

Covenant, Oath, and Divine Sonship in Galatians 3–4

The explanatory power of a theory is one of the criteria of its scientific validity. In Part One we developed several hypotheses concerning the nature and relationship of the divine covenants in the Old Testament. In Part Two we are testing the explanatory power of these hypotheses by applying them to select documents of the New Testament canon in which covenant and divine sonship concepts figure prominently: Luke–Acts, Galatians, and Hebrews.

It is difficult to exaggerate the influence Galatians has had on all subsequent Christian thought on the relationship between the Old and New Covenants, and the Gospel and the Mosaic law.¹ The issues presented by this Epistle are numerous and complex.² However, the discussion in this chapter is restricted to the heart of the Epistle's argument (Gal 3–4) and to those issues most relevant to the present study: divine sonship, oath-swearing, curse-bearing, and the meaning of "covenant" (*diathēke*).

In particular, emphasis is on three points: First, in Paul's view of salvation history, *the Abrahamic covenant has chronological priority and ontological primacy over the Mosaic*. Moreover, for Paul, the Abrahamic covenant does not receive its definitive shape in Genesis 17, but in Genesis 22, where it is *ratified by God's self-sworn oath after the Aqedah* (Gen 22:15–18). This will become evident especially in our study of Galatians 3:15–18. The logical corollary of Paul's view of the Abrahamic covenant is that the Mosaic covenant is *secondary and subordinate*. Moreover, its definitive shape is achieved, not in the earlier Sinai or Wilderness legislation (Exod 20–Num 36), *but in the book of Deuteronomy* (i.e., the Book of the Law), where it

is ratified by curses invoked and pronounced by Moses and the Levites (Deut 27–30). The heavy emphasis on curses in Deuteronomy lies behind Paul's thought in Galatians 3:10 and elsewhere. Second, Christ's curse-bearing death on the cross simultaneously *bears and expiates the Deuteronomic covenant curses* and *releases the Abrahamic blessings* promised to the nations at the Aqedah (Gen 22:18). Third, in the entire movement from the Abrahamic through the Mosaic to the New Covenant, Paul sees at work a *paternal pedagogy* whereby God as father works to restore his people to the fullness of divine sonship.

Preliminaries

In the following discussion we will make three assumptions: (1) the covenant idea was central to Palestinian Judaism, (2) the scriptural contexts evoked by Paul's OT citations are crucial to his arguments, and (3) the rhetorical *probatio* ("demonstration" or "proof") of Galatians extends from 3:6 to 4:31 and is chiasmatically focused on 3:26–29. These assumptions require some comment and justification.

The Covenant in Judaism.

First, on the central place of the covenant concept in Palestinian Judaism, we simply point to E. P. Sanders' seminal work, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, in which he demonstrated convincingly that the religious outlook of first-century Jews could be accurately described as "covenantal nomism." Briefly put, covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires—as the proper response of each individual—obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression.³

Sanders is almost solely responsible for a "paradigm shift" in Pauline scholarship, which for the past two centuries has largely held first-century Judaism to be a legalistic religion in which the covenant concept was of little or no consequence. As N. T. Wright comments, "Sanders has shown . . . so conclusively that one wonders how any other view could ever have been taken [that] covenantal ideas were totally common and regular" in Second Temple Judaism.⁴

We concur with Sanders' basic insight that the covenant was the centerpiece of first-century Judaism and a controlling principle of Paul's theology. However, Sanders' portrayal of Jewish "covenantal nomism" is somewhat

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one sided in its emphasis on continuity in the covenantal relationship between God and his people and the ready availability of atonement for sin by sacrifice and repentance. Sanders underestimates the degree to which the sins of Israel had introduced tensions and discontinuity into the covenantal relationship. We give two examples.

First, Sanders dismisses offhandedly F. Weber's proposal that the incident of the golden calf was to Israel what the fall was to Adam. According to Sanders, "Weber obviously attributes to the golden calf story a systematic place in the history [of] Israel which it never occupied in Jewish literature."⁵ Sanders cites as support a seminal article by L. Smolar and M. Aberbach on the golden calf episode in postbiblical Judaism.⁶ This citation is curious, because Smolar and Aberbach strongly *support* Weber's proposal by demonstrating that in the midrashic and rabbinic sources, the calf incident "was a virtually unpardonable offense . . . the worst sin ever committed by Israel . . . [which] left a permanent mark in Jewish history . . . [the] evil consequences [of which] . . . were *never exhausted*."⁷ Within the rabbinic tradition, the permanent loss of the natural "sacerdotal privileges" of the firstborn to the Levites was attributed to the calf apostasy; it was "the nearest Jewish equivalent to the concept of original sin."⁸ This Jewish recognition of the consequences of the calf episode will shed light on our understanding of Paul's view of the law in Galatians 3:19 and elsewhere.

Second, Sanders overlooks a significant number of texts witnessing to a distinct tradition within Second Temple Judaism characterized by the so-called "Deuteronomic view" of Israel's history. This "Deuteronomic view"—so called because of its roots in the canonical book of Deuteronomy and the "Deuteronomic history" (Deuteronomy–2 Kings)—viewed Israel as in a state of apostasy for which the divine punishment was exile. This exile was still an ongoing, undeniable fact in the first century, inasmuch as Roman foreigners controlled the land of Israel, and large numbers of Jews as well as the remnants of the northern ten tribes were still scattered among the Gentiles.⁹ J. M. Scott summarizes this outlook on the accursed condition of Israel:

Israel had not yet been restored, but rather remains until the eschatological restoration, under the wrath of God which came upon the people in 722 and 587 BC . . . From this perspective the Second Temple and its cult has no efficacy for atonement. In fact, the Second Temple is often either considered polluted or deficient (cf. Dan 3:38 LXX; Sir 36:14; *I Enoch* 89:73; 90:28–33; Tob 14:5; *T. Levi* 16:1–5; 17:10–11; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 65:5–7;

T. Moses 4:8). . . . Many penitential prayers of the Second Temple period lament the present plight of Israel as a nation (e.g., Dan 9:4–19; Ezra 9:6–15; Neh 9:5–37; Bar 1:15–3:8; Pr Azar; Sir 36:1–17 . . .) . . . This condition of Exile would last until God intervenes in the eschatological future, which is now recognized as a time well beyond the seventy years which Jeremiah envisioned (cf. Dan 9:24: 70×7 years) . . . The earlier salvific deeds of God can now be only a pledge . . . that the expected restoration might come in order to bring an end to the present curse and remove the guilt of the people.¹⁰

Sanders paints a picture of first-century Judaism in which covenant is primary, but there is no internal tension or predicament for which Paul's Gospel of Jesus Christ provided the solution. Thus his famous but hapless conclusion: "This is what Paul finds wrong with Judaism: it is not Christianity."¹¹ However, as Smolar, Aberbach, and Scott have shown, a large portion of first-century Judaism embraced considerable internal tension: God's people were under a curse (cf. Gal 3:10) because of past transgressions (the golden calf and subsequent infidelity) and in need of eschatological deliverance. Paul claims this deliverance has taken place in Christ.

Paul's Use of the Old Testament.

Contrary to the widespread assumption that Paul resorts to arbitrary and atomistic exegesis, citing texts without regard for their original contextual meaning, our study will participate in the movement within Pauline scholarship—traceable to C. H. Dodd and represented more recently by R. Hays and C. A. Evans—which takes seriously the contextual meanings of Paul's OT citations.¹²

In his extensive and thorough study of scribal methods of exegesis in first century Judaism, D. I. Brewer has contributed substantial, if indirect, support for a contextual approach to Paul's use of the OT. In his thorough survey of over a hundred "exegeses preserved in rabbinic literature which are likely to have originated before 70 CE,"¹³ Brewer affirms three underlying principles which govern scribal exegesis: First, *Scripture is totally self-consistent*. Second, *every detail in Scripture is significant*. Third, *Scripture is understood according to its context*: "Every single scribal exegesis examined could be quoted as an example to show that Scripture was interpreted according to its context. . . . Although this rule is rarely specifically mentioned, it is frequently implied. Many exegeses cannot be understood at all

without reference to the context of the text which is quoted.”¹⁴ Brewer’s last conclusion may be overstated; nonetheless, he does succeed in showing a widespread concern for contextual interpretation (to varying degrees) in a large number of diverse, early Jewish sources—a most remarkable phenomenon seldom recognized by scholars. In light of Brewer’s study, it should simply not be *assumed* that Paul, a first-century Jewish exegete, was unconcerned with the contexts of his scriptural citations.

One scholar who has taken seriously the context of Paul’s quotations is C. Stockhausen. In her essay on Pauline exegesis in the Epistles to the Corinthians and Galatians, she begins by explaining the narrative orientation of Paul’s citations: “Paul takes as the basis for his interpretative task the Torah; that is to say, narrative texts from the Pentateuch are usually (perhaps always) at the core of his arguments. In interpreting selected Pentateuchal narratives, he is usually (perhaps always) extremely concerned with the stories themselves—that is, with plot-line, character, narrative event, and especially the inexplicable, unusual, or unmotivated character or action.”¹⁵ As an example, Stockhausen points to Paul’s treatment of the Abraham narrative in Galatians 3–4: “Paul displays a sustained interest in the Genesis Abraham narrative in his Epistle to the Galatians. . . . The citation of Genesis 12 and 15 early in Galatians is obvious and receives great emphasis as the locus of the definitive statement of, and scriptural proof for, his ‘doctrine of justification by faith,’ so called. His clear reference to Genesis 12, 15, and 22 in Galatians 3:16, when he introduces the important concept of the seed of Abraham, is undisputed and ties the beginning and ending of Abraham’s story to Paul’s argument.”¹⁶ Stockhausen goes on to demonstrate that these Pentateuchal narrative texts supply Paul with the key theological terms controlling the argument of Galatians. The terms Paul uses favorably (faith, righteousness, inheritance) all come from Genesis 15; those used negatively (circumcision, flesh) occur only in Genesis 17. The term “seed” occurs in both passages and serves to link the two.¹⁷

Paul’s interest in the Genesis narrative extends to the end of the *probatio* of Galatians, that is, Galatians 4:21–31, where Paul makes clear references to the birth stories of Ishmael (Gen 16) and Isaac (Gen 21). Thus, Stockhausen points out, Paul’s references to the Abraham story run roughly in order from beginning to end. “He begins, we realize, as Abraham begins, with promises, and ends, we realize, as Abraham ends, with sons.”¹⁸

If Stockhausen’s analysis of Paul’s contextual scriptural argumentation is correct, the question naturally arises, why has this been widely overlooked in Pauline scholarship? Stockhausen answers that the Pauline Epistles show us exegetical results, not Paul’s exegetical process:

I have argued that Pauline exegesis often structures the arguments of Pauline letters but is not on that account to be expected to be exhausted by them. Quite the contrary; Paul's interpretations of Scripture are often only to be recovered from behind or beneath his text as it stands. Paul does not describe his exegetical process. We see only its results, as the shape of his arguments expresses his hermeneutic. His exegetical process will always remain a more or less hypothetical abstraction from and beneath his tantalizingly obscure "text as we have it," which provides some visible brush strokes but does not yield a full portrait of the exegete.¹⁹

Though she has not articulated it in precisely this way, Stockhausen's analysis of Paul's exegesis reveals four principles that will guide our own investigation into Galatians 3–4.

First, Paul's strategic deployment of scriptural texts is profoundly *contextual*, taking into account both the near context and the larger narrative context from which he quotes.

Second, Paul's exegesis is *salvation-historical* in orientation, meaning that the location of his OT allusions and citations within the entire arc of the biblical story of God's redemption of his people is significant.

Third, Paul employs a *typological* methodology to correlate different texts, figures and events of salvation history in a theologically meaningful pattern. Thus Paul often cites in tandem thematically related texts from patriarchal and Israelite narratives (see Gal 3:6–9, 10–14; 4:21–31), inviting his readers to find significant elements of historical continuity in God's dealings with his people. For example, by viewing the typological correlation of the Abrahamic and Israelite images in Galatians 4:21–31, it becomes clear that Paul (unlike many modern covenant theologians) does not explain the Old and New Covenants exclusively in temporal terms (i.e., before/after Christ). Instead, by linking the New Covenant with Abraham, and the Old Covenant with Moses, Paul shows how the new surpasses the old precisely because it preceded it,²⁰ in view of the promise and oath that God pledged to Abraham.²¹

Fourth, Paul argues in a *teleological* style. In other words, he deploys OT citations and allusions earlier in his discourse with a view to a certain endpoint or *telos*, that is, a scriptural argument or conclusion introduced only later or at the end of his discourse. For example, the typological interpretation of Genesis 16–21 in Galatians 4:21–31 forms a certain climax of Paul's argument in Galatians, shedding light on the scriptural citations

employed earlier. Thus, interpreters need to read Paul's arguments in both directions, since later portions shed light on earlier ones, and vice versa.

The Genre and Structure of Galatians.

The perceived structure of Galatians cannot but influence the Epistle's interpretation. H. D. Betz identifies the genre of the Epistle as a Hellenistic "apologetic letter," whose component parts are arranged as follows: *Prescript* (1:1–5), *Exordium* (1:6–11), *Narratio* (1:12–2:14), *Propositio* (2:15–21), *Probatio* (3:1–4:31), *Exhortatio* (5:1–6:10), *Conclusio* (6:11–18).²² Thus, in this chapter we are concerned with what Betz calls the *probatio*, that is, the central section of the letter, which bears the weight of the author's argument. Notably, according to Betz's analysis, this section concludes with Galatians 4:21–31, confirming Stockhausen's insight into the way Paul's use of Genesis texts reaches a thematic convergence and climax at this point, thus disclosing his teleological style of argumentation.

While recognizing the value of Betz's analysis, some qualifications are in order. It is unlikely that Paul, with his decidedly Jewish perspective, felt any compulsion to adhere strictly to Greco-Roman literary patterns. Following E. C. Muller's structural adaptations of Betz,²³ it is better to extend the *propositio* in Galatians 2:15–21 (where Paul summarizes his thesis in a series of concise doctrinal formulas) to include the opening verses of the third chapter (vv. 1–5). This leads to a revised structural outline for Galatians 3–4 that follows a chiastic pattern:

3:6–9	sons of Abraham
3:10–13	curse of the law: under the law
3:14	summary
3:15–21a	one seed of Abraham, why the law
3:21b–25	"under"
3:26–29	sons of God seed of Abraham
4:1–4a	"under"
4:4b–6	sons of God, why the law
4:7	summary
4:8–20	curse of the law: in bondage to elements
4:21–31	sons of Abraham

This structural analysis strongly suggests that sonship is the centerpiece and unifying theme of Galatians 3–4.²⁴ Yet as we will see, it is not sonship

per se but sonship *ordered to inheritance* that concerns Paul.²⁵ Sonship is significant not merely for its own sake but because it embodies the fulfillment of God's promise and covenant oath regarding the *inheritance* of Abraham's "seed."

Galatians 3:6–9: God's Promissory Oath to Abraham as "The Gospel"

In Galatians 3:6–9, Paul deploys two citations from the Abraham narrative (Gen 15:6; 12:3/22:18). Having just declared his militant opposition to circumcision in the *propositio* (Gal 2:15–21; 3:1–5), Paul seeks to defend the priority of faith over circumcision, based on Scripture. In fact, he chooses to defend his position from the Abraham cycle, the very narrative that formed the main plank in his opponents' pro-circumcision arguments. In all likelihood they appealed to the example of Abraham in Genesis 17: granted that Gentiles have been accepted as part of God's people through faith in Jesus Christ (like Abraham in Gen 15), it is still necessary to be circumcised to enter into God's covenant with Abraham (like Abraham in Gen 17), through which God's blessings flow.

How does Paul correct their misreading? Muller offers a plausible explanation of Paul's exegetical strategy: "The Judaizers had powerful support in Genesis 17:11, which declares circumcision to be the sign of the covenant. They understood Genesis 17 as the explication of Genesis 15, the first account of the covenant with Abraham. Paul reversed the interpretive direction and gave Genesis 15—'he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness'—priority over the later version. . . . It is this covenant which is not abrogated by later legislation (Gal 3:15–17)."²⁶ There is an important insight here: the covenant of Genesis 17 cannot add conditions to the foundational covenant of Genesis 15, even if it reconfigures Abraham's relationship with God. It is also relevant to Paul's case that Abraham is reckoned justified at the time of the covenant of Genesis 15, long before he receives the sign of circumcision in Genesis 17 (cf. Rom 4:10–12).

However, these insights do not exhaust Paul's exegetical strategy in these verses or in those to follow. Instead of "reversing the interpretive direction," as Muller suggests, by moving from ch. 17 back to ch. 15, Paul actually does just the opposite. It can be shown (see pp. 261) that the "covenant" referred to in Galatians 3:15–17 is the divinely sworn covenant in Genesis 22:16–18, where God placed himself under a covenant oath—with its attendant curses (see Gal 3:13; Deut 21:23)—to bless all the nations (Gentiles)

through the “seed” of Abraham. The substance of this covenant represents exactly what Paul is primarily concerned with throughout his argument in Galatians 3–4, especially 3:6–18. He responds to his opponents who would push the covenant forward from Genesis 15 to Genesis 17 by saying, in effect: Your problem is not that you are pushing it forward, but that you are not pushing it forward far enough.

Paul’s entire argument is not yet present in vv. 6–9, although there are hints of what is to come. In vv. 6–7, Paul cites Genesis 15:6, demonstrating the foundational nature of faith in the Abrahamic covenantal economy, such that it is “men of faith” who are the “sons” of Abraham. The theme of sonship is introduced here. The immediate referent is Abrahamic sonship; divine sonship will be mentioned later (3:26). But the two are related: as a son of Abraham, one enters into the divine covenant with Abraham and thus into a filial relationship with God.

But in v. 8, Paul makes a different point, speaking of the “Scripture” preaching the “Gospel” to Abraham in advance. In this remarkable statement we see how Paul associates the new covenant (i.e. “the gospel”) with Abraham, such that Abraham is “pre-evangelized” (*proeuēngelisato*) long before the coming of Christ. Thus, the old and new covenants are not distinguished so much by chronology as by faith or the lack thereof. Temporally, the two covenants (old and new) “interpenetrate.” (In the next chapter we will see that the author of Hebrews employs a similar model of the covenantal relationship.)

Paul identifies the content of this gospel preached to Abraham as “In you all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” This is a conflate quotation of Genesis 12:3 and 22:18, the two loci in Scripture where similar statements are made to Abraham. A comparison of the Greek is helpful:

Gen 12:3b *kai eneulogēthēsontai en soi pasai hai phylai tēs gēs*
“and in you will be blessed all the tribes of the earth”

Gen 22:18a *kai eneulogēthēsontai en tō spermati sou panta ta ethnē tēs gēs*
“and in your seed will be blessed all the nations of the earth”

Gal 3:8b *eneulogēthēsontai en soi panta ta ethnē*
“in you will be blessed all the nations”

The phrase “in you will be blessed” (*eneulogēthēsontai en soi*) must be taken from 12:3, but “all the nations” (*panta ta ethnē*) as the object of the blessing comes from 22:18, the only place these words are spoken to Abraham.²⁷ Both passages may well be in Paul’s mind, with theological justifica-

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tion: there is a close and significant relationship between 12:3 and 22:18. Genesis 12:1–3 records the initial blessing promise given to Abraham. The different elements of this promise are confirmed to Abraham through covenants in Genesis 15 and 17, but the climactic promise of Genesis 12:3b—blessing to all people through Abraham—is not repeated to Abraham nor confirmed by a covenant-oath until 22:18, where the promise of universal blessing climaxes the solemn self-sworn oath of God after the dramatic testing of Abraham's faith at the Aqedah. Thus, Genesis 22:18a repeats Genesis 12:3b but advances and focuses the promise in significant ways: now universal blessing is no longer just a promise, but a divine oath; and the mediator of the blessing is no longer simply Abraham but Abraham's "seed."

To summarize, in Galatians 3:8 echoes of both Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 are present and identified as the content of the gospel. Of the two passages, 22:18 is more significant in some respects, since in 22:15–18 God *ratifies* his covenant with Abraham and focuses it on Abraham's *seed*. The background of Genesis 22 will become prominent a few verses later in Galatians 3 when Paul will develop both the concepts of "ratification" and "seed." This is additional evidence of his teleological style.

It is not immediately apparent how the promise of blessing to the nations through Abraham is relevant to the debate between Paul and the Judaizers concerning justification by faith (baptism) versus justification by "works of the law" (circumcision). It may be Paul's point, however, that God swore to Abraham (Gen 12:3, 12:18) that the "Gentiles" would be blessed through him *as Gentiles*, not *as Jews*, that is, not by *becoming* Jews through circumcision. For Paul, compelling the Gentiles to be circumcised and follow the "works of the law" was tantamount to making them *Judaize* (*ioudaizein*, cf. Gal 2:14), typically translated "to live like a Jew" but possibly "to become a Jew."²⁸ To be circumcised is to be born of Abraham "according to the flesh" (like Ishmael, cf. Gal 4:29) in a physical and ethnic sense. That Gentiles who are circumcised essentially *become* Jews may be the hidden premise of the argument in vv. 8–9:

God promised Abraham: all the Gentiles will be blessed in you.
(Gal 3:8)

But circumcised Gentiles are no longer Gentiles but Jews.

Therefore: It is uncircumcised Gentiles ("those of faith," not circumcision) who are blessed with Abraham. (Gal 3:9)²⁹

Galatians 3:10–14: The Deuteronomic Covenant Curses Borne by Christ

In these five verses Paul cites four Old Testament texts—Deuteronomy 27:26; Habakkuk 2:4; Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 21:23—concerning Israel's experience in the wilderness and exile before returning to the Abrahamic theme in v. 14, a verse clearly based on Genesis 22:18. The challenge is to follow Paul's logic and purpose behind the deployment of these texts.

Deuteronomy 27:26

At first, the switch between vv. 9 and 10, from meditation on the Abraham narrative to discussion of the Deuteronomic curses, seems capricious. However, it will become clear that Paul perceives a typological relationship between the experience of Israel under the law (Deuteronomy) and the life of Abraham. Specifically, being under the curse of the law (Gal 3:10, 13) is like enduring a kind of slavery (3:23–25; 4:1, 3, 7) in which the threat of disinheritance always looms (4:30, 5:4). This corresponds to Ishmael (Gal 4:21–31), Abraham's son by natural or “fleshly” means, and especially to Genesis 17, the account of the covenant of circumcision, in which Ishmael is circumcised (17:23) but nonetheless is disinherited (17:18–21). However, the full typological relationship between Israel-under-the-law and the “Ishmaelite” phase of Abraham's life is not yet developed in Galatians 3:10.

Having defended the way “of faith” in vv. 6–9 by appeal to the Abraham narrative, Paul condemns the way “of works” in vv. 10–13 by appeal to texts concerning Israel and her experience under the Mosaic law: “For however many are the works of the law, are under a curse. For it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by everything written in the book of the law, to do them’ (v. 10). Scholarly debates continue over Paul's exact point here and whether he has cited Deuteronomy 27:26 appropriately. Paul's strategic purpose in citing this text may be clarified by considering its original context.

First, Deuteronomy 27:26 marks the climax of the curse ceremony which was to take place on Mount Ebal when the Israelites had entered the promised land.³⁰ Paul would be hard pressed to cite a more suitable text to show the underlying cause of Israel's dreadful experience in exile, stemming from their violations of the Deuteronomic covenant, that is, “the book of the law” (Deut 28:61; 29:21; 30:10; 31:26).

Second, Paul's phrasing of 27:26 does not follow the LXX or MT exactly, but includes echoes of Deuteronomy 29:19b (or even 28:15). J. M. Scott argues that this "shows that he reads Deuteronomy 27–32 as a unit and does not consider Deut 27.26 as one verse in isolation. In fact, the formulaic expression γεγραμμένας ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τούτου ["written in the book of this Law"] which Paul cites in Gal 3.10 runs through Deuteronomy 27–32 like a leitmotif (cf. Deut 28.58, 61; 29.19, 20, 26; 30.10)."

The unit Deuteronomy 27–32 consists of blessings and curses that serve to ratify the Deuteronomic covenant, whose statutes and laws have been given in Deuteronomy 12–26. But while both blessings and curses are offered in chs. 27–32, there is in fact no real doubt about which of the two will be enacted:

- The curses are four times as long as the blessings (Deut 28)
- Only curses are pronounced in the ratification ceremony (Deut 27)
- Both God (Deut 31:16–22) and Moses (31:27–29) explicitly declare that the people will unfailingly break the covenant and actualize the curses. In fact, the purpose of Deuteronomy 32 is to serve as a song of accusation against Israel when she apostatizes.

Now it becomes clear why Paul says that all those "of law" are under a curse. Anyone who undertakes to be justified by works of the Mosaic law enters once again into the Mosaic covenant and its economy, whose final and definitive form was "the book of the law," Deuteronomy. But the Deuteronomic covenant (distinct yet related to the Sinai covenant) declared emphatically that those who undertook to fulfill it would fail and thus invoke upon themselves its fearsome curses, which culminate in exile (i.e., disinheritance).

Careful reading of the text of Deuteronomy reveals it to be, in a sense, a *self-retiring covenant*. Although life through the Deuteronomic covenant was a theoretical possibility (Deut 30:15–19), both God and Moses knew and declared that, in fact, death and exile would result (Deut 30:1). Then, there would be a new initiative on God's part: a regathering of the exiles and a supernatural "circumcision" of their hearts (30:4–6). This new initiative of God involving the cleansing of the heart is what Jeremiah identifies as the new covenant (Jer 31:31).

For Paul, those who commit themselves once again to follow the "book of law" are attempting to rehabilitate a covenant that *has failed* and was—in a sense—*intended to fail* and thus evoke a new initiative of mercy (the circumcision of the heart) from God, which Paul sees realized in Christ.

Thus they will inevitably fall once again under the curses of this failed covenant.

Habakkuk 2:4: "The one righteous from faith shall live"

According to Jewish interpretive tradition, Habakkuk was a prophet who lived in the period right before the Babylonian conquest of Judah and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Therefore, he would have experienced the crisis of faith announced by his own prophetic message, that is, the onset of the exile.

In 1:12–2:1, Habakkuk questions the divine rationale behind using those who are more evil (Babylon) to punish those who are less (Judah). God delivers his response in 2:2–20 in the form of a message that cuts to the heart of the spiritual crisis that was soon to be faced in the exile: How could Israel fulfill the covenant laws when dispersed among the Gentiles, far from Jerusalem, with the Temple lying in ruins? Further, what about all of the Mosaic laws codified in the national constitution, the Deuteronomic covenant, with its laws linked to the priesthood, the central sanctuary, sacrifice, and festivals (i.e., the “works of the law”)? The Lord’s oracular answer begins on a note of hope, with the short and simple declaration: “The righteous shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4).³¹ In other words, although the chaos of conquest and exile has made it impossible to seek life through observance of the law, there is still a way of life open for the righteous: the way of faith.

Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 because it offers the only correct solution (faith) to the crisis caused by human sin, in general; and Israel’s infidelity to the covenant of Deuteronomy, in particular. This infidelity brought the Deuteronomic covenant curses down on Judah from Babylon in Habakkuk’s time, and from Rome in Paul’s. The solution is covenant fidelity expressed as trust in God’s faithfulness to provide and deliver even in the midst of exile.³² Since Israel’s exile continued in Paul’s day, Paul viewed Habakkuk’s message as still valid. Paul interprets Habakkuk as promising something that surpasses the limitations and liabilities of a covenant like Deuteronomy, whereby God’s promise of life to Israel (Lev 18:5) may somehow be realized, perhaps by divine means.

Leviticus 18:5: "The one who does them shall live by them"

Perhaps more than any other Pauline citation, exegetes are vexed by the apostle’s allusion to Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:10–12 (and Rom 10:1–5).

Our analysis, however, need not explore all the issues presented by this citation. It will suffice to summarize the function of 18:5 in Paul's immediate argument (3:10–14).

Having shown via Habakkuk 2:4 that the way of the righteous in Israel's continuing exile is based on *faith*, Paul cites Leviticus 18:5 as demonstration that the promise of life through the law was based strictly on *performance*: "He who does them shall live by them." In the concrete situation of Paul's contemporaries, the realities of the diaspora and exile prevented any hope of total performance of the law.³³ In fact, even Paul's Judaizing opponents were only selective in their observation of the Mosaic law, a fact which Paul does not fail to point out (Gal 6:13; cf. 2:14; 5:3).

The question arises whether or not Paul's interpretation of the law is inconsistent. Earlier he spoke of the law as entailing a curse (3:10), yet here he speaks as if it offers life to those who perform it. But there is no real contradiction. Paul would admit that the law would grant life to those who fulfilled it completely; he would only deny that anyone had, in fact, done so—certainly not the nation of Israel as a whole.

In fact, it seems likely that Paul's use of Leviticus 18:5 reflects the interpretive reuse of this verse in Ezekiel 20 (vv. 11, 13, 21) and Nehemiah 9 (v. 29).³⁴ In both of these canonical texts, Leviticus 18:5 is used in highly critical recitations of Israel's history, highlighting the nation's failure to abide by the Mosaic covenant. In these contexts, 18:5 "does not represent the positive purpose of the covenant . . . but now ironically . . . it comes to signify the *unrealized purpose* of the covenant within redemptive history."³⁵ Especially in Ezekiel 20—the context and themes of which are very close to Paul's in Galatians 3–4³⁶—18:5 serves as a refrain reminding Israel of what should have been, but never was.

Thus, when Paul deploys Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12, he not only contrasts faith versus performance as the basis of two different covenantal arrangements, but also calls to mind that the positive purpose of the law always remained unfulfilled in Israel's historical experience under the Levitical and Deuteronomic covenants. Though the law offered life, it did not confer the power needed to obey it. The law was necessary, but clearly not sufficient, especially apropos God's redemptive plan for Israel and the nations. This purpose cannot be realized until and unless Israel humbly acknowledges the need for a greater power.³⁷

In adopting this attitude toward the law, Paul reflects the tensions within the book of Deuteronomy itself. For while Deuteronomy stresses the offer of life through the law (Deut 30:15–20; 32:47), it also makes clear that this offer of life will never be realized until God initiates an internal

transformation of his people, an eschatological “circumcision of the heart” (Deut 30:6).

*Deuteronomy 21:23: “Cursed be every one
who hangs on a tree”*

As F. F. Bruce and others have shown, Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13 in order to establish a link with Deuteronomy 27:26 (cited in Gal 3:10) via “the exegetical device of *gezerah shawah* (“equal category”) which depends on the presence of a common term in the two texts brought together.” Paul highlights the link between the two texts by rewording the LXX of Deuteronomy 21:23 to begin, like 27:26, with the phrase “cursed is every[one]” (*epikataratos pas*). Deuteronomy 27:26 sums up the Deuteronomic principle that the curse of God will rest on those who fail to keep all the laws of the “book of the law” (Deuteronomy). Deuteronomy 21:23 describes a manner of death in which an individual falls under divine curse; in fact, *becomes* a curse, if the Hebrew is taken literally. By suffering this kind of death, Paul argues, Christ has borne the Deuteronomic curse as *redemptive representative* of Israel. N. T. Wright explains:

The clue to it all is Paul’s corporate christology [sic]. . . . Because the Messiah represents Israel, he is able to take on himself Israel’s curse and exhaust it. Jesus dies as the King of the Jews, at the hands of the Romans whose oppression of Israel is the present, and climactic, form of the curse of exile itself. The crucifixion of the Messiah is, one might say, the *quintessence* of the curse of exile, and its climactic act. . . . Christ, as the representative Messiah, has . . . [taken] on himself the curse which hung over Israel and which on the one hand prevented her from enjoying full membership in Abraham’s family and thereby on the other hand prevented the blessing of Abraham from flowing out to the Gentiles. . . . That which, in the scheme of Deuteronomy, Israel needed if she incurred the curse of the law, is provided in Christ . . . He is Israel, going down to death under the curse of the law, and going through that curse to the new covenant life beyond.³⁸

Thus Christ serves as the corporate representative of Israel, bearing away the curse merited by their covenantal infidelities. But what of the Gentiles? Does Christ’s death bear a curse on their behalf, and if so, how? One must

apply the concept of *redemptive representative* one step farther by recognizing that Israel herself was the *redemptive representative* of all mankind. This is expressed in the narrative of Genesis and Exodus, where the notion of redemptive representation is presented in terms of primogeniture: Israel is the firstborn son of God within the family of nations (Exod 4:22). Israel is to function as a corporate priest—that is, as one who makes atonement—within the international family (Exod 19:6). Wright argues that “the Torah has the effect of, as it were, piling up the sin of the world . . . in Israel.”³⁹ It is precisely because they share in the sin of the nations that they are divinely called to serve as the redemptive representative for the nations: “The Torah brings the curse for Israel, because Israel has not kept it. . . . Israel as a whole has failed in her task of being the light to the nations, of being the seed of Abraham through whom the varied families of the world would be blessed. . . . The consequence of the curse was that the blessing bequeathed to Abraham, to be enacted through his seed, looked as though it would never reach its destination.”⁴⁰ That is how Wright explains Paul’s strategic use of OT citations in Galatians 3:10–14 to explicate the covenant logic behind the Christ event. He describes Paul as “expounding covenantal theology, from Abraham through Deuteronomy and Leviticus, through Habakkuk, to Jesus the Messiah,” and thus concludes—not surprisingly, nor without warrant—that the “original assumption, that Galatians 3 should be treated as ‘covenant theology,’ has been fully vindicated.”⁴¹

The Jewish exegetical tradition associated Deuteronomy 21:23 with two other OT passages, both of which may be pertinent to Paul’s discussion in Galatians 3. First, the Palestinian Targums associated 21:23 with Numbers 25:1–10, the account of the apostasy at Baal-peor, culminating in the hanging of the chiefs of the people “before the Lord” and Phinehas’ execution of an Israelite man and his Moabite consort. The Targums apparently made the connection between the texts because of the common reference to the hanging of persons, and highlighted the connection further by including the detail that the offenders were to be hanged “upon wood” and buried before sundown in accord with Deuteronomy 21:23:

And the people of the house of Israel joined themselves to Baal-Peor, just like the nail in the wood, which is not separated but by breaking up the wood. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said to Moseh, Take all the chiefs of the people, and appoint for them judges, and let them give judgment to put to death the people who have gone astray after Peor, and hang them before the Lord *upon the wood* over against the

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morning sun, and at the departure of the sun take them down and bury them, and turn away the strong anger of the Lord.⁴²

Commenting on this text, A.T. Hanson remarks: “It is very tempting to think that Paul actually knew of this Targum, or the tradition that lay behind it, and this explains in part at least why he writes about Christ. . . . The act of redemption reversed the act of trespass at Baal Peor.”⁴³ Paul’s concern in Galatians 3 is Christ’s bearing of the curses of Deuteronomy. The apostasy at Baal-peor *directly precipitated* the giving of the Deuteronomic covenant, which was delivered to Israel by Moses at that very location. The hanging of the leaders of the people was to atone or propitiate for the people’s sin before God. Significantly, the text never records the carrying out of this sentence, leaving open the interpretive possibility that the sentence against the leaders was never carried out and thus the sin of Baal-peor was never atoned for. It is “tempting,” as Hanson says, to view Paul as suggesting that Christ as leader of the people now atones for the sins of Israel which provoked the Deuteronomic covenant and its attendant curses by “hanging on the wood” before God. However, the hypothesis is too speculative to be demonstrated conclusively.

Secondly, Jewish tradition connected Deuteronomy 21:23 with Genesis 22:9 LXX, the near-sacrifice of Isaac “upon the wood”:

<i>kai ōkodomēsen ekei Abraam thysiastērion</i>	And Abraham built there an altar
<i>kei epethēken ta xyla kai sympodisas</i>	and laid out the wood; and having bound
	bound
<i>Isaak ton huion autou epethēken auton</i>	Isaac his son, he laid him
<i>epi to thysiastērion epanō tōn xylōn</i>	on the altar, upon the wood.

Deuteronomy 21:23 may have been linked in Paul’s mind with Genesis 22:9 by the analogy of *epanō tōn xylōn* (“upon the wood”) with *epi xylou* (“on wood”). Max Wilcox argues that “behind the present context in Galatians 3 there is an earlier midrashic link between Gen 22:6–9 and Deut 21:22–23 by way of the common term *יָד* [*xylon*, “wood”],” citing *Gen. Rab.* 56:4 and (Ps.)-Tertullian, *Adv. Iudaeos* 10:6 as evidence.⁴⁴ This possibility becomes stronger when one recognizes the reworking of Genesis 22:18—the climactic verse of the Aqedah narrative—in Galatians 3:14.

Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:14.

Several scholars, notably Max Wilcox, have pointed out that Galatians 3:14 represents a Christological reworking of Genesis 22:18. The phrase “that the blessing may be unto the nations” (*eis ta ethnē hē eulogia . . . genētai*) in Galatians 3:14a corresponds to “all the nations will be blessed in [you]” (*eneulogēthēsonta . . . panta ta ethnē*) in Genesis 22:18a, and “in Christ Jesus” (*en Christō Iēsou*) with “in your seed” (*en tō spermati sou*). Here Paul implicitly equates the “seed” of Abraham with Jesus Christ, as he will do explicitly in v. 16.⁴⁵ The presence of Genesis 22:18 behind 3:14 should not surprise us, since 22:18 was evoked earlier in Galatians 3:8.

The relationship between Galatians 3:13–14 and the Aqedah has not been missed by Jewish commentators on Paul. For example, G. Vermeš observes: “In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul teaches that the blessing of Abraham promised to the Gentiles is available through Jesus, ‘the seed’ of Abraham. The Saviour is Christ, not Isaac. The source of salvation is not the Binding of Isaac, but the sacrifice of Christ. In Galatians 3:6–9, Paul uses Genesis 12, 18 and 22 indiscriminately, but in verses 13 and 14 he obviously has Genesis 22:18 in mind.”⁴⁶ Levenson, another Jewish interpreter of Paul, also sees how Aqedah typology controls much of the argument here:

As Paul read this text through his own particular christological lenses, the key point would probably have been this: it is the father’s willingness to surrender his beloved and promised son unto death that extends the blessing of the Jews to “all the nations of the earth.” The equivalent for Jesus of the binding of Isaac is, once again, his crucifixion. It is undoubtedly this that underlies Paul’s citation of Deuteronomy 21:23 (Gal 3:13). . . . In positioning this clause before his mention of the blessing of Abraham (v. 14), Paul develops a polarity between the curse that, in his view, comes from biblical laws and the blessing that comes from biblical promises. This, too, befits one of his central objectives in composing the letter to the Galatians. . . . Though far from an antinomian, Paul rather consistently associated the laws of the Torah with sin, curse, condemnation, and death, all of which are antithetical to those things he associated with Jesus. In the juxtaposition of Gal 3:13 and 3:14, we can thus hear a recapitulation of the whole movement of Pauline salvation history: from curse to

blessing, from law to spirit and faith, from Israel to Church, from the crucifixion to the blessings contingent upon it.⁴⁷

In sum, the Aqedah and divine oath represent an interpretive key to Paul's argument in Galatians 3:13–14. In the crucifixion of Christ, as God's "only beloved son" (Gen 22:2), Abraham is proven right. God did "provide himself the lamb for a holocaust" (Gen 22:8; see 22:14). By swearing a covenant oath, God subjected himself to the curse that rightly belonged to Israel and the Gentiles, in order to guarantee, at his own expense, the blessing of all nations. God's faithfulness thus surpasses even that of Abraham. At the same time, Christ's filial trust exceeds that which Isaac manifested.

By voluntarily offering himself "upon the tree," Christ ratified the New Covenant by fulfilling in himself—as the divine Son—the curses that were deserved by those who were called to divine sonship as the seed of Abraham. The Aqedah not only secured but signified the divine oath and its attendant curse. In other words, the Aqedah served as a ritual preenactment of the curse entailed by God's covenant oath to bless the nations through Abraham's seed (Gen 22:16–18). This covenant oath meant that God himself assumed ultimate responsibility to bless the nations, even if that required that he bear the immense burden of the curse for their sin.

Galatians 3:15–18: The Priority of the Abrahamic Covenant Oath

Galatians 3:15–18 is a *crux interpretum* requiring somewhat more attention on our part than other pericopes in Galatians 3–4. At the heart of this crux is the meaning of the term *diathēkē* in Galatians 3:15: Should it be translated "last will" or "testament," as in secular Greek; or "covenant," in keeping with the LXX and Paul's usage elsewhere?

We argue first, that the sense of *diathēkē* in vv. 15 and 17 is "covenant"; second, that the *diathēkē* in view here is the Abrahamic covenant ratified in Genesis 22:15–18; and third, that understanding the covenant-oath of the Aqedah (Gen 22:15–18) as the subtext clarifies Paul's theological argument in 3:15–18.⁴⁸

Diathēkē as "Covenant" in Galatians 3:15.

Although the most basic meaning of *diathēkē* seems to have been "a disposition," from *diatithēmi*, "to dispose, determine, distribute, establish,"

this meaning is rarely attested and only in older texts.⁴⁹ Over time the term became particularized to one specific kind of disposition, namely, “a final testamentary disposition in view of death”⁵⁰

Within Hellenistic Judaism, however, the development of the term followed a different trajectory. The translators of the Septuagint, with almost complete consistency, chose *diathēkē* to render the Hebrew *bērît*, “covenant.” This translational choice has elicited some scholarly discussion, since the usual Greek term for “covenant” is *synthēkē*.⁵¹ Yet there is no reason to think the Septuagintal translators misunderstood *bērît* as “last will and testament”; rather, “it may be assumed that where LXX uses *diathēkē* the intention is to mediate the sense and usage of *bērît*.”⁵² For the most part, later Second Temple literature also employed *diathēkē* in the sense “covenant.”⁵³

A testament is quite a different sort of legal institution than a covenant. A testament provided for the distribution of an individual’s estate shortly before or after his or her death, whereas a covenant was a legally binding relationship of obligation—which could take a wide variety of forms—ratified by an oath between one or more parties, which seldom concerned the distribution of goods after one’s death *per se*.⁵⁴

Usually, which of the two senses *diathēkē* bears is clarified by the context, but Galatians 3:15 is a difficult case:

<i>Adelphoi, kata anthrōpon legō</i>	Brothers, I speak according to a human being:
<i>homōs anthrōpou kekyrōmenēn</i>	once a person’s will has been ratified,
<i>diathēkēn</i>	
<i>oudeis athetei ē epidiatassetai</i>	no one adds to it or annuls it.

Most contemporary commentators agree that *diathēkē* here should be taken in the secular sense “will” or “testament.” Usually it is proposed that either (1) the presence of “technical legal terms” (*kuroō, atheteō, epidiatasomai*)⁵⁵ or (2) the introductory statement “I speak according to a human being” (*kata anthrōpon legō*) suggests that Paul is using *diathēkē* in its Hellenistic sense.⁵⁶ However, neither of these arguments withstands scrutiny.

First, the presence of supposed “technical legal terms” in 3:15 has been quite exaggerated.⁵⁷ But more importantly, the argument from “legal terminology” presupposes a false dichotomy between the “legal” sense of *diathēkē* as “testament” and the “nonlegal” sense of *diathēkē* as “covenant.”⁵⁸ In fact, a “covenant” is just as much a legal instrument as a “testament,” only of a different kind. Legal terminology is equally applicable to both.⁵⁹ Indeed, Paul uses “legal” terminology throughout Galatians 3, yet

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always within the context of Israel's religious law and covenantal history.⁶⁰ For example, the terms *prokyroō* and *akyroō* are applied to *diathēkē* in 3:17, where it clearly bears the meaning "covenant."

Secondly, as C. H. Cosgrove has shown, the typical rendering of "I speak according to a human being" (*kata anthrōpon legō*) as "I cite an example from everyday life" cannot be substantiated by the use of the phrase in Greek literature.⁶¹ A better translation would be "I speak according to human standards." The mistranslation has led scholars into thinking that Paul commits himself to using *diathēkē* as it was customarily used in secular Greco-Roman society, when, in fact, he merely indicates that he will argue from what is true in the human realm to what is true in the divine.

Therefore, neither the presence of legal terminology nor the phrase *kata anthrōpon legō* support understanding *diathēkē* as "testament" rather than "covenant." Moreover, there are three serious difficulties with *diathēkē* as "testament" in 3:15.

First, Paul always employs *diathēkē* as "covenant" in his other writings.⁶² The same is true for the LXX translators, as well as the other NT writers and the apostolic fathers.⁶³

Second, the reference to a Hellenistic "testament" in v. 15 would represent a lapse in the coherence of Paul's argument. Both before and after v. 15 he proceeds strictly within the conceptual sphere of the Jewish (not Greco-Roman) law. It is difficult to see the relevance of an analogy drawn from the secular court.

Third (and most seriously), if Paul intends *diathēkē* to be understood as "testament" in v. 15, his statement "no one adds to or annuls [a *diathēkē*]" is quite erroneous.⁶⁴ It is widely acknowledged that all known Greek, Roman, or Egyptian "testaments" could be annulled (*atheteō*) or supplemented (*diatassomai*) by the testator.⁶⁵ *Legal practice in the first century directly contradicts what commentators claim Paul is asserting.* This has led to an exegetical impasse.⁶⁶

In an attempt to get beyond this impasse, some scholars suggest that Paul's statement *oudeis athetei ē epidiatassetai* means "no one [other than the testator] can annul or supplement [it]." It is then supposed that Paul holds God to be the "testator" of the Abrahamic "testament," whereas angels give the Mosaic law (3:19).⁶⁷ Since the angels are not the "testators," their law cannot annul or supplement the original testament.

This interpretation strains the sense of v. 19. Concerning the phrase *dia angelōn* ("through angels"), Burton remarks: "[It] does not describe the law as proceeding from the angels, but only as being given by their instrumentality, and the whole argument of vv. 19–22 implies that the law proceeded

from God.”⁶⁸ It was a commonplace in Second Temple Judaism that the Sinaitic law came by means of angels, but nonetheless from God.⁶⁹

Other attempts around the impasse have focused on finding some contemporary legal instrument that *does* fit Paul’s description of a *diathēkē* in v. 15. Greer Taylor suggests that Paul refers to the Roman *fidei commissum*.⁷⁰ Ernst Bammel states that Paul has the Jewish *כתובת ברית* in view.⁷¹ However, there is no positive evidence that Paul’s Galatian audience would have been familiar with either of these legal institutions, and more importantly, neither was called a *diathēkē*.⁷² How could Paul expect his readers to understand that by *diathēkē* he meant neither “covenant” nor “testament” but a lesser-known legal instrument not called a *diathēkē*?⁷³

A better interpretation results if one understands *diathēkē* according to Paul’s normal use of the word, that is, as “covenant.” This has two advantages over the previously mentioned proposals: First, if we may assume that the Galatian congregation was familiar with Paul and his manner of speaking, it seems likely they would have understood Paul’s use of *diathēkē* according to his usual meaning.⁷⁴ Second, since a covenant was irrevocable even by its maker (as we will show in the next section), Paul’s statement that “no one annuls or supplements it” rings true without nuancing.⁷⁵

The Covenant as Inviolable Legal Institution

The idea of “covenant” is so theologically charged in biblical scholarship, it is easy to overlook that the covenant institution had a life of its own in antiquity quite apart from its particular religious significance in Judaism and Christianity. F. M. Cross offers the following working definition: “Oath and covenant, in which the deity is witness, guarantor, or participant, is . . . a widespread legal means by which the duties and privileges of kinship may be extended to another individual or group.”⁷⁶ Covenants were widely used to regulate human relationships on the personal, tribal, and national levels throughout ancient Mesopotamian, Anatolian, Semitic, and classical (Greek and Latin) cultures.⁷⁷ The Bible itself attests to the widespread use of covenants. At least *twenty-five* different covenants between two human parties—always rendered by *diathēkē* in the LXX—are mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures: for example, between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 21:27–32), Laban and Jacob (Gen 31:14), David and Jonathan (1 Sam 18:2), David and Abner (2 Sam 3:12–13), and many others.⁷⁸ Of particular relevance to Paul’s point in Galatians 3:15 is the narrative of the covenant between the Israelites and Gibeonites. Joshua cannot break his covenant with the Gibeonites despite the fact that it was based on de-

ception (Josh 9); the covenant remains valid for generations, such that Saul brings down a curse on his descendants when he violates it (2 Sam 21:1–14). Also of significance for Paul's use of *diathēkē* is the fact that the author of 1 Maccabees—a Hellenistic Jew, writing not so very long before Paul—understood *diathēkē* in the sense of *bērît* or “covenant” and applied the term in that sense to relatively recent human affairs (see 1 Macc 1:11; 11:9).

As we have seen in previous chapters, those scholars who work with biblical and nonbiblical covenant texts point out that a covenant *was always ratified by an oath*.⁷⁹ As G. P. Hugenberger states: “the *sine qua non* of ‘covenant’ in its normal sense appears to be its ratifying oath.”⁸⁰ For this reason, the terms “oath” (Heb., *’ālâ*; Gk., *horkos*) and “covenant” (*bērît*; *diathēkē*) are frequently associated, and at times functionally equivalent, in the Bible (both Testaments), OT Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha, Qumran literature, Targums, ancient Near Eastern documents, and classical Greek literature.⁸¹

As we have seen, the oath which ratified a covenant generally took the form of an implicit or explicit self-curse in which the gods were called upon to inflict punishments upon the covenant maker should he violate his commitment.⁸² Because a covenant was ratified by oath before the gods (or God), the obligations to which the parties had sworn could not be annulled or supplemented by either party subsequently.⁸³ Quell summarizes the legal status of an oath-sworn covenant as follows: “The legal covenant . . . makes the participants brothers of one bone and one flesh. . . . Their relationship as thus ordered is *unalterable, permanent, . . . and inviolable*, and thus makes supreme demands on the *legal* sense and responsibility of the participants. There is no firmer guarantee of *legal* security . . . than the covenant. Regard for the institution is made a religious duty by means of the oath taken at its establishment [my emphasis].”⁸⁴ In light of Quell's summary, one can see (1) how baseless is the argument that *diathēkē* must mean “testament” because of the “legal terminology” in Galatians 3:15; and (2) when *diathēkē* is taken as “covenant” in 3:15, Paul's statement “no one annuls or supplements even a human *diathēkē* once it is ratified” makes excellent sense.⁸⁵ Paul, like the translators of the LXX and the author of 1 Maccabees, has employed *diathēkē* as the equivalent of *bērît* to describe covenants both human and divine.

Thus, not only does the inviolable covenant fit the precise statements of Paul in v. 15, but Paul's thinking throughout chapters 3 and 4 is deeply shaped by the covenant institution, such that one could describe it as “covenant logic.”⁸⁶

*The Diathēkē of Galatians 3:15, 17 as the
Covenant-Oath of the Aqedah*

In previous chapters attention was drawn to the fact that Genesis records three distinct covenant-making episodes in the life of Abraham (Gen 15:17–21; 17:1–27; 22:15–18).⁸⁷ Is it possible to determine which of these three, if any, Paul has specifically in mind in Galatians 3:15 and 17?

A close reading of the context of Galatians 3:15–18 reveals three salient characteristics of the *diathēkē* of v. 17:

1. It is “ratified by God” (*prokekyrōmenēn hupo tou theou*, v. 17), not by a human (*anthrōpos*, v. 15).
2. It is made with Abraham and his “seed” (*sperma*, vv. 16, 18).⁸⁸
3. It guarantees a divine blessing (*eulogia*) to the Gentiles (*ta ethnē*, v. 14).⁸⁹

Since neither Genesis 15:17–21 nor 17:1–27 promise blessing to the Gentiles, Genesis 22:16–18 is the only potential source-text with all three characteristics.⁹⁰ The passage reads:⁹¹

By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son,⁹² I will indeed bless you (*eulogōn eulogēsō se*), and I will multiply your seed (*sperma*) as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your seed shall inherit the gate of his enemies⁹³ and by your seed shall all the nations (*panta ta ethnē*) of the earth be blessed.

Here all three elements occur—(1) *ratification by God* with a solemn oath of a covenant containing a promise (2) *to Abraham and to his “seed”* concerning (3) *blessing of the Gentiles* (*eneulogēthēsontai . . . panta ta ethnē*, v. 18a).⁹⁴ Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the specific *diathēkē* Paul has in mind in Galatians 3:17 is the Abrahamic covenant in its final form, as ratified most solemnly by God’s oath after the Aqedah (Gen 22:15–18). This final form of the covenant is based on what Abraham *has done* (Gen 22:15); it is not conditioned on the continued practice of circumcision or any other observance.

It should not surprise us to find allusion to the Aqedah in Galatians 3:15–18, since we have seen that Paul has the Aqedah in mind in the verses directly preceding (vv. 13–14). Even the example of a human *diathēkē* in

v. 15 itself may have been inspired by Paul's meditation on the near context of the Aqedah: strikingly, the Aqedah (Gen 22:1–19) is directly preceded by the *first account* of the making of a *human covenant* recorded in Scripture: that between Abraham and Abimelech (Gen 21:22–34). Since Paul engages the Aqedah pericope (Gen 22:1–19) in 3:15–18 and the expulsion of Ishmael pericope (Gen 21:8–21) in 4:21–31, he cannot have failed to notice the narrative of a human covenant (Gen 21:22–34) sandwiched between them.⁹⁵ Once again, this seems to confirm Stockhausen's view that Paul is concerned with the entire Abrahamic narrative.

The Legal Form of Paul's Argument in Galatians 3:15–17

Granted that Paul has the covenant-oath of the Aqedah in mind in his discussion of the "*diathēkē* ratified beforehand by God" in vv. 15 and 17, how does this insight illuminate Paul's theological argument in 3:15–18?

Paul's argument in vv. 15–18 is a *legal argument* (thus the legal terminology) in the *kal va-homer* (a fortiori, or lesser-to-greater) form.⁹⁶ Since even in the lesser sphere of human justice it is illegal to change the conditions of a covenant after one has sworn to it (v. 15), it is more so in the sphere of divine justice, when God unilaterally swears to bless all the Gentiles through Abraham's seed (v. 17).

Paul's argument is also a *reductio ad absurdum*: he shows that his opponent's position leads to an unacceptable conclusion. The Judaizers argue that obedience to the Mosaic law is necessary for the Abrahamic blessing to reach the Gentiles, that is, for them to become children of God and children of Abraham. In Paul's view, this would be tantamount to placing the Mosaic law as a condition for the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham to bless the nations through his "seed" (Gen 22:16–18). Since, at the Aqedah, God put himself under an unconditional, unilaterally binding oath to fulfill his covenant with Abraham, this would be nonsense. To suppose that God added conditions (the Mosaic law) to the Abrahamic covenant, long after it had been unilaterally sworn by God would imply that God acted illegally, reneging on a commitment in a way not tolerated even in human covenants. This would be an utterly unacceptable conclusion; therefore, the premise that obedience to the Mosaic law had become the condition for Gentile inclusion into the Abrahamic covenant blessings must be rejected.

Galatians 3:16: The One “Seed” as Christ

If indeed the Aqedah is the background for the discussion in vv. 15–17, light is shed on Paul’s puzzling argument based on the singular “seed” of Abraham in v. 16, a notorious *crux interpretum*.⁹⁷ The narrative context of the Aqedah enables Paul to lay another subtle but significant plank in his argument against his Judaizing opponents.

It is not coincidence that the narrative of Genesis 22 stresses three times that Isaac is the *one* or *only* son of Abraham (Heb., *yāhîd*, vv. 2, 12, 16, cf. Gal 3:16, Gk., *eph’ henos*), pointedly excluding Ishmael (cf. Gen 17:18–21) and any other progeny (cf. 25:1–5) from view. Moreover, the covenantal blessing in Genesis 22:18, unlike similar ones in 12:3 and 18:18, is only through Abraham’s “seed,” which in context is Isaac. Thus, Paul’s point about the promise not being to “seeds” but to the one “seed” has some justification from the narrative of Genesis itself.⁹⁸

If Paul had simply made the point that the “seed” in the context of Genesis 12–22 is primarily one individual, Isaac, there would be no controversy. However, Paul identifies the one “seed” as Christ. Why Christ and not Isaac? The most satisfying explanation is that Paul is engaged in an Isaac-Christ typology.⁹⁹ What Paul has in view is probably Isaac’s singular claim to Abrahamic sonship in Genesis 22, precisely as a result of the expulsion and disinheritance of Abraham’s other “seed” Ishmael in Genesis 21. This becomes explicit in Galatians 4:21–31, the climax of Paul’s argument.¹⁰⁰ M. Pérez Fernández comments: “Throughout Paul’s entire argumentation and in the typological representation that he makes of Isaac, the term with which Isaac is denominated in Gen 22,2.12.16 in the chapter about the *Akedah* is fundamental . . . Paul . . . translate[s] the concept of *yahid* with the Greek numeral *heis*. The whole argumentation of chapter 3 of Galatians is based on the following equivalence: Isaac is *heis*, Jesus is *heis*, God is *heis*, believers are called to overcome their differences [cf. Gal 3:28] . . . by being *heis* in Christ.”¹⁰¹ But more is involved in Paul’s Isaac-Christ typology than the “only son” motif: he sees Christ’s passion as the fulfillment of Isaac’s binding.

Isaac indeed carries the wood of his death up the mountain, and is affixed to it in sacrifice, the “only” beloved son of his father, offering himself in obedience to God’s command. But ultimately the sacrifice is abortive: it is, after all, the *Aqedah* and not the *’olah* of Isaac. The sacrifice is incomplete, and the divine promises (Gen 22:16–18) are not actualized in Isaac.

When and through whom was Isaac’s abortive sacrifice completed and

the promises actualized? In Paul's view, through Christ at Golgotha. There, the "only beloved son" (cf. Rom 8:32, John 3:16) bore the wood of his death up the mountain, was affixed to it, and died in obedience to the command of the Father. Now through him the promised blessing of the Gentiles (Gen 22:18)—that is, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2, 5, 14)—had come to pass. For Paul, Abraham's binding of Isaac not only merited the blessing of the Gentiles through Abraham's "seed" (Gen 22:18), but in fact *prefigured* and *preenacted* the sacrifice of the only beloved Son which would release that same blessing.¹⁰²

Galatians 3:16 is not the only evidence that Paul reads the Abrahamic narratives typologically.¹⁰³ An implicit Isaac-Christ typology of the Aqedah has been recognized by Vermeš, Levenson and others in vv. 13–14, as noted above. Moreover, as we will see, at the climax of the epistolary *probatio* in Galatians 4:21–31,¹⁰⁴ Paul draws an explicit typological allegory based on Genesis 21, in which the exclusion of Ishmael from the Abrahamic covenant blessing and the exclusive identification of Isaac as Abraham's heir figures prominently.

Galatians 3:19–22: Mosaic Covenant Law Added for Transgressions

At this point in his discourse, Paul has argued for a radically different view of salvation history from that of his Judaizing opponents: the foundational covenant with God's people was not at *Sinai* but at *Moriah*. Paul must now explain the purpose of the Mosaic legislation if it was not to establish the fundamental relationship between God and Israel. "Why then the Law?" says Paul, "It was *added* because of transgressions."

It seems that Paul, like Ezekiel before him (Ezek 20), has recognized an important literary-historical pattern woven into the fabric of the Pentateuch, with its continual oscillation between narrative and law. The pattern is consistently the same: Israel sins and laws are added. In previous chapters we observed this pattern running from Exodus through Deuteronomy. It is highlighted most prominently in two places in the narrative: after the apostasy of the first generation at the golden calf, the Tabernacle legislation and "priestly code" are delivered to the people; and after the apostasy of the second generation at Baal-peor, the Deuteronomic code ("book of the law") is imposed on the people by Moses. These two incidents may be prominent in Paul's mind; we have already seen that echoes of the

Baal-peor episode may be present in the allusion to Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13.

The question then arises, what does Paul mean here by “the Law”? Does he mean *all* divine law, including the Decalogue; or only the additional bodies of law “added” after the “transgressions” which began with the golden calf incident?

The first option, that all divine law was given to Israel in response to transgressions, is not unthinkable nor without precedent. For example, in Ezekiel’s scathing recounting of Israel’s spiritual history (Ezek 20), even the first formal giving of the law (the Sinai event, Ezek 20:11) is preceded by the rebellion of Israel already in Egypt (Ezek 20:8). Indeed, Ezekiel’s perspective has a basis in the Pentateuchal narrative, which portrays the Israelites as grumbling and recalcitrant long before the revelation at Sinai (Exod 5:21; 6:9; 14:11–12; 15:24; 16:2–12; 17:2–3).

Nonetheless, certain clues in Paul’s statement in v. 19 indicate that the “Law” is not the first Sinai revelation—the Decalogue—but the legislation given subsequent to the golden calf. He describes the “Law” as (1) “added,” (2) “because of transgressions,” (3) “through angels and by the hand of a mediator.” None of these three elements seems to describe the original revelation of the Decalogue.

First, the Decalogue was not “added” to anything else, but appears to be God’s most direct revelation of himself to his people. J. Bligh remarks: “Strictly speaking the decalogue [sic] was not ‘added’ at all: it summed up the religion of the Patriarchs.” Rather, Paul’s use of the word “added,” (*prostithēmi*), may allude to Moses’ concluding words after the restatement of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5:1–21: “These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and he *added* (*prosethēken*) no more” (Deut 5:22). God did not add anything more directly. What *was* added came through Moses, especially after Beth-peor, as Deuteronomy explicitly and repeatedly affirms (Deut 4:1–3, 44–46; 29:1 [28:69 MT]).

Second, the law “was added *because of transgressions*.” This statement does not seem to apply well to the narrative of the giving of the Decalogue or even the so-called “Covenant Code” (Exod 21–23) which consists mainly of case applications of the principles of the Decalogue anyway. The Pentateuchal narrative does not connect these laws in any immediate way with the transgressions of the people; in any event, from a Pauline perspective, “sin is not counted where there is no law” (cf. Rom 3:13) and the misdeeds of the people prior to Sinai do not have the weight of the calf

apostasy, which takes place after the people have knowledge of God's law and have entered the covenant. Ancient Jewish tradition did, however, observe a close connection between the calf incident and the ritual legislation (Exod 25–Lev 27), all of which is revealed to the people after the apostasy, and much of which aims to atone for sin.

Third, being “given through angels by the hand of a mediator” does not apply well to the Decalogue, which according to Deuteronomy 5:4; 22–27 and Exodus 20:1–21:1 was given by God speaking directly to the people. All subsequent laws, however, are given through the mediation of Moses. In particular, we have seen in previous chapters that when the covenant is renewed in the aftermath of the calf rebellion, the narrative emphasizes the heightened function of the angel(s) and Moses as mediator(s) between God and Israel. Moses' role as mediator reaches its zenith in Deuteronomy, almost all of which is his direct speech. Concerning the angel(s), ancient rabbinic traditions attributed Israel's subjection under an angel—like the Gentile nations—to a punishment for the golden calf idolatry.¹⁰⁵

It is not surprising, then, that several scholars have identified the “law added because of transgressions” in Galatians 3:19 with the ritual, purity, and civil legislation given to Israel in the aftermath of the golden calf and subsequent rebellions. J. Bligh asserts: “The statement that ‘it was added on account of transgressions’ . . . means ‘it was added because Israel had fallen into idolatry (by worshipping the Golden Calf) and to prevent further sins of idolatry. St. Paul cannot be talking about the decalogue . . . but only about the further legislation added after Israel had sinned. . . . The decalogue was not ‘added’ . . . What was added was the positive ritual-legislation concerning sacrifices, forbidden foods etc. [i.e., Exodus 25–Leviticus 27].” T. Callan produces additional arguments that support Bligh's interpretation, pointing out that Paul refers to the golden calf incident at least four times in his letters—even simply equating the events of Exodus 34 (the covenant renewal after the calf) with the giving of the Mosaic law in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18.

If Bligh and Callan are correct, Paul's understanding of the consequences of the golden calf is not so different from what we have found in ancient Jewish and early Christian sources. The *Didascalia Apostolorum* states: “For the law which the Lord spoke before the people had made the calf and served idols, which consists of the ten commandments and the judgments [Exod 20–23]. But after they had served idols, He justly laid upon them bonds . . . [But] our Saviour came . . . to set us loose from the bonds of the Second Legislation.” Likewise Irenaeus remarks: “God himself personally spoke the Decalogue . . . that is why they remain valid

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for us. . . . But the precepts of slavery he laid separately upon the people through Moses. . . . When they turned aside to make the Calf . . . they received . . . further servile obligations . . . as Ezekiel says [citing Ezek 20:25].”

To summarize Paul's evaluation of the law in Galatians 3:19–22, we may say that Paul regarded the great bulk of the Mosaic law as *secondary* (“added”), *penitential* (in response to transgressions), *temporary* (until the coming of the “seed” promised Abraham at the Aqedah [Gen 22:18]), and *indirectly divine* (given through mediators). In every aspect it must concede priority and primacy to the self-sworn divine oath given to Abraham to bless the nations.

Galatians 3:23–29: From a Servile Pedagogy to the Spirit of Sonship

In Galatians 3:24 Paul describes the law as a “custodian” (*paidagōgos*).¹⁰⁶ Scholars are unanimous in seeing this term as a metaphor based on a household slave. The slave was given temporary charge of a minor son by his father for the purpose of exercising strict disciplinary supervision of his behavior, which sometimes required using severe punitive measures. Scholars have not, however, reached any consensus on the source of Paul's use of the metaphor. While a majority still favor a Greco-Roman background, a stronger case can be made for a Jewish setting. A Jewish background would certainly comport better with Paul's customary use of the Old Testament, especially in Galatians.¹⁰⁷

Whatever the case, Paul's use of this domestic metaphor marks a definitive turning point in his argument, after which he turns his complete attention to the covenant in terms of a father-son relationship.¹⁰⁸ Paul now brings to a climax the long buildup of images that have clustered around sonship—Abrahamic and divine. He does so in three parts. First, in Galatians 3:26–29 the divine sonship of Christians is discussed in terms of the covenant bond forged through baptism. Second, in 4:1–7 the divine sonship of Israel is treated in terms of its covenant-historical development, with God as father raising his son from childhood through adolescence to adulthood. Third, in 4:21–31 Isaac's sonship is presented in stark contrast to that of Ishmael, the circumcised slave-son who was disinherited. In each of these three sections we will observe that sonship is ordered to inheritance; it is not just the son but the son-heir that concerns Paul.

It has been noted that Paul presents various elements of his theological

argument in Galatians 3 (promise, blessing, faith, justification, spirit, etc.) with a critical eye toward what his opponents apparently attribute to the “works of the law,” especially circumcision.¹⁰⁹ In Galatians 3:26–29 Paul sharpens the polemical edge of his rhetoric by insisting that all of these elements converge on baptism and are imparted through it.¹¹⁰

Clearly, he means to pit the two covenant rites—circumcision and baptism—against each other. He does so in a daring manner by announcing in 3:26–27: “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith; for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Even more striking—at least from his opponents’ perspective—is his concluding assertion in 3:29: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise.” Note that “heirs according to the promise” is in apposition to “Abraham’s seed,” which correlates with “sons of God.” “Heirs” specifies what is relevant about being a “son” or “seed.” Paul argues that baptism delivers to believers everything that was promised as an inheritance to Abraham.

Paul’s opponents had been using the fact of Abraham’s reception of circumcision (Gen 17) after justification (Gen 15) to impose it upon Gentile converts in Galatia. Brinsmead comments: “There is an indication here of the opponents’ Christology. They have a place for Jesus in their system, but it is only a preliminary place. Baptism into Christ makes one a novice, as was Abraham when he had faith. One must then advance to the heart of the mystery through circumcision and the observance of the calendrical law.”¹¹¹ Paul, however, turns their argument around: “As Paul’s answer to the intruding theology is essentially a sacramental answer, sacrament can be assumed to be playing a central role in the debate. As well as making circumcision essential to salvation, the opponents apparently understand the rite in a unique way, judging by Paul’s unique attack upon it. . . . In one of the climaxes of the letter [3:25–27], Paul makes baptism its dialogical counterpart. What the opponents say is to be achieved by circumcision, Paul says is already achieved by baptism.”¹¹² Brinsmead concludes that for Paul, “justification is sacramentally defined,” especially since “it is by the sacrament [of baptism] that the believer is established ‘in Christ.’”¹¹³

Paul has unleashed powerful rhetoric on the importance of baptism. In just one short passage (Gal 3:24–29) an avalanche of information about the effects of baptism descends: (1) it brings about one’s justification (v. 24); (2) it causes one to be freed from the pedagogy of the law (v. 25); (3) it establishes one as a son of God (v. 26); (4) it clothes a person with Christ (v. 27); (5) it causes those who were formerly divided to be one in Christ (v. 28); (6) it makes Jews and Gentiles to be Abraham’s offspring (v. 29).¹¹⁴

Why all of this from the simple rite of baptism?¹¹⁵ It is surprising that Paul never bothers to explain for his readers why he attributes so much to baptism. Most scholars agree, however, that it was probably part of the received tradition that his readers already shared—and which Paul can assume.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, there may be something to be gained by speculating about the reasons behind the importance Paul gives to baptism.

From what has been seen regarding the central importance and constitutive role of oath-swearing for making and renewing covenants, it seems natural to conclude that Paul understands baptism as the new covenant counterpart to circumcision. Baptism is, after all, what initiates people into a share of the Abrahamic family of God established in Christ. Moreover, it is a sign and seal “of the faith of Christ” (*pisteōs Christou*) and of the resultant justification, Spirit, life, blessing, inheritance, etc. Just as circumcision was a ritual oath-sign, Paul’s theological intuition leads him to think of baptism in terms of a covenant oath (in Latin, a *sacramentum*)¹¹⁷ divinely instituted and designed for the purpose of initiating people into the new covenant family of God by causing them to share in the divine sonship of Christ.

Thus, baptism may be thought of as a sacrament in the technical sense of “covenant oath,” faithfully established and administered by Christ, “the seed of Abraham” and redeeming representative of Israel and the nations.¹¹⁸ It is, therefore, the sacrament of faith and the fulfillment of God’s pledge to Abraham (Gen 22:16–18). It is by means of baptism, as the sacrament of faith, that Jews and Gentiles alike enter into the blessing of Abraham through the divine sonship of Christ and the Spirit of Sonship, that is, kinship by covenant, sonship by sacrament.¹¹⁹

Galatians 4:1–7: From Servants to Sons in the Fullness of Time

Paul moves from his description of divine sonship through Christ, the Spirit, and baptism (Gal 3:25–29) to a brief sketch of God’s fatherly treatment of Israel in its historical development as a wayward son (Gal 4:1–7).¹²⁰ He analyzes this relationship by dividing it into three periods, corresponding to the three phases through which a son passes on his way toward maturity (infant → child/slave → son/heir).

Paul states the foundational reality of Israel’s covenant identity as God’s son in 4:1. Israel is God’s “heir” (*klēronomos*) and “child” (*nēpios*). These descriptions contain *in nuce* the vocation and mission that God gave to

Israel as his firstborn son (Exod 4:22) at the Exodus and the giving of the Sinai covenant. Exodus 19–24 reflects this in its account of the (short-lived) kinship-type covenant initially ratified between Israel and God. This covenant expressed a profound truth that Paul sees as abiding even after Israel's sin and demotion to servility: "You shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine" (Exod 19:5). Consequently, even though Israel "is no better than a slave . . . he is the owner of all the estate" (Gal 4:1).

As "the seed of Abraham," Israel shares in God's promise to the patriarchs with respect to the blessing of "all nations" (Gen 22:18) and the inheritance of "all these lands" (Gen 26:4). The divine oath makes Israel the covenant family of God. It binds them together as a father and a firstborn son. The kinship-type covenant ratified at Sinai (Exod 19–24) formally confirmed the filial relationship of Israel to God founded on the promise and oath to Abraham, which, like "the gifts and the call of God, are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).

Paul reintroduces the hard lessons of Galatians 3:19–25 in 4:2 by describing how Israel's sin increased the degree of Mosaic and angelic mediation: "But he is under guardians and trustees (*hypo epitropous . . . kai oikonomous*) until the date set by the father." Israel's great failures at the golden calf and Beth-peor relegated it to the status of an immature minor son—differing little from that of a slave (4:1). As an immature minor son, Israel was placed under the (temporary) Levitical and Deuteronomic covenants that effected a reconfiguration of its filial relation to God along the lines of a treaty-type covenant. The relationship between God and Israel became characterized as that of a master and his slave (i.e., a suzerain and his vassal). Nevertheless, the father recognizes that the son's immaturity is not permanent. The state of servility, therefore, lasts only "until the date set by the father," which corresponds to the time of maturity and inheritance.

The Deuteronomic covenant envisioned a time after Israel's experience of the curses of servility and exile (Deut 28:14–54), when God would renew his (broken) covenant with Israel by effecting a radical internalization of the law (a "circumcision of the heart"—Deut 30:1–10). This was realized in the New Covenant, which rendered the Deuteronomic covenant unnecessary and (hence) terminated.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the typological analogies that Paul sees between Ishmael and Israel-under-Deuteronomy are striking. Israel, like Ishmael, is the natural son of Abraham, yet lives in a situation in which disinheritance is inevitable due to the prophecies of God and

Moses concerning the actualization of the covenant curses. The analogy is even closer for those who return to the old (Deuteronomic) covenant after the offer of salvation in Christ. At least ancient Israel could look forward to the promise of the new covenant after the curse of disinheritance had run its course; but for those who abandon the new covenant itself to return to the old, they like Ishmael can only anticipate permanent disinheritance.

The correspondence between Paul's description in Galatians 4:1–7 and Israel's experience of being redeemed by Christ from the curses of the Deuteronomic covenant is striking. B. Byrne notes: "What Paul appears to be doing in using this 'immature heir' image is making allowance for a situation where an heir, though long since designated as such, endures for a time a period of suspension of all legal rights and only later receives the true legal capacity to inherit by having the status of sonship conferred; though always truly heir, he passes through two distinct epochs, the first involving a situation of quasi-slavery that stands in total contrast to his subsequent state."¹²² Finally, the characteristics of a grant-type covenant are reflected in Galatians 4:4–7. Here the primary recipient of the grant is the "Son" par excellence, who demonstrates exceptional virtue while living "under the law," thereby securing a divinely sworn reward which effects the redemption of his own: "so that we might receive the 'full (legal) rights of sons' " (4:4).¹²³ Byrne clarifies Christ's essential role here: "The transition from slavery to *υιοθεσία* [*huiothēsia*, "sonship"] is no gradual growth, but presupposes the creative intervention of God, sending his Son. Christ, as Son, enters what is for him a totally inappropriate situation—our situation of slavery—in order to set us free from this condition, in order that we might receive (on an 'interchange' basis) that which pertains to him 'by nature': the status of son(s)."¹²⁴ As the New Covenant grant of divine sonship is conferred on Christ, believers come to share in it by means of the "Spirit of sonship" at baptism, enabling them to live as "sons in the Son" (*filii in Filio*).¹²⁵ With the grant of the divine sonship of Christ through the Spirit, Christians receive the attendant blessings of freedom and inheritance, that is: "For through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir" (4:7). Again, as in 3:29, the final clause of this sentence indicates the relevance of sonship: *it confers inheritance*. For this reason Y. Kwon calls "sonship" a "median motif"; it is not Paul's final point but always leads to "heirship."¹²⁶

T. L. Donaldson shows how the covenant-historical program for the salvation of Israel and the Gentiles is summarized in 4:1–7, as well as showing how 4:1–7 integrates it into Paul's larger argument in Galatians 3–4:

The law, therefore, cannot accomplish the promise; but by creating a representative sample in which the human plight is clarified and concentrated, it sets the stage for redemption. Christ identifies not only with the human situation in general (γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικὸς ["born of a woman"], 4.4), but also with Israel in particular (γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον ["born under law"]), thereby becoming the representative individual (ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ["for us"], 3.13) of the representative people. Due to the very nature of Israel's special role, the redemption of Israel is at the same time and on the same terms the redemption of the Gentiles. As Israel's representative, Christ is the representative of all humankind; all can participate in him.¹²⁷

In sum, Galatians 4:1–7 presents a synopsis of the historical development of the father-son covenant(s) which were made between God and his representative firstborn, Israel. The history of Israel may be likened to a wayward son-heir whose father does whatever is necessary to see him through his period of rebellion, until he achieves the maturity necessary for him to receive his inheritance. The process involves the son passing from infancy through adolescence to adulthood, that is, three stages that correspond loosely to the three covenant-types examined in Part One. Established as God's son by covenant of kinship (the first Sinai covenant), Israel passes under a pedagogical vassalage (the renewed covenant after the calf incident, culminating in the Deuteronomic covenant) until the time of inheritance comes (the New Covenant in Christ). Abraham, too, passed through these pedagogical covenantal stages in Genesis 15 (kinship), Genesis 17 (vassalage), and Genesis 22 (grant). A typological relationship between Abraham's and Israel's salvation-historical experiences seems to underlie Paul's thought in Galatians 3–4.

Galatians 4:21–31: God Disinherits the Circumcised Seed of Abraham

Galatians 4:21–31 is the climax to the *probatio* which Paul lays out in Galatians 3–4. Paul begins this section by posing a rhetorical question with a sharp sarcastic edge: "Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise" (Gal 4:21–23).