or end’ and ‘a segment of time as a particular’ as the first and second meaning of this word. The third possibility is ‘the world as a spatial concept, the world’ (cf. Heb 1.2; 11.3). In Paul’s usage, the first meaning is commonly found when the term is used with prepositional phrases that indicate temporality, such as εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα/τοὺς αἰῶνας (as in the following verse, Gal 1.5) and πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων (cf. τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων). Elsewhere, it is difficult to distinguish between the second and third options. Paul admonishes the believers not to be conformed to this world (τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ; Rom 12.2), and disparages the debater of this world (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; 1 Cor 1.20), as he speaks a wisdom that is not of this world (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; 1 Cor 2.6; cf. 3.18), unknown to the rulers of this world (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; 1 Cor 2.6, 8). The unbelievers are blinded by the god of this world (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; 2 Cor 4.4). As a perusal of the standard English versions will show, both ‘age’ and ‘world’ are possible translations of αἰών in these contexts. However, translation into English forces us to make a choice that should probably not be made. The present αἰών is associated both with the present era and with the present world. It represents the domain of worldly and evil powers.<sup>9</sup> That Paul in 1 Corinthians understands this domain at least partly as ‘the world’ is indicated by his use of κόσμος as a synonym for αἰών in 1 Cor 1.20.<sup>10</sup>

In Gal 1.4, we are then faced with two possibilities that are not necessarily mutually exclusive: Jesus has delivered us from the evil age that is now,<sup>11</sup> or Jesus has delivered us from the evil world that is here.<sup>12</sup> On either translation, Paul’s language is informed by the conviction that the new creation has broken into this world (6.15).<sup>13</sup> Through Jesus Christ and his resurrection, God has intervened most decisively in this world, and those who believe in Jesus Christ share in this eschatological reality. This new reality can be conceived of both as a new time, a new era, and as a new place, a new spatial realm.<sup>14</sup> I will argue that the spatial

9 Cf. A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 165.

10 In the disputed Paulines, the temporal associations are more pronounced, as ὁ αἰών οὗτος is contrasted with ὁ αἰών μέλλων (Eph 1.21) and there are references to ὁ νῦν αἰών (1 Tim 6.17; 2 Tim 4.10; Tit 2.12).

11 Cf. CEB; ESV; HCSB; NAB; NASB; NEB; NET; NIV; NRSV; REB; RSV.

12 Cf. ASV; CEV; KJV; NJB; NLT.

13 Similarly, Longenecker, *Triumph*, 37.

14 Richard Longenecker observes that ‘Paul also uses κόσμος as a synonym for αἰών to denote not just the present period of world history but also the way of life that characterizes it (cf. 1 Cor 1.20; 2.12; 3.19; 7.31)’ (*Galatians* [WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990] 9). According to de Boer, ‘the two ages are not only temporal epochs but also two spheres or zones in which certain powers hold sway or in which certain kinds of activity take place’ (*Galatians*, 32; similarly,

way of conceiving of this eschatological reality is of primary significance in the letter to the Galatians. In Galatians, Paul describes the eschatological reality as a realm into which the Galatians have been transferred.

The context of Gal 1.4 points us in the direction that Paul operates with a spatial concept of Christ's deliverance, as is the case in the similar doxology in Col 1.13: 'He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son'.<sup>15</sup> The idea of deliverance lends itself more readily to the thought of deliverance from a domain than to the thought of deliverance from a time. The term ἐξαιρέω, which Paul uses in Gal 1.4, is typically used in the sense 'rescue from the hand of' (Gen 32.12; 37.21, 22; Exod 3.8; 4 Kgdms 18.35 etc.).<sup>16</sup>

After the doxology, the letter to the Galatians proceeds with a statement of astonishment that the Galatians have been moved to a different place (μετατίθεσθε), away from the one who called them in the grace of Christ (1.6). When Paul later recounts his personal story, the decisive moment is the intervention of God, who had already set him *apart* (ἀφορίσας) before he was born and called him through his grace (1.15).

Characteristically, the benefits that Paul describes in the letter are benefits that believers enjoy 'in Christ'. The preposition ἐν must be taken in its locative sense, signifying a spatial metaphor.<sup>17</sup> Believers possess their freedom 'in Christ' (Gal 2.4), are justified 'in Christ' (2.17), are sons of God 'in Christ' (3.26), are one 'in Christ' (3.28), and the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles 'in Christ' (3.14).

In contrast, Paul describes his experience before believing in Christ as being 'in Judaism' (Gal 1.13, 14). The approach to justification that he disavows is to

---

P. Bonnard, *L'Épître de Saint Paul aux Galates* [CNT 9; Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1972] 21; Martyn, *Galatians*, 102 n. 65). Christof Landmesser observes: 'Eine deutliche eschatologische Zeit- oder auch Raumeinteilung findet sich bereits in Gal 1,4' ('Eschatologie im Galaterbrief und im Römerbrief', *Eschatologie—Eschatology: The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Eschatology in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity [Tübingen, September, 2009]* [ed. H. -J. Eckstein, C. Landmesser and H. Lichtenberger; WUNT 272; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011] 233; similarly Vouga, *Galater*, 19–20).

15 The value of this parallel will of course depend somewhat on one's view of the authorship of Colossians. However, scholars agree that Colossians is strongly influenced by Paul, whatever his involvement in the writing process may have been. See especially J. L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008) 1–9.

16 Translating 'damit er uns herausreisse aus dem gegenwärtigen bösen Äon', Franz Mussner observes that 'dieser Äon [ist] als bedrohliche Macht verstanden' (*Der Galaterbrief* [HTKNT 9; Freiburg: Herder, 1974] 51). Hans-Dieter Betz emphasizes that Paul refers to 'liberation "out of" the evil aeon' as opposed to a change of aeons (*Galatians* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 42).

17 Winfried Elliger observes that the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ serves 'as a characterization of one's realm of existence' ('ἐν', *EDNT* 1.448).

be 'in the law' (Gal 3.11; 5.4), under the domain of the law, as opposed to being in Christ and belonging to his realm.<sup>18</sup>

In keeping with this perspective, Paul describes his ministry as a territorial war. His opponents in Jerusalem are portrayed as spies that have sneaked in (2.4), but Paul did not give way to them (2.5). Paul's opponents in Galatia want to *shut* the Galatians *out* (ἐκκλεῖσαι; 4.17), but such characters must be cast *out*, like the slave and her child (4.30). With a possible double entendre, Paul wishes that they cut themselves *off* (5.12), possibly referring to their standing in the community as well as to their genitalia.<sup>19</sup>

The Galatians have been liberated from slavery, but they are running the risk of returning to their old domain. Paul therefore has to ask: 'how can you turn back again (ἐπιστρέφετε) to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits?' (4.9). He assures them that, if they seek to be justified in the law, they will be released *away* from (κατηργήθητε ἀπό) Christ (5.4).

The contrast between these two realms is an ethical contrast.<sup>20</sup> Those who are in Christ relate to God as children (4.5-7, 31), whereas those who are not in Christ live in slavery (4.3, 7, 8-9, 22-25, 31; 5.1). Those in Christ are slaves to one another (5.13), those on the outside try to force others into slavery (2.4; 4.9, 25). Those in Christ are justified by God through faith (2.16), the others seek to be justified by works of the law (2.16; 5.4). Those in Christ suffer with him (3.4; 4.29; 5.11; 6.17), those outside bring suffering and persecution upon Christ's followers (4.29).<sup>21</sup>

18 This correspondence between being 'in Christ' and 'in the law' is also noted by E. de W. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920) 124. The use of the phrase ἐν νόμῳ/ἐν τῷ νόμῳ for a person who is under the domain of the law is unique to Paul in the NT (cf. Rom 2.12; 3.19; Phil 3.6). Elsewhere it is only used to refer to something that is textually written in the law of Moses.

19 The prospect of exclusion from the community may well be implied if the main thought is that of castration. A eunuch would be excluded from the assembly of God, according to Deut 23.1. Similarly, Burton, *Galatians*, 289; H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (KEK 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 5th ed. 1971) 240-1; C. K. Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation: A Study of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985) 70; D. Lührmann, *Galatians: A Continental Commentary* (trans. O. C. Dean, Jr.; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 98; Dunn, *Galatians*, 283; Vouga, *Galater*, 126; Witherington, *Galatians*, 374.

20 See Y.-G. Kwon, *Eschatology in Galatians: Rethinking Paul's Response to the Crisis in Galatia* (WUNT 2/183; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 192-5 and especially J. M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 75-105.

21 'Ἐπόθητε in Gal 3.4 should probably be given its full weight according to its prevalent usage and be translated 'suffered', rather than simply 'experienced'. So J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians: A Revised Text with Introduction, Notes, and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan, 4th ed. 1874) 135; E. Baasland, 'Persecution: A Neglected Feature in the Letter to the Galatians', *ST* 38 (1984) 142; R. Jewett, 'The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation', *NTS* 17 (1970-71) 203; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A*

Those in Christ fulfill the law (5.14; 6.2), the others do not really observe the Mosaic law (6.13). Those in Christ are characterized by the Spirit (3.3, 5, 14; 4.6, 29; 5.5, 16, 18, 25; 6.8), the others by the flesh (3.3; 4.23, 29; 5.19; 6.8). Those in Christ display community-building virtues (5.22–23; 6.1–2), the others engage in destructive works of the flesh (5.15, 19–21, 26; 6.3). Those in Christ bear each other's burdens and love each other (5.14; 6.1–2), the others bite and devour, threatening to consume one another (5.15). Above all, those in Christ are united with him in his crucifixion (2.19; 6.14). The others are not willing to be persecuted for the cross of Christ (6.12).

This contrast between being in Christ and being without him does not correspond precisely to being without and with the law. Even though they are free from the law, those in Christ are expected to hear the law (4.21) and to fulfill it. 'The whole law is fulfilled in one word: "love your neighbor as yourself"' (5.14), and love describes the life of the believer (5.6, 13, 22). However, those in Christ do not seek to be justified in the law (2.16, 21; 5.4), they are not under the law (3.23, 25; 4.5, 21; 5.18), and they are not enslaved by it (4.3, 9, 24–25, 31; 5.1). Accordingly, Paul's issue with circumcision more specifically concerns attempts to compel (ἀναγκάζειν) people to be circumcised (2.3; 6.12).

## 2. Temporal Categories

To be sure, temporal categories are not missing in Galatians. Paul recounts his personal history and alludes both to the history of Israel and to the history of the Galatians. But his purpose is not to provide an overview of salvation history; it is to explain the nature of the Galatians' transition from slavery to freedom.<sup>22</sup> The Galatians have been transferred to a new domain; they now belong to Christ. Paul's use of temporal categories serves to describe the before and now of this transfer. When he refers to his own personal history and to the history of Israel, the rhetorical function of both of these examples is to provide analogies that may elucidate the Galatians' own situation.

I suggest that this is the reason why the interpreter of Galatians faces an almost insoluble problem when trying to decide whose history Paul is referring to from one verse to another. His many shifts from the first person to the second

---

*Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 150; A. J. Goddard and S. A. Cummins, 'Ill or Ill-Treated? Conflict and Persecution as the Context of Paul's Original Ministry in Galatia', *JSNT* 52 (1993) 119.

22 Cf. Susan Eastman, who argues that 'problems arise when [Paul's testimony] is understood primarily in simple temporal terms'. She finds in Galatians an 'interweaving of temporal narrative and relational language' (*Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007] 56).

person in 3.10–4.7 have puzzled many commentators. Even the early scribes appear to have been confused and attempted to improve on the consistency of Paul's grammar (cf. the apparatus in NA27 on 4.6, 28), and scholars continue to discuss whether his first person plurals were intended to include the Galatians.<sup>23</sup>

Paul's language is ambiguous, and I suggest that it is ambiguous by design. Paul's rhetorical purposes in Galatians mean that he is not interested in the history of Israel for its own sake, and he is not trying to show how Israel's salvation history eventually would benefit the Gentiles.<sup>24</sup> Instead, he shows the parallels between his own personal history as a Jew and the history of the Galatians.

Paul may have been motivated by a need or a desire to defend his apostleship when he included his autobiography in his letter to the Galatians, but his story is also told in such a way that the points of overlap between himself and the Galatians can be appreciated. He used to be a persecutor, but now he is being persecuted (1.13, 23). The Galatians, however, are being tempted to make the opposite move: from being the suffering and persecuted people of God to a people that avoids persecution to gain a standing in this world (3.3; 6.12; cf. 4.29). Just like Paul used to try to destroy the church (1.13; cf. 1.23), so do the Galatians now run the risk of destroying one another (5.15). Paul was transformed through a direct intervention by God, revealing his Son to him (1.15–16), just as the Galatians were transformed as God intervened and gave his Spirit when Christ was portrayed as crucified before their eyes (3.1–2). All these points of convergence between Paul's story and the story of the Galatians inform the exhortation in 4.12: 'become like me because I have become like you'.<sup>25</sup>

Similar points of overlap exist between Paul's telling of Israel's story and the story of the Galatians. Ostensibly, Paul's first person plurals in 3.23–25 concern himself and other Israelites. 'Before faith came, we were imprisoned under the law, locked up until the coming faith was revealed... With the coming of faith, however, we are no longer under the disciplinarian.' Then in v. 26, Paul suddenly switches to the second person plural, apparently referring to the Galatians: 'For in Christ Jesus all of you are God's children through the faith. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ' (3.26–27). It is apparently not important to clarify whether it is Israel's story or the Galatians'

23 See, e.g., T. L. Donaldson, 'The "Curse of the Law" and the Inclusion of the Gentiles: Galatians 3.13–14', *NTS* 32 (1986) 94–112; R. J. Morales, *The Spirit and the Restoration of Israel: New Exodus and New Creation Motifs in Galatians* (WUNT 2/282; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010) 105–9, 113–14, 121–2.

24 Pace Donaldson, "'Curse of the Law'"; B. W. Longenecker, 'Sharing in their Spiritual Blessings? The Stories of Israel in Galatians and Romans', *Narrative Dynamics in Paul* (ed. Longenecker) 66; Morales, *Spirit*.

25 Similarly, Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 38–43. Martyn observes: 'they are to become like him in regarding themselves as former Jews (4.5)' (*Galatians*, 420).

story Paul is recounting. What is important is that both stories concern a transition from captivity to freedom.<sup>26</sup>

The ambiguity is taken to another level in 4.1–7. Paul begins with a reference to an underage heir. This heir presumably represents Israel under the law, and this choice of metaphor may reflect Paul's conviction that there is a significant difference between Israel under the law and pagan Gentiles: Israel corresponds to the underage heir, pagan Gentiles to the slave. But for Paul's rhetorical purposes in Galatians, the similarities between Israel and the pagans are more important. He provocatively states: 'there is no difference between the heir and the slave, even though the heir is master of all' (4.1).<sup>27</sup> The point is that the heir is also under guardians and trustees. Paul then returns to the first person plural in v. 3, to explain that the heir corresponds to 'us', who were in slavery under the elements of the world (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου). Paul's use of this phrase is the clearest example of his tendency to conflate the history of Israel and the history of the Galatians. In 4.3, he and his fellow Jews are enslaved under the elements, and in 4.9 he associates these same elements with the Galatians' former life in idolatry. If the Galatians were to embrace circumcision, it would constitute a return to the very same elements to which they had been enslaved when they were pagans.<sup>28</sup>

Paul's point when he compares the slave and the underage heir is therefore not to relegate Israel to an intermediate state in salvation history. Rather, his purpose is to describe the Jewish experience in such a way that the parallels between the Jewish and the pagan experience become clear. They were both enslaved. Apparently, Paul presupposes that Israel was in a different situation than the pagans; he distinguishes between the child and the slave, but his interest lies elsewhere: in explaining the similarities between them.

The similarities between Israel and the pagans are so strongly in focus that Paul's own analogy completely breaks down. While he is operating within his own analogy, Paul observes that the submission to guardians and trustees would only last until the time predetermined by the father (4.2). This concept

26 Similarly, C. H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* (Louvain: Peeters, 1988) 69–70. Robin Scroggs observes that 'Paul's interest in the past is for the sake of the present' ('Salvation History: The Theological Structure of Paul's Thought [1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Galatians]', *Pauline Theology 1* [ed. Bassler] 221).

27 Betz observes: 'Paul's claim that there is no difference is hyperbolic, since legally there is a vast difference between a free person and a slave' (*Galatians*, 203).

28 Scholars who maintain that Galatians emphasizes the special place of Israel in salvation history also recognize that Israel and the Galatians were in the same position with respect to the elements (Donaldson, "'Curse of the Law'", 96; Dunn, *Galatians*, 226). Johannes Woyke argues that the elements, both in the case of the Torah and in the case of the former Galatian paganism, served as instruments of God's punishment ('Nochmals zu den "schwachen und unfähigen Elementen" [Gal 4.9]: Paulus, Philo und die στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου', *NTS* 54 [2008] 231).

of a predetermined time is recalled by the phrase 'in the fullness of time' in 4.4, but the differences between the analogy and the application are striking. An underage heir would not need to be redeemed and delivered from slavery. He or she would simply have to reach the specified age.<sup>29</sup> Not so in Paul's application of his own analogy. With a first person plural, presumably including himself as an Israelite, Paul explains that 'we received adoption as children' (4.5). This language does not describe people who already enjoy the status of children and who reach the age when they are no longer under a guardian. The language refers to people that do not enjoy such status, but who receive it by adoption.<sup>30</sup> This constitutes a significant tension within Paul's argument.<sup>31</sup> In v. 1, he appears to presume that Israel under the law could be considered children, even though they did not enjoy the privileges of children.<sup>32</sup> In v. 5, however, he appears to presume that Israelites needed to be granted status as children.<sup>33</sup> This tension remains unresolved in the letter to the Galatians.<sup>34</sup> Paul does not display any interest in solving it, but rather

29 Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 203.

30 The term is poorly attested in Greek literature, but quite common in inscriptions, where it is used to identify a person as someone's adopted son, sometimes with indication of the time of adoption. Cf. MM; A. Deissmann, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901) 239.

31 The inconsistency is duly noted by J. M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* (WUNT 2/48; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992) 123–5. Scott's solution is to see the passage as referring to Israel's enslavement in Egypt before the exodus. For a critique of his interpretation, see J. K. Goodrich, 'Guardians, not Taskmasters: The Cultural Resonances of Paul's Metaphor in Galatians 4.1–2', *JSNT* 32 (2010) 251–84.

32 If Paul held the conviction that there was a remnant of Israel that had remained faithful to the Lord (as many interpreters understand Rom 9.27–29; 11.4–5, but see J. M. G. Barclay, 'Paul's Story: Theology as Testimony', *Narrative Dynamics in Paul* [ed. Longenecker] 151), it is possible that this conviction explains the concept of an underage heir in Gal 4.1–2. The remnant was God's faithful people and therefore enjoyed the status as his children, but they were also bound to the Sinai covenant and therefore under guardians and trustees. Whether or not Paul held such a conviction at the time when he wrote his letter to the Galatians, it plays no role in his argument in the letter.

33 Similarly, J. M. G. Barclay, 'Paul, the Gift and the Battle over Gentile Circumcision', *ABR* 58 (2010) 54.

34 One might suggest that Paul presupposes an underlying story, a story that he merely alludes to, but does not spell out completely, and that, if recovered, such a story might explain the tension. Cf. Hays's argument that the differences between 3.13–14 and 4.3–6 may be explained by assuming a more comprehensive underlying story (*The Faith*, 81–2, 108–9). However, it is difficult to see how such an argument could be made in this case. Gal 3.13–14 and 4.3–6 may be understood as making references to different parts of the same story; e.g., 3.13–14 mentions the cross and 4.3–6 the incarnation; 3.13–14 refers to Christ as the subject and 4.4–5 to God; 3.13–14 uses the title 'Christ' and 4.3–6 the title '[God's] Son'. The problem in 4.1–7, however, is not that Paul may omit something on one occasion and omit something else later; the problem is that he affirms two things that cannot both be true at the same time. An underlying story that could solve the tension inherent in Gal 4.1–7 would have to explain how Israel could be children and heirs on the one hand and slaves in need of redemption and adoption on the

in establishing that both Israel and the Galatians were in slavery and under a curse until they came to faith in Christ.

Their liberation is the result of God's direct intervention in Jesus Christ. This immediacy of God's action in Christ is precisely what distinguishes the promises from the law. The law was administered through angels, by the hand of a mediator (3.19). God's rule through the law is therefore not his direct rule. Accordingly, those under the law are in slavery to the elements of the world (4.3). They do not enjoy immediate fellowship with the Father, the fellowship that characterizes the Son. With the outpouring of the Spirit, however, believers enjoy the ultimate level of intimacy: they have the Spirit of God's Son in their hearts, and they address him in the way that the Son does, crying: 'Abba, Father' (4.6). They are not ruled indirectly by God; they are not enslaved by the law. Instead, they are ruled directly by God; they are led by the Spirit (5.18).

With this focus on intimacy with God and his direct intervention, there is little room for any emphasis on continuity with the people of God throughout history. As Martyn correctly observes, the only element of continuity that is affirmed in the letter to the Galatians is the connection between the gospel and the promise to Abraham. For Paul's rhetorical purposes in Galatians, there is no straight salvation historical line that runs from Abraham through Israel and culminates in the blessing of the Gentiles. Instead, the justification of the Gentiles is directly and immediately connected to Abraham and God's promise to him. As Paul interprets it in Galatians, God's promise to Abraham specifically concerns Jesus Christ (3.16) and constitutes a prediction of God's justification of the Gentiles by faith (3.8).<sup>35</sup>

Viewed in this light, the problem with the law is not that it is obsolete, but that it is not old enough. It was introduced 430 years too late to invalidate or add anything to the Abrahamic covenant (3.15).

---

other. It is possible to imagine some ways in which Paul might have been able to resolve this tension (based on the assumption that the different descriptions referred to Israel at different times or to different constituencies within Israel), but it is not possible to appeal to any evidence in Galatians for any such resolution, not even the fact that Paul felt the need to provide one. It would be purely speculative to attempt to reconstruct a theology of Galatians on the basis of any such assumptions.

35 Martyn concludes: 'Paul's interpretation of the seed to whom God made the covenantal promise is as polemically punctiliar as it is polemically singular' (*Galatians*, 347). Hays maintains that 'most of the history of Israel vanishes into an interpretive abyss' and that there is no development that moves from Abraham to Christ. Instead, he finds that the Christ-event relates typologically to the story of Abraham (*The Faith*, 56-7). Cf. also G. Klein, 'Individualgeschichte und Weltgeschichte bei Paulus: Eine Interpretation ihres Verhältnisses im Galaterbrief', *EvT* 24 (1964) 148-51; F. Watson, 'Is There a Story in These Texts?', *Narrative Dynamics* (ed. Longenecker) 238; Barclay, 'Paul', 53-4.

What is more, the nature of the law is fundamentally different from the promises of God. The law prescribes works, but the promises grant God's gift by faith.<sup>36</sup> The law brings a curse and the promises bring life (3.10–12, 21–22). Justification is therefore not by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ (2.16). When it comes to seeking justification, the law and the promises therefore exclude each other: those who are justified by faith are free from the law (3.13, 23, 25; 4.5), whereas those who seek justification by the law are disqualified from justification by faith (5.2). The reason for Paul's objection to law observance is therefore not that the law belongs to a bygone era. His objection is based on the conviction that adherence to the law would sever the relationship to Christ.

### 3. The Purpose of the Law

This interpretation may seem to run counter to Paul's affirmation that there is no conflict between the law and the promises (3.21a). It should be noted, however, that Paul makes this affirmation in response to either a real or a perceived objection to his message: '[i]s the law then opposed to the promises of God?' In other words, it was possible to infer from Paul's gospel that there was indeed a conflict between the law and the promises.

The reason why Paul rejects this inference is not that the law and the promises served the same purpose. It is precisely the opposite: the law and the promises served diametrically different purposes. The law was never intended to give life (3.21b). Instead, it 'was added for the sake of transgressions, until the coming of the seed regarding whom the promise had been made' (3.19). The phrase τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν can be taken either in a causal sense (cf. Luke 7.47; 1 John 3.12) or in a telic sense (cf. Eph 3.1, 14; 1 Tim 5.14; Titus 1.5, 11; Jude 16; Prov 17.17). If it is the former, the law would have been added 'because of transgressions', presumably to deal with them or to control them.<sup>37</sup> If Paul had used the phrase τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν χάριν ('because of sins') or τῆς ἁμαρτίας χάριν ('because of sin'), this interpretation would have been more plausible. But since the point concerns 'transgressions' (παραβάσεων), which specifically

36 This interpretation of the nature of the law is probably the reason why Paul can associate the circumcision commandment with the Mosaic law (5.3), even though this commandment was given by God to Abraham.

37 Dunn focuses on the sacrificial system as a remedy for sin and paraphrases: 'in order to provide a way of dealing with, in order to provide some sort of remedy for transgressions' (*Galatians*, 189–90). Bruce Longenecker argues that the function of the law is 'to restrain sinful desires and to protect Israel from excessive sinful indulgence' (*Triumph*, 122–8; similarly D. J. Lull, "The Law Was our Pedagogue": A Study in Galatians 3.19–25', *JBL* 105 [1986] 483–5; Vouga, *Galater*, 82–3; G. D. Fee, *Galatians: Pentecostal Commentary* [Pentecostal Commentary Series; Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2007] 129–30). Hays favors a similar interpretation, in combination with the view that the law identifies sin ('Galatians', 266–7; cf. below).

refer to violations of a law or commandment, and since there is no ‘transgression’ (παράβασις) where there is no law (Rom 4.15), it is difficult to imagine that the law was added to deal with a non-existent issue.<sup>38</sup> It is therefore better to take the phrase in the telic sense; the law was added for the purpose of transgressions, either to bring them about or to make them known.<sup>39</sup> The fact that ‘transgressions’ do not exist without a law also helps decide between these two options; transgressions need to be present before they can be made known. For this reason, the former interpretation is the most likely. The idea that in Gal 3.19 is expressed in the most shorthand fashion appears to be very similar to what Paul explains in greater detail in Rom 7.7–13: the law provokes violation of the commandment.

This interpretation is confirmed by the image of imprisonment invoked in v. 22: ‘Scripture has imprisoned all things under sin’.<sup>40</sup> The picture that Paul paints here is not that of a remedy, but that of a predicament that cries out for liberation. The disciplinarian analogy (3.24–25) contributes to the same idea. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the παιδαγωγός (‘disciplinarian’) may have had both positive and negative connotations.<sup>41</sup> The παιδαγωγός was a slave responsible for accompanying a minor to school. His task was not pedagogical,<sup>42</sup> but to protect the boy, ensure that he kept good manners, and discipline him if necessary. In a context where Paul describes imprisonment and the need for liberation, the image of the παιδαγωγός should probably be understood to invoke the image of constraint and lack of freedom.<sup>43</sup>

38 D. C. Arichea and E. A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Helps for Translators 18; Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1976) 74; Martyn, *Galatians*, 254; de Boer, *Galatians*, 230–1.

39 For the former interpretation, see H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Galatians* (trans. G. H. Venables; Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1873) 170; Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 144; Burton, *Galatians*, 188; M.-J. Lagrange, *Saint Paul épître aux Galates* (EBib; Paris: Gabalda, 3rd ed. 1926) 82; Schlier, *Galater*, 152–3; Bonnard, *Galates*, 72–3; A. Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (THKNT 9; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 3rd ed. 1973) 115; Mussner, *Galaterbrief*, 245–6; Betz, *Galatians*, 165; Bruce, *Galatians*, 175; Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, 33; H.-J. Eckstein, *Verheissung und Gesetz: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu Galater 2,15–4,7* (WUNT 86; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 191–3; Martyn, *Galatians*, 354–5; T. R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 239–40; de Boer, *Galatians*, 230–1. For the latter, see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 138; F. J. Matera, *Galatians* (SP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992) 128; cf. also Hays, ‘Galatians’, 266–7.

40 The meaning of συγκλείω is to ‘confine’ or ‘imprison’ (BDAG). Cf. Rom 11.32.

41 Lull, “‘Pedagogue’”; N. H. Young, ‘Paidagogos: The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor’, *NovT* 29 (1987) 150–76.

42 A point missed by Georg Bertram (‘παιδεύω κτλ’, *TDNT* 5.620).

43 Schlier, *Galater*, 168–70; Oepke, *Galater*, 121–2; Betz, *Galatians*, 77; L. L. Belleville, “‘Under Law’”: Structural Analysis and the Pauline Concept of Law in Galatians 3.21–4.11’, *JSNT* 26 (1986) 60; Martyn, *Galatians*, 363; D. Sänger, “Das Gesetz ist unser paidagogos geworden

The law does not contribute to the liberation, therefore, and it does not serve as a sequel to the promise or as a prequel to the gospel. Rather, the law reinforces the imprisonment. In so doing, however, it reveals the plight from which Christ brings redemption.<sup>44</sup> The law makes human sinfulness manifest itself, so that it can be adequately dealt with in Jesus Christ.

#### 4. The Temporal Nature of the Law

This discussion of the purpose of the law in 3.19–26 may seem to provide the most serious counter-indication to my thesis, as Paul's argument here appears to focus on temporal categories. According to Gal 3.19, the law was added 'until the coming of the seed regarding whom the promise had been made'. In the whole letter, this is perhaps the clearest reference to a historic progression of God's salvific purposes: the era of the law is replaced by the era of the offspring. Once again, however, a closer examination will reveal that Paul's purpose is not to explain the role of the law in salvation history. His concern is with the offspring's effect on the Galatians, as his subsequent explanation demonstrates.

Paul revisits this temporal contrast in v. 23: 'Before the faith came, we were imprisoned and locked up until the coming faith was revealed'. What Paul means by 'the faith' (τὴν πίστιν) is very difficult to determine with precision. Commentators suggest that the meaning is human faith in Christ; the content of faith, the gospel, Christ, or Christ's faithfulness; or a combination of both subjective faith and objective teaching.<sup>45</sup> The very idea of 'coming' as well as the parallel with the coming of the offspring in v. 19 indicate that 'faith' is simply a synonym for Christ. A comparison of the whole passage 3.23–29 with 4.1–7 also

---

bis zu Christus" (Gal 3,24)', *Das Gesetz im frühen Judentum und im Neuen Testament: Festschrift für Christoph Burchard zum 75. Geburtstag* (ed. D. Sänger and M. Konradt; NTOA/SUNT 57; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006) 254–60; de Boer, *Galatians*, 240–1; and, more cautiously, Young, 'Paidagogos', 170–3. James Dunn translates παιδαγωγός as 'custodian' and argues that the image is that of protective custody (Dunn, *Galatians*, 197–9; *Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, 89–90). This interpretation does not seem to do justice to the fact that Paul here describes a state from which liberation was necessary. In 4.3, he invokes the less ambiguous image of slavery.

44 Barrett likens its function to that of a jailor or an executioner (*Freedom and Obligation*, 35).

45 For the meaning 'human faith in Christ', see Meyer, *Galatians*, 200; Burton, *Galatians*, 198; Lagrange, *Galates*, 89; Schlier, *Galater*, 166; Bonnard, *Galates*, 75; Oepke, *Galater*, 120; Mussner, *Galaterbrief*, 254–5; Bruce, *Galatians*, 181; R. Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 168; Dunn, *Galatians*, 197; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 245–6; for 'the content of faith', 'the gospel', 'Christ', or 'Christ's faithfulness', see Betz, *Galatians*, 176; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 145; Lührmann, *Galatians*, 74; Martyn, *Galatians*, 361–2; Witherington, *Galatians*, 268; Hays, 'Galatians', 269–70; for both subjective faith and objective teaching, see Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 148.

shows that the expression ‘with the coming of faith’ in 3.25 parallels the phrase ‘God sent his Son’ in 4.4, further strengthening the impression that ‘faith’ is another term for Christ. Paul’s use of the definite article in 3.23 indicates that the faith he has in mind is the same as what he has described in v. 22, where he affirmed that ‘the promise might be given by the faith of Jesus Christ to those who believe’. One’s interpretation of ‘faith’ in v. 23 will then depend on one’s interpretation of the much-debated term ‘faith of Christ’, unless Paul means to refer back to the verb ‘those who believe’ (πιστεύουσιν) in v. 22. This faith that is said to ‘come’ in v. 23 is also said to be revealed (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι). This idea recalls Paul’s affirmation in 1.12, 16 (the only other times he uses the verb ἀποκαλύπτω in Galatians), that he received the gospel ‘through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ (δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). This claim does not refer to the historical coming of Christ, but to Paul’s experience of coming to faith in him.<sup>46</sup>

The references to ‘faith’ in 3.23, 25 may therefore have associations both of the historical coming of Christ and of the believers’ experience of coming to faith in him.<sup>47</sup> As Paul’s argument proceeds, however, he focuses more specifically on the Galatians’ appropriation of Christ’s gifts. This becomes clear in v. 27: ‘for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ’. The argument in Gal 3.23–27 concerns the transfer of the Galatians from a state of imprisonment to a state of sonship. The point of transfer is variously identified as the coming of faith (vv. 23, 25), as Christ (v. 24), as faith without qualification (v. 26),<sup>48</sup> and as baptism (v. 27). As Paul’s argument is clearly leading towards the Galatians’ change of identity (v. 27), it is difficult to rule out a reference to the believers’ own experience of faith in vv. 23–25 as well. Most scholars agree that at least the unqualified ‘faith’ in 3.26 must be taken in this sense.<sup>49</sup>

46 Hays sees this parallel as evidence that Paul in Gal 3.23 does not refer to subjective faith, but to ‘the faith which is believed’ or, as he prefers, ‘the faithfulness of Christ’. His argument is that ‘revelation is not a matter of human possibility’ (‘Galatians’, 269–70). However, subjective faith should not be understood as a human possibility, but as the result of divine intervention, as Paul explains in Gal 1.12, 16. Cf. M. A. Seifrid, ‘Faith of Christ’, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (ed. M. F. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) 41.

47 Similarly, Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 148.

48 The prepositional phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ probably does not modify τῆς πίστεως (contra CEB; CEV; KJV; NIV84; NLT) but rather υἱοὶ θεοῦ. The sense is captured well by the NRSV: ‘for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith’ (cf. ESV; GNB; NAB; NEB; NIV; NJB; REB).

49 Mussner, *Galaterbrief*, 262; Betz, *Galatians*, 861; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 521; Dunn, *Galatians*, 202; *pace* Schlier, *Galater*, 171–2. Even interpreters that find Christ’s faithfulness to be the antecedent of ‘the faith’ in 3.23 agree that the ‘faith’ in 3.26 refers at least partly to human faith (Martyn, *Galatians*, 375; Hays, ‘Galatians’, 271), but see also de Boer, *Galatians*, 242.

In 4.1–7, a passage that continues many of the themes from 3.23–29 and develops them further,<sup>50</sup> the intermingling of the coming of Christ and the transformation of the Galatians is even more pronounced. The crucial change, as described in this passage, is to receive ‘adoption as children’ (4.5). This adoption is clearly a consequence of the historic coming of Christ, God’s sending of his Son (4.4). At the same time, it is connected with God’s sending of ‘the Spirit of his Son into our hearts’ (4.6). With this reference to the Spirit, Paul recalls the Galatians’ experience when they first accepted the gospel message (cf. Gal 3.1–5).

Paul’s language reflects an awareness that the coming of Christ in history is the cause of the Galatians’ liberation, but the purpose of his argument is not to describe the before and now of cosmic history or salvation history. Paul’s purpose is to show the Galatians that their own history means that their identity has changed.<sup>51</sup> They have been given the Holy Spirit, and they are no longer slaves, but children.

Regarding the Mosaic law, Paul’s purpose in reminding the Galatians of its temporary role (3.19, 23) is not to impress upon the Galatians that the law is obsolete, but that *they* are no longer under it. This fact does not have to do with a change in the law, as much as with a change in their status. An underlying premise of Paul’s argument in Galatians is that the law remains the same. It continues to condemn those who are under it.<sup>52</sup> It continues to pronounce a curse for all ‘those who are of the law’ (3.10). In its original context, the curse from Deut 27.26 that Paul quotes in Gal 3.10 was directed at Israel in the wilderness. But Paul’s rhetorical purpose in Galatians is not to evoke sympathy with the wilderness generation. It is to hold up the prospect of this curse befalling the Galatians. If they submit to works of the law, this curse will apply to them. In other words, the condemnation of the law is still a real possibility.<sup>53</sup>

What is more, the claims of the law continue to be valid claims. Christ will be of no benefit to the Galatians if they are circumcised, because ‘every man who is circumcised...is obligated to do the entire law’ (5.2–3). The obligations of the law continue to be in effect. Within its domain, then, the law continues to exercise the same rule as it has done previously. It holds up the same obligations and pronounces the same curses.

## 5. Relationship Categories

Those who believe in Christ, however, are no longer under the law (3.13, 23, 25; 4.5; 5.18). They belong to a different realm. The reason is not that Christians know what time it is, but that they are severed from the law through

50 Dunn, *Galatians*, 210.

51 Similarly, M. Wolter, ‘Das Israelproblem nach Gal 4,21–31 und Röm 9–11’, *ZTK* 107 (2010) 3, 15.

52 Pace Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians*, 132.

53 Similarly, Wakefield, *Where to Live*, 193–4.

their union with Christ's crucifixion.<sup>54</sup> With a reference to his union with Christ, Paul confesses: 'through the law I have died to the law, so that I might live to God' (2.19). He makes a similar statement with respect to this world (κόσμος) in Gal 6.14: 'May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world'. The historical fact of Christ's crucifixion is the foundation for Paul's argument, but the point that he is driving at is that he now stands in a new relationship to the world. His point is not that the world has changed, but that his relationship to it has changed. He is no longer under its domain, and its values and power structures no longer have any claim on him or hold any real significance for him. The reason for this transformation is the objective fact of Christ's crucifixion, but also Paul's continued identification with it, as his use of the perfect tense (ἔστρωρωται) shows.<sup>55</sup> What it all comes down to, then, as Paul sums up his argument in the impassioned conclusion to the letter, is not a change of times, but a change of domains and relationships.

Through the sending of his Son and through the sending of the Spirit of his Son, God has delivered the Galatians from slavery (4.4–6), be it slavery under idols or slavery under the law. They are therefore no longer slaves, but enjoy adoption to sonship. This liberation marks a new era for the Galatians and defines a very clear distinction between before and now. They live in a new time, indeed, the time of freedom and sonship. The Galatians may therefore very well affirm that slavery belongs to their past. But now they have been liberated from the yoke of slavery and enjoy their freedom. However, the reason for their freedom is not to be found by reading the calendar. The reason for their freedom is that they have been liberated.

It is not the ticking of the eschatological clock that has liberated the Galatians from slavery; it is the death of Jesus Christ. The Galatians enjoy this freedom when they receive Christ's liberation in faith, but if they once again sign their slave contract by undergoing circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to them (5.2). Then they will have turned back to the realm of slavery.

## 6. Conclusion

Time in relation to world history, salvation history, or cosmic history is not interesting to Paul in his letter to the Galatians. The only history that is important for his rhetorical purposes in this letter is the Galatians' own. They have moved

<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Kwon, *Eschatology*, 39–40.

<sup>55</sup> The perfect tense refers not only to the objective fact of Christ's crucifixion, but also to the state that results from it (Dunn, *Galatians*, 413). Martyn emphasizes that the crucifixion is 'an event that happened apart from [Paul]', but concedes that 'he participated in that event' (*Galatians*, 563–4).

from slavery to freedom. Paul's references to his personal history and to the history of Israel serve to illustrate the nature of this transfer and to describe the two domains that the letter intends to contrast: slavery under the law and adoption to sonship. As the purpose of the letter is to urge the Galatians not to return to the domain of slavery, spatial categories are more important than temporal categories. The Galatians have been liberated from slavery by God's direct intervention in Christ's act of redemption. Through their union with Christ and his crucifixion, the believers are severed from this evil world and placed in a new realm, in which they enjoy adoption as sons.

The burning question in Galatians is not: 'what time is it?', but rather: 'what has Jesus done for you and what is your relationship to him?'