

ABRAHAMIC TRADITION IN THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS*

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If we omit two mentions of Abraham which relate to Paul's personality and his Jewish origin (2 Cor 11:22 and Rom 11:1),¹ all the other references in the Epistles to the Galatians and Romans are concerned with the essential problem of choice on the basis of the promise and its consequences for Christians as (newly incorporated) descendants of Abraham. Paul is in this respect a cardinal figure, since he as a Jew cognizant of the Law (cf. Gal 1:14) used the Abrahamic tradition for legitimisation of the mission to the Gentiles “without the Law”. In doing so he uses the interpretation borrowed from the Jewish tradition, which means combining different excerpts from the Scripture² to support his propositions with the authority of the Scripture, but contrary to the tradition.³ In this essay we will deal with two passages of the Epistle to the Galatians concerning Abrahamic tradition.

Problem of Christian identity in Galatian communities

The theme of Abraham and Isaac occupies a central role in Paul's testimony for Galatian Christians who are disconcerted by allegations that for the full redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection, it

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¹ These two references nonetheless show how deeply grounded in the Jewish tradition Paul was, in spite of his Christian belief. His efforts to support with arguments the sonhood of non-Jewish Christians in relation to Abraham substantiate this very fact.

² Cf. SCHLIER, Heinrich. *Der Römerbrief*. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1977, p. 125. Paul uses 2nd of the 7 Hillel's rules of interpretation.

³ Cf. MUSSNER, Franz. *Der Galaterbrief*. 3rd ed. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1977, p. 212.

is necessary to belong fully to Israel, i.e. be Abraham's descendants. And to become true descendants of Abraham they have to undergo circumcision and abide by the commandments of purity.⁴ It is likely that Paul's "competitors" based their argumentation on Abraham, and the sentence "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" was one of the points in their argumentation, probably in the sense that God's blessing to Abraham is valid also for the Gentiles through affiliation to Abraham (incorporation in the chosen people – i.e. by acceptance of circumcision as a token of the Covenant).⁵ In the contemporary Jewry's understanding Abraham is a man of faith, or rather of faithfulness to God, namely for his works (the greatest of which is his obedience to God expressed in the sacrifice of Isaac). God sealed his Covenant by the commandment of circumcision (Gen 17:10–14) which probably was used as an argument by the Paul's opponents. That was why Paul had to explain the promise in a completely contrary sense, which means that the Covenant holds true even without circumcision. It is difficult to deduce from Paul's indignant words if his rivals offered circumcision (i.e. the affiliation with Abraham and thus with the chosen people) as a more complete path of salvation in Christ, or as a necessary precondition.⁶ In any case, their recruiting of adepts for circumcision was effective. Paul, on the other hand, sees in this a step backward, not forward, as it was proclaimed by his opponents.⁷

⁴ With regard to the importance of the theme of Abraham as a true adherent to the Law in later and apocryphal Jewish texts Paul's argumentation "from faith" is comprehensible. In this context Paul's change of the paradigm (which belongs to his "conversion") is being reshaped from the Law as a legitimisation structure, to faith, by which faith in Jesus Christ is meant or more precisely faith in God's acts of salvation executed through Jesus Christ.

⁵ To the likelihood of the use of Abrahamic traditions by the opponents of Paul see WILSON, Todd A. *The Curse of the Law and the Crisis in Galatia: Reassessing the Purpose of Galatians*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, p. 58.

⁶ Cf. THEISSEN, Gerd. *The Religion of the Earliest Churches: Creating a Symbolic World*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999, p. 222.

⁷ A similar case (but just an individual case) is mentioned by Josephus Flavius in *Antiquities of Jews* (XX, 2, 4) where he refers to the conversion of king Izates who, under the influence of his mother Helen, the queen in Adiabene, converted to Judaism, but under the influence of his teacher Ananias did not accept the circumcision. Later however under the influence of a new Jewish teacher Eleazar was persuaded to do it. "O king! That thou unjustly breakest the principal of those laws, and art injurious to God himself, [by omitting to be circumcised]; for thou oughtest not only to read them, but chiefly to practice what they enjoin thee. How long wilt thou continue uncircumcised? But if thou hast not yet read the law about circumcision, and dost not know how great impiety thou art guilty of by neglecting it, read it now. When the

Theissen concludes that Paul's opponents did not question his work, they only wanted somehow to finish it off, to crown it with circumcision.⁸ However, Paul's response to this is very sharp. This of course poses the question why. Longenecker believes that the argumentation of the whole Epistle to the Galatians, especially of the passages referring to the Scripture, must be read from the point of view of Paul's hermeneutical key which is salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is manifested in the lives of Christians under the influence of the Holy Spirit, which in turn means a radical change of life, a new identity. Only by attiring ourselves in Christ, by "embodiment" in Christ, through a total change of the perspective of life, just like that Paul himself had undergone in his vocation (as substantiated in Gal 1-2) are we able to read the Holy Scripture properly. "The issue in Galatia, then, is not simply about matters of circumcision and nomistic observance, but fundamentally about the way one reads Scripture in accordance with Christian character. Paul is all too well aware that scripture can be read in ways that support different definitions of identity and lifestyle. For this reason, his hermeneutical programme is rooted in the more fundamental issue of character, with Christ-like, cruciform character as a presupposition for proper readings of the Scripture."⁹

The argumentation presented in the Epistle to the Galatians needs to be read from the point of view of the addressees, i.e. the Galatian Christians both from the Gentiles and from Judaism. Interpretation of the Scripture is being questioned here, as well as the role of the Law after Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, i.e. after the new beginning in Christ. What impact does this new beginning have on the interpretation of the past and its validity for the present? Is Christ the end and completion of the Law, as it was later articulated by Paul in Rom 10:4, is he the one who opens new access to God without any preconditions, only through faith, or is he "an ingredient" of God's action within the frame of the commandments of the Law? This was the gist of the controversy. It is probable that not only Paul, but both parties logically

king had heard what he said, he delayed the thing no longer, but retired to another room, and sent for a surgeon, and did what he was commanded to do." Quoted from: <<http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/ant-20.htm>> [2013-07-29].

⁸ *The Religion*, p. 222.

⁹ LONGENECKER, Bruce W. *The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998, p. 170.

based their arguments on Abraham,¹⁰ in whose vocation, as handed down by the Scripture, is present both the particular and the universal dimension. Paul's opponents, grounded in the Jewish tradition, subordinated the universal dimension to the particular one, or rather sought some kind of a compromise. Paul, on the other hand, considered the particular dimension to have been surmounted in Christ¹¹ once and for all (and thus to be only temporarily effective) and aimed his interpretation at the universal dimension of the Abrahamic tradition. At the same time this was the crucial moment, as it was the faith that was at stake, not in its monotheistic aspect which was self-evident to both the sides; it was its substance that was being questioned – which part of the traditional faith becomes the necessary constituent of the Christian faith. Paul extracted *nomos* from faith in its essential validity in relation to God. Instead of it, not beside it, he placed God's action in Christ, faith in Christ: *pistis*.

Gal 3:1–29

Paul's line of argument is here based on Abraham's story, which is interpreted in its universal dimension. In the text Gal 3:6–18 Abraham is mentioned as many as seven times, then again in 3:29 and 4:22 where the explication that follows (4:23–31) is concerned with true sonhood (explicated by the contrast between Sarah and Hagar, Sinai and Jerusalem).

The first step in Paul's argumentation: blessing to Abraham for the Gentiles

- Abraham believed in God (relied on Him) and this was accounted to him as righteousness, i.e. he was accepted by God.
- Only those who believe in God like Abraham are, owing to his faith, his kinship (sons).¹²

¹⁰ The option for Abraham obviously was not an accidental choice because Abraham is in the Bible connected with the circumcision (Gen 17,10f) and Covenant (Gen 15:9–21) and with the blessing for all nations on the earth (Gen 12:3; 17:5f; 22:18).

¹¹ Cf. Gal 3:28.

¹² EINSENBAUM, Pamela. *Paul was not a Christian: The Original Message of a misunderstood Apostle*. New York: HarperOne, 2009, pp. 205–207. translates οἱ ἐκ πίστεως “those descended of faith” and emphasizes: “He means that Abraham's descendants possess membership in the lineage of Israel by virtue of the great patriarch's

- The Holy Scripture predicted that the Gentiles will be justified from faith and that is why they were given blessing beforehand, as far back as in Abraham. Abraham is the forefather of the chosen nation but, by God's decision, also the bearer of the promise for the Gentiles and this promise will come true through his descendant. Gen 12:2f. presents the blessing and promise by which God confirms the vocation of Abraham: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed". Paul uses this wording of the promise to Abraham to emphasize the Gentiles' grounding in the choice and vocation of Abraham, namely through faith – and this is another moment of his argumentation – this blessing had come true in Abraham owing to his trust, that is to say when he believed God that his promises would be fulfilled, and as one who was not yet under the Law.
- Thus those who believe will be given the blessing/promise along with Abraham. The faith in question is not ordinary faith; it is faith, which is supported by the only certainty, which rests in God's unconditional acts of salvation, in God's actions in Jesus Christ. Those who believed obtained the gifts of Spirit, as the Galatians know very well, because they had experienced these gifts themselves. They received these gifts on the basis of their faith and of nothing else. So how can they expect anything else is still necessary?

The second step in his argumentation: The Law utters a curse on everyone who does not abide by it

- Those who rely on the deeds prescribed by the Law are in danger of being damned.
- The one that relies on the Law must live from the Law.
- The Law does not imply justification, though, since "the righteous one shall live from faith".
- The Law nonetheless does not equal to faith.
- Jesus took upon himself the curse of the Law (by his death) – Deut 21:23.

This step in argumentation is the most problematic of all among Paul's conclusions, as it concerns the role of the Law in the lives of the members of the chosen nation. The Law was accepted as embodied

indefatigable trust in God's promise for a multitude of progeny, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the beach."; p. 206f.

God's will for man. Paul's Jewish contemporaries were convinced that it is necessary to comply with God's will, i.e. to abide by the instructions of the Law (including the oral tradition), and they were also convinced that it is feasible (cf. e.g. Deut 4:1; Sir 15:16–21; 18:13). They did not rely on their own merits either, but they exhorted everyone to rely on God's mercy. For them the Law was the source of life.

In his argumentation Paul separates faith from the Law (works) as two contrasting facts, which was hardly acceptable for his contemporaries (cf. also Jas 2:14–26). Faith in the sense of faithfulness was expressed primarily by abiding by the commandments of the Law, which to those who were “under the Law” attributed dignity of a member of the chosen nation that is of someone called to salvation. But Paul's concept of the Law is very specific; he considers it as something quite temporary (see further) and something that has to be fulfilled one hundred percent.¹³ The Law has power over man, which is inescapable. Paul confirms this fact by reference to Deut 27:26: “Cursed *is* the one who does not confirm *all* the words of this law.” Paul quotes the text LXX: ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ὃς οὐκ ἐμμενεῖ ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ νόμου τούτου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτούς in a slightly modified way: “Cursed *is* everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them”, which is by no means accidental.¹⁴ Deut 27:26 sums up maledictions pronounced on the Ebal Mountain referring to the basic relationships as characterised in Decalogue (the relationship to God and to other people). The text modified by Paul might refer to the connection with the end of the Book of Deuteronomy (cf. also 28:15) where the curse hits those who do not respect all the instructions and commandments.

As it is not possible to fulfil the Law, so man becomes a captive of sin and thus he is under a curse to the trespasser. Paul, though, is not primarily concerned with the individual trespasses,¹⁵ but with the radical incapability of man under the Law to meet the requirements of the Law. All men are under the curse of the Law, because it is beyond their power to abide by the Law, as they are an integral part of the guilty people (cf.

¹³ He characterised himself as a campaigner for the Law who in this respect outdid all the others (cf. Gal 1:14; Phil 3:6).

¹⁴ “ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου.” This idea is further developed in the Epistle to Romans where it is de facto extended also to the Gentiles.

¹⁵ Cf. WILCKENS, Ulrich. Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem. *ZTK* 56 (1959), p. 273–293, p. 275.

the sermon of John the Baptist). This pessimistic view of the situation of man under the Law (and later of man's situation in general – see Rom 1–3; 7:14) in Jewish context was not typical for the period (cf. e.g. Sir 15:16–21) though such an attitude might have occurred sporadically.¹⁶ The man hit by the curse of the Law cannot free himself from the curse. The Law can only judge men because of their sins, not free them from them. This can only be done by God himself. And he did it in the person of Jesus Christ. Lincicum¹⁷ explains the curse of the Law as Paul's Deuteronomic view of the history of Israel – “the history has proven that the law does not in fact lead to blessing but to curse [...]”. Israel is – in Paul's view – under a curse. “Therefore for the Galatian agitators to invite Gentile converts to join the observance of the law, is confronted by a historical *reductio ad absurdum* – so Paul argues.”

Those who want to accept the obligations following from the Law decide to enter into subjection to the Law (even under the curse of the Law). This seems totally unreasonable to Paul. He, moreover, exploits his own experience (cf. Phil 3:3–11). Man is stretched between the two opposing poles: he is predetermined for association with God and he longs for it, he wants to do truly good deeds (cf. Rom 7:14–23) and at the same time he is not able to achieve this because of involvement (of men) with sin; this paradox for Paul has no other solution than God's mercy in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 7:24f.). Jesus, who had been exempt from this involvement, voluntarily surrendered his privilege and in his death he took this curse on himself. Paul quotes here Deut 21:23: this death and damnation (the curse uttered by the Law over the trespassers) that were destined for men, were surmounted in Jesus' resurrection once and for all. One could say, it is not possible to live

¹⁶ THEISSEN, Gerd. *Religion*, p. 214f., speaks about aporia that were peculiar for the Jewry as such, and that became manifest in the 1st century. The tension between theocentrism and anthropocentrism and between particularism and universalism was present even in Paul's own statements and found its expression in disparity of the teachings of the individual groups. As an example he presents Josephus Flavius's interpretation (*Antiquities of Jews* IV, 6, 10–12, § 141–155) of Zimri's rebellion against Moses and his legislation which is characterised as tyrannical. Theissen presents also other examples (PHILO. *On migration of Abraham* 89f., 4 Ezra [8:20–36]) substantiating that the requirements of the Law were perceived by some members of the Jewish nation as impossible to fulfil even though he includes these examples as incorrect attitude. Paul in confrontation with Judaists radicalises these aporia, and he does this by shifting the notional balance to the side of theocentrism (God's grace) and universalism (by refusing the separateness of the chosen nation).

¹⁷ LINCICUM, David. *Paul and the Early Jewish Encounter with Deuteronomy*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010, p. 144f.

under the constant threat of the damnation because it is not a life, it is a prison. Therefore the rescue from this threat of the damnation is needed, the breaking of bond. It was done in Jesus Christ. The faith in him brings life, there is no fear any more and in him is freedom for everyone. Paul argues from this experience of life and freedom which Galatians have already experienced themselves.

Paul uses the traditional lines of argumentation, but he uses them contrary to the existing tradition. He puts together Deut 27:26 and 21:23 concerned with the curse, and interprets them through the event in Christ; and Hab 2:4b and Lev 18:5 which are concerned with life. He interprets these two places from the Scripture in an opposite way as it was normally understood.¹⁸ He interprets them as “two different ways to gain eschatological life”:¹⁹ Hab 2,4b is connected with the activity of God (faith, grace) and Lev 18:5 with the activity of men (deeds of σάρξ). Nevertheless only divine action could save man.

The Law stands in contrast to faith; therefore those who want to comply with the Law may only have life from the Law, which in fact is not possible, because the Law does not lead to life (association with God). The only possibility is to live from faith. And since the righteous one will live from faith and as Abraham’s faith was accounted to him (entered to his credit) as righteousness, only those who live from faith are the true sons of Abraham.²⁰ Paul’s opponents probably pointed to those passages of the Scripture speaking about the necessity to abide by the commandments of the Law, such as Lev 18:5. To them Abraham was an example of obedience to the Law.

Righteousness in the Biblical sense is a relational concept. Righteous in the true sense of the word is only God. Man is righteous only to that degree to which he fulfils God’s will. Righteous is the one who

¹⁸ In fact both the passages speak in accord about faithfulness to God, i.e. about faithfulness to God’s commandments. Paul, though, puts them in contrast. The reason for his unusual use of these two quotations lays in his concept of the Gospel (cf. Gal 2:20f). In Hab 2:4b he underlines God’s action in opposite to Lev 18:5 that he understands as “a merely human way to attain eschatological life”. Cf. SPRINKLE, Preston M. *Law and Life: The Interpretation of Leviticus 18:5 in Early Judaism and in Paul*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, p. 164. “For Paul in Gal 3:12, Lev 18:5 is unduly optimistic about humanity’s ability to rescue itself from the plight of the curse of the law (3:10)”; *ibidem*.

¹⁹ SPRINKLE, Preston M. *Law*, p. 138.

²⁰ Those who live from faith are Abraham’s spiritual sons – the spiritually understood sonhood is well documented for that period. Paul systematically uses this meaning (its further development, especially in the contrast of a corporeal son and a son of the promise in 4:22–31, is another important step in his argumentation).

in mutual relationships within a community of persons meets the obligations imposed on him by this relationship. In common Jewish understanding this meant a man who was able to meet the requirements of the Law, as the Law was God's will revealed. For Paul the important point in Abraham's story from Gen 15 is that Abraham was acknowledged as righteous by God not on the basis of fulfilment of the requirements of the Law but on the basis of his faith and trust.²¹ If Abraham was justified on the basis of his faith and not of the deeds of the Law, then also the Galatians are justified on the basis of their faith (God's actions in Jesus Christ) and they can support this by the evidence of gifts of the Holy Spirit. Paul here interprets faith in contrast to the deeds, which is in conflict with the Jewish understanding according to which faith is fulfilled through the deeds of the Law (i.e. God's will revealed). In this respect Paul, who knew the Jewish tradition very well and who used to adhere to it before his conversion, markedly departs from it.

Jesus took on himself the curse which is meant for the trespassers which Paul documents by reference to Deut 21:23.²² What is remarkable in this, is the fact that Paul omits ὑπὸ θεοῦ / from the quotation which probably is not accidental. It is obvious that he does not want to say that Jesus was damned by God but that he was hit by the curse which the Law threatened the trespassers with.²³ It is as if the Law here became a kind of independent power, different from God. It is not God, but "only" the Law as a guardian, a custodian that utters the curse that means death for the sinner as a penalty for sin.

"Paul believes that the law is incapable of giving life, and according to Gal 3:19–22 it was not intended to do so [...]. Moreover, humanity is enslaved to the powers of this present evil age and lacks the ability to escape the curse under their own power, namely by 'doing these things' so as to gain life 'by them' [...]"²⁴ In Paul's concept of the Law there can be seen certain ambivalence, since on the one hand it is from God which

²¹ Cf. BORSE, Udo. *Der Brief an die Galater*. Regensburg: Verlag F Pustet, 1984, p. 126.

²² This passage is concerned with quite a specific order to bury the convict sentenced to death (hanged on a tree) so that the earth was not desecrated.

²³ It seems to be logical from Paul's point of view. The only problem is that we cannot be completely certain of the original version of the Greek text Paul is quoting from. In his time there was not a canonical version of the biblical text: there were "keine zwei identischen oder fast identischen Rollen eines Buches der LXX", TIWALD, Marcus. *Hebräer von Hebräern: Paulus auf dem Hintergrund frühjüdischer Argumentation und biblischer Interpretation*. Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, p. 85.

²⁴ SPRINKLE, Preston M. *Law*, p. 164.

means it is holy, on the other hand it is a power which holds man captive in his sins thus he cannot free himself from this captivity. Therefore he needs someone who will liberate him, free him from the dependence on the Law. Christ achieved this by his death. It is possible that it was Jesus' death on the cross, declared as an act of redemption, that irritated Paul as a persecutor of Christians and that he saw the person of Jesus as a damned one.²⁵ This damnation is now interpreted in a positive way as an act of redemption. The curse applies to the killed, the executed, but Jesus (who was hit by this curse unjustifiably, as he did not commit any sin) was resurrected, is alive, and thus the power of this curse is broken. This argumentation was important and might have been effectual only in relation to Galatian Christians (and after all they were at stake) because they believed in salvation in Christ. It is precisely for the reason that Christians are connected with Christ (they attired themselves in Christ) that they are exempt from this curse (they certainly have life in Him on the basis of their faith) and that is why it is absurd to turn backwards. Without belief in Christ and salvation through him, Paul's argumentation was incomprehensible and from the Jewish point of view, unacceptable.

The third step in his argumentation: In Jesus the promises given to Abraham come true for the Gentiles

- Nobody can revoke the promises given to Abraham and his descendant.
- Jesus is the promised descendant (singular!).
- The promise is fulfilled by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The third moment of Abrahamic argumentation is the promise from Gen 22:18 where the promise is transferred from Abraham to his descendants: *καὶ ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν τῷ σπέρματί σου πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς ἀνθ' ὧν ὑπήκουσας τῆς ἐμῆς φωνῆς*. In LXX the word *σπέρμα*²⁶ is used for his progeny which means sperm (semen), but also, figuratively, progeny or in rare cases also descendant/son.²⁷ This interpretation

²⁵ Certain formulations in Talmud in later times express such concept.

²⁶ In Hebrew the used expression (זרע) has the same meaning (semen, progeny). According to TIWALD, Markus. *Hebräer*, pp. 430–432, Paul uses in this case the specific mode of the Jewish interpretation, e.g. the ultra-literal interpretation. “Beim Ultraliteralismus geht es um einen Interpretationsmodus, der in kontextwidriger Fokussierung auf einzelne wortwörtlich interpretierte Textpassagen einen völlig neuen Sinn des überlieferten Textes erschließt” (p. 431).

²⁷ The same expression is used both in Hebrew (זרע) and Greek (σπέρμα) in Gen 5:15, in so-called “proto-gospel”. In LXX of course *sperma* (grammatically a neuter) is

so to say ad hoc is more remarkable with regard to the fact that Paul elsewhere uses the same expression as a collective noun. Christians are (as co-heirs with Christ) included in the blessing given to Abraham. In the person of Abraham God had already prepared the way for the Gentiles (into the community, into the relationship with Himself), and he did this on the basis of faith. The interpretation of σπέρμα for the person of Jesus Christ is understandable only in the Christian context, for his addresses (as well as the opponents) know it.²⁸

The fourth step in his argumentation: The temporary role of the Law

- The Law cannot revoke the Covenant since it came much later (after 430 years) when the Covenant was already effective and had been directed to Christ.²⁹
- Meanwhile the Law was given, to regulate life (because of trespassing) until that descendant comes.
- The Law was given by (many) angels through a single mediator (for Israel, i.e. for many), but there is only one God and that is why he does not need any mediator.
- The Law cannot compete with the promise on the basis of faith because life does not come through it.

substituted by a masculine pronoun “he” (αὐτός), which might be reflected also in Paul’s interpretation when in his argumentation he transforms the collective noun progeny into a male descendant. “Auch in der LXX lässt sich damit jene messianisch-endzeitliche Deutung von σπέρμα belegen, wie sie Paulus in Gal 3:16 in Bezug auf Christus geltend macht.” Cf. TIWALD, Markus. *Hebräer*, p. 432.

Singular form in the sense of a son, an offspring, is sporadically applied in Genesis to Isaac (cf. Gen 17:1–20) or to Ishmael (cf. e.g. Gen 21:15) as an individual, a particular descendant of Abraham. Cf. MUSSNER, Franz. *Galaterbrief*, p. 239f.: “Die ‘individuelle’ statt ‘kollektive’ Deutung von σπέρμα, die Paulus in Gal 3,16 den Segenserheißungen gibt, ist im AT selbst schon durch ihre Applikation auf Einzelgestalten wie Isaak, Jakob, David und den Gottesknecht vorbereitet [...]”, while of course the collective meaning is in most cases present as well. In the following text Paul uses the word in the usual collective meaning.

²⁸ For the Jews it would not have been clear.

²⁹ According to BAUMERT, Norbert. *Der Weg des Trauens: Übersetzung und Auslegung des Briefes an die Galater und des Briefes an die Philipper*. Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2009, p. 76, ἐπαγγελία in v. 16 and 21 are in pl. because Paul has in mind the promises for the Jews/Israel and through Israel for the Gentiles. It sounds very logically; however, in v. 18 and 22 Paul uses the word promise in sg. ἐπαγγελία (ἐκ πίστεως). He points, however, rightly that there is an intentional connection between ἐπαγγελία to Abraham and a Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) he has preached to Galatians. They are nearly identical.

- The Law was able to delineate the limits (of sin); it was a tutor (preparing for faith).

The distinction between the Law and the Covenant is very important for Paul's interpretation. From the point that they are not identical, the idea of blessing of the Gentiles in Abraham through their faith without circumcision comes out. The Covenant of God with Abraham is larger than the Law which was given only for Israel, not for Gentiles, in the Covenant. However, even the Gentiles are included (in the same way as Abraham, i.e. through their faith). The fulfilment of the Covenant is reached in Jesus Christ as the promised descendant (σπέρμα in sg.) for both: the Jews and the Gentiles. Therefore the role of the Law (as a preparation, a tutor) is finished now; there is no need any more to be under the Law because the Covenant comes into full validity.

Understanding of the Law as something temporary stood in sharp contrast with Jewish thinking of that time.³⁰ It was permanent validity of the Law, confirmed by the act of circumcision, that Paul's opponents could have probably argued by (cf. Gen 17:10–14). Paul comes with an argument of a Covenant expressed in the form of promise guaranteed to Abraham a long time before the gift of Law, even before circumcision was ordered as a token of the Covenant. From this Paul infers the primacy and priority of the promise (grace) on the basis of faith over the Law. The Law was given by angels (i.e. not by a single subject) and that is why it needed a mediator in the person of Moses to interpret its commandments to the people.³¹ There is only one God and he did not need any interpreter in his relationship with Abraham.

Paul does not deny that in the last instance the Law is from God (in this he is at one with his opponents) but the reason for the gift of the Law is the existence of sin in the history of man. The Law pointed out

³⁰ The problem regarding the person of Abraham in Jewish thinking of that time was his relationship to Mosaic Law; although the solutions to this problem are different from Philo and the rabbinic literature, Paul's solution is very unique. By Rabbis Abraham observed the Oral Law; by Philo he observed the law of nature, which is incarnated in the Mosaic Law, only Paul says that the Law is posterior to the Covenant and only temporary. For Philo cf. SANDMEL, Samuel. *Philo's Place in Judaism: A Study of conceptions of Abraham in Jewish Literature*. New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1971; a comparison between them p. 103.

³¹ This passage in itself is relatively difficult, for my part, I consider the most comprehensible Mussner's interpretation – see *Galaterbrief*, p. 248f. BORSE, Udo. *Der Brief an die Galater*, p. 135, regards the reference to angels as Paul's effort to show that the Law is not directly from God, but was given by angels, and that is why it is of a lower standing than the promise that God addressed directly to Abraham, without any mediator.

the general depravity³² but it did not show the path to salvation as his Jewish contemporaries believed; that is to say that it brought to light the situation of man before the face of God but it could not mediate how to overcome this situation. Its role is on the one hand temporary (until faith comes), on the other hand supervisory, which means judicial. The Law brought to light the imprisonment of man by sin; it showed man's human limits and the necessity of his liberation,³³ in order to confirm the effect of the promise (the Covenant) and justification from faith. Its role thus ended with the arrival of faith, since only faith is life-giving.

The fifth step in Paul's argumentation: Faith gives life, and faith is given through Jesus Christ

- Through faith we are God's children in Jesus Christ.
- Baptism means identification with Christ and overcoming of all the past differences.
- In Christ all are that descendant and thus become heirs to the promise given to Abraham.

Paul concludes his argumentation with an appeal to the Galatian Christians as to those who had built their lives on Christ and through him and thanks to faith they are sons (children) of God. Through their faith, confirmed by baptism (attiring themselves in Christ) they identified themselves with Christ and so surmounted all the differences, for these differences lost their meaning as far as faith is concerned. Through unification with Christ they are one and the same in faith and thus they are also the descendants of Abraham and heirs to the promise. That emphasis on ὑμεῖς εἶς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ / may have connection with the emphasised sg. σπέρμα, related to Christ as the descendant for whom the promise had been meant (v. 16). In Jesus Christ every believer becomes the descendant (σπέρμα) of Abraham and an heir to the promise.

It was probably argumentation by Abraham that his competitors among the ranks of orthodox Judeo-Christians used to explain to the newly converted that if they want to participate in the promise given to

³² In Rom 3:9ff. the term general depravity includes also the Gentiles. The general depravity of humankind is documented from the Scripture (cf. Rom 3:10-18). The Scripture itself proves that all are guilty (Gal 2:22). The role of the Law (as well as of the law of conscience) is in "realization/recognition of sin".

³³ Cf. BORSE, Udo. *Der Brief an die Galater*, p. 134.

Abraham and thus in salvation in Christ, they have to be incorporated in the chosen nation, namely by acceptance of the very basic attributes, i.e. circumcision and other (dietary) laws.⁵⁴ It seems that in his argumentation Paul wanted to prove that Abraham's argument in favour of circumcision is incorrect. Paul relativizes the role of the Law in relation to the promise and the choice which he treats even more emphatically in Rom 4. Paul set in contrast the tradition of faith from Gen 15:6 which he supports with another reference to Hab 2:4,⁵⁵ and the Law or, better to say, abiding by its commandments. Because he knew the Law very well and he also knew its provisions about circumcision in Gen 17:10–14 as well as other ones, he had to find a crushing counterargument to his opponents' Abrahamic argument.⁵⁶ Two traditions of interpretation of Abraham's heritage thus clashed in the disputation about the validity of salvation in Christ.⁵⁷ Paul probably was not very successful in his argumentation. His concept of Abrahamic tradition meant separation of faith in the sense of faithfulness to the Divine Law (that is juridical-ethical performance) from faith as trust in God's actions in Christ (existential attitude). Faith for him means radical change of perspective, radical newness of being. This newness of being of course has its ethical consequences, but it is not the result of obedience to the Law, it is not given by man's performance. It is pure grace. By his own example (and this is the purpose of the biographical part of the epistle) he demonstrates how radical this change is, and that is why there is no way back for the Galatians.

In opposition to the Jewish post-Biblical interpretation of Abraham as a faithful follower of Torah⁵⁸ symbolised namely by circumcision, to

⁵⁴ In Gal Paul does not explicitly speak about dietary laws, the dispute is concerned primarily with the circumcision, as follows from the commandments in Gen 17:10–14. Paul also mentions observance of the calendar, by which he probably means Jewish sacred days (festivals) – cf. Gal 4:10.

⁵⁵ In LXX the text runs as follows: “ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεώς μου ζήσεται”, which can be translated as the righteous one shall live from the faith in me (from the faithfulness to me) or also as the righteous one shall live from my faithfulness. Paul probably omitted the possessive pronoun in the quotation intentionally, because he is concerned with faith in Jesus Christ, not in the Law or in God (through obedience to the Law). Further commentaries see MUSSNER, Galaterbrief, p. 226; BORSE, Udo. *Der Brief an die Galater*, p. 128f. Paul used this quotation also in Rom 1:17.

⁵⁶ He will return to this theme and treat it more explicitly and at great length in Rom 4:1–25 (explicitly in v. 10f.).

⁵⁷ Cf. LONGENECKER, Bruce W. *The Triumph*, p. 128–154.

⁵⁸ Cf. KUSCHEL, Karl-Josef. *Spor o Abrahamu: Co Židy, křesťany a muslimy rozděljuje a co je spojuje (Streit um Abraham. Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt – und was sie einigt)*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 1997, p. 80f.: “The Holy One said to Abraham: When I created the

which his opponents might have related, Paul emphasises the priority of the promise regardless of the circumcision, i.e. the Law. To explicate in greater length his emphasis on the change of existence in the struggle with his judaising opponents over Galatian Christians, in his Epistle to the Galatians he turns again to the Abrahamic tradition, namely to the difference between the son of the promise (δι' ἐπαγγελίας) and the son according to the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα).

4:27–31

This passage (4:27–31) of the Epistle to the Galatians is even sharper in its tone than the preceding argumentation in the third chapter. Here Paul, by his allegorical exposition, reverses the relationship between Jews⁵⁹ and the Gentiles,⁴⁰ of course within the frame of the clash with orthodox Judeo-Christians. In spite of the fact that throughout history these verses have been misused against Jews, and reference to them supported anti-Judaism, their meaning is quite different. The Jews as such are here not in view of Paul. Paul turns to Galatian Christians who are about to opt (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι) for belated acceptance of the Law (symbolised by circumcision and observance of the

world, I was patient – for all the twenty generations, until you came and performed the circumcision. And so if you had not accepted the circumcision now, I have had enough of the world. And I would return to the state of nothingness and shapelessness. For I do not need for the world to exist any more. That is why he says (in Gen 17:1): 'I am God the Almighty', I have had enough of the world. But if you accept this circumcision, there is enough of us for the world, there is me and you." Quoted from p. 81 *Midrasch Tanchuma*, ed. S. Buber, Lekh-Lekha, Gen 3 zu Gen 17:1f., section V.

We can only follow the existing written traditions about Abraham of that time. It can be possible that there were other traditions, perhaps nearer to Paul's understanding and interpreting of Abraham but about them we have no evidence. That is a methodological problem which we are not able to solve. COHEN, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*. 2nd ed. Louisville – London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006 p. 33, admits that there were a few Jews ("apostates") interpreting Torah allegorically: "[...] Philo describes a group of 'extreme allegorists' who argued that the laws of the Torah, including the laws of circumcision, Sabbath, and forbidden foods, were meant to be observed not literally but allegorically." That point of view is formally similar to Paul's interpretation but his reason for it is completely different. We have no texts of this kind, only the critic references of Philo. Cf. PHILO. *On migration of Abraham* 16, § 89–95. Nonetheless it is important that such a way of thinking did exist. Paul might have made use of it in his argumentation against his opponents (cf. e.g. Phil 3:3; Rom 2:28f.).

⁵⁹ Understanding is sometimes difficult due to the fact that Paul speaks about Jews but he means Judeo-Christians. His allegedly anti-Semitic polemic must be perceived against this background.

⁴⁰ See THEISSEN, Gerd. *Judentum und Christentum bei Paulus: Sozialgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu einem beginnenden Schisma*. In HENGEL, Martin – HECKEL, Udo (eds.). *Paulus und das antike Judentum*. Tübingen: Mohr, 1991, p. 337f.

calendar etc.) to crown their Christian existence. As an exception only, it was possible for the converts to Judaism not to undergo the circumcision, but it definitely was not the legitimate way.⁴¹

If Christ freed all from the yoke of the Law (as Paul strived to prove in the preceding text), then all those who want to take it upon themselves, enter again into slavery from which they had been freed. Jesus Christ and consequently those who believe in him (from both the Gentiles and Jews) are the true descendants of Abraham, the children of promise, and that is why they stand in the line of Isaac, and Sarah is their mother. Those who want to be under the Law, given on Mount Sinai, and who want to live in bondage, are necessarily the children from the bondswoman (Hagar), they stand in the line of Ishmael who persecuted Isaac. Paul here does not interpret the Biblical text; he uses it typologically for his own purposes. The text has no ethnical background, it does not place the Gentiles above Jews but, in a rather pronounced polemic, it claims Abrahamic heritage (sonhood) through Christ for all, irrespective of origin.

He based his explanation on the theme typical for the period⁴² – the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac. His interpretation nonetheless is not concerned with the priority of Jews as descendants of Isaac (and so heirs to Abrahamic promise) to their relations, the descendants of Ishmael; he uses his allegory to appeal to the awareness of Christian freedom which is the result of fulfilment of Abrahamic promise in Christ. His allegory is pragmatic and for his Jewish contemporaries certainly incomprehensible, as it contradicts the very sense of the text of the Old Testament. The connection between Hagar and the Covenant of Sinai and Jerusalem (the symbol of Judaism) turns the tradition upside down. The key word here is bondage: Hagar is a bondswoman/servant, therefore she symbolises those who are under the bondage of the Law (Jerusalem of that time), and her son was born from the

⁴¹ Cf. *Antiquities of Jews* XX, 2, 4. COHEN, Abraham. *Talmud pro každého. Historie, struktura a hlavní témata Talmudu (Everyman's Talmud. The Major Teaching of the Rabbinic Sages)*. Praha: Sefer, 2006, pp. 101–104; 249; BECKER, Jürgen. *Paulus: Der Apostel der Völker*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 93–97. Cf. also COHEN, Shaye J. D. *From the Maccabees*, p. 198: “Philo knew allegorists who advanced the same argument [i.e. ‘the laws were never even intended to be followed literally’], and against them he insisted that allegorical meaning does not negate literal meaning. The commandment of circumcision represents the excision of lustful inclinations, but even if you excise your lustful tendencies, you must still circumcise your eight-day-old son.” (PHILO. *On migration of Abraham* 16, § 89–93).

⁴² STRACK, Hermann L. – BILLERBECK, Paul. *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 3. 4th ed. München: Beck, 1965, p. 575.

human calculation, not from God's decision. His descendants are those who are in servitude to the Law, descendants according to the flesh. Sarah⁴⁵ is free, she gives birth to her son on the basis of the promise, i.e. from God's will and might, therefore he is the symbol of the inhabitants of free Jerusalem up there (the heavenly one), the Divine one. Sarah's descendants are children of the promise. The descendants of Ishmael persecute the descendants of Isaac, as had been suggested in the Scripture. By this Paul primarily means his opponents in Galatian communities, for they strive against freedom which Paul preached (Gospel of the salvation in Christ) to become – from free descendants of promise – slaves. The quotation from Gen 21:10: "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman" is addressed to the judaizing Judeo-Christians who strive to win Galatian Christians over. To brand a member of the Jewish nation as Ishmael's descendant must have sounded like a provocation and sarcasm.⁴⁴

In both quoted passages of the Epistle to Galatians, the Abrahamic tradition is used to emphasise the freedom following from faith and as a consequence of the promise fulfilled in Christ who is the true descendant of Abraham. The Law had been given only as a transitional tool whose function was ended or better fulfilled by God's action in Christ. Those who want to stay under the bondage of this tool, or even take it upon themselves as Christians, lock themselves into bondage. So Paul suspended the meaning of the Law as the currently effective God's will. Paul exploits the Abrahamic theme in the context of justification from faith again in the Epistle to Romans (4:1–25 and 9:1–15).

Conclusion

In contrast to the contemporary Jewish tradition, which reduces Abraham to the true follower of the Law (emphasis on particularism), Paul presented the concept of Abraham as a man of faith and father of

⁴⁵ Paul argues only by social status of both the women, not by their ethnic origin. It is though interesting that in Jewish tradition Sarah was perceived as the mother of the Gentile nations, as the one who brought pagan women to the faith in God.

⁴⁴ For the structure of the passage Ga 3:1 – 4:11, see BECHMANN, Ulrike. Rhetorische Figuren der Entgrenzung: Abraham, Sara and Hagar bei Paulus. *Bibel und Kirche* 2011, vol. 66, no. 1, p. 9.

all believers regardless of their physical origin (emphasis on universalism). The sonhood of Abraham is spiritualised by Paul and declared the only true sonhood, the ethnical or religious origin as a value and a part of identity is absolutely put aside. For Paul, Abraham is not primarily a representative and a model of correct ethical behaviour in accordance with God's commandments which he was for the post-Biblical and for the greater part of the Judeo-Christian tradition, for him Abraham is a paragon of a man of faith which has distinctly existential character. Paul intentionally transcended the contemporary Jewish tradition. By separating the Law and the Covenant as two different entities he radicalised contraposition of faith (faithfulness connected with the Covenant) and deeds (obedience to the Law), which was something quite extraordinary in the Jewish context of that time. Very likely this also reflects Paul's personal experience of transformation from a radical preacher in favour of the Law (human performance) into the follower of Jesus Christ (God's grace). The faith of Abraham includes the faith of the true believers because he believed in God and was accepted by Him without any preconditions and he opened in this way for his followers the space of God's grace, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ as the promised descendant. Through Jesus Christ who is the fulfilment of God's promise given to Abraham (and also the fulfilment and the goal of the Law $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\upsilon \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ – see Rom 10:4)⁴⁵ is this space of grace accessible for all believers and they shall live by faith. “In sum, Paul carries out a radicalization, universalization, and eschatologization of this verse [i.e. Gen 15:6] so significant to his theology.”⁴⁶

RESUMÉ

MIREIA RYŠKOVÁ

Abrahámovská tradice v listě Galatanům

Studie se zabývá Pavlovým způsobem využití abrahámovské tradice v argumentaci pro ospravedlnění na základě víry. Na rozdíl od svých židovských a některých židokřesťanských současníků nevěnuje Pavel pozornost halachic-

⁴⁵ BROŽ, Jaroslav. *Telos nomú* a interpretace Ř 9,30–10,10. In TICHÝ, Ladislav – OPATR-NÝ, Dominik (eds.). *Apoštol Pavel a Písmo: Sborník příspěvků z konference*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2009, pp. 5–30. He also argues for the understanding of $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\upsilon \chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$ as the goal of the Law.

⁴⁶ SCHLIESSER, Benjamin. *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4: Paul's Concept of Faith in Light of the History of Reception of Genesis 15:6*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, p. 429.

kému rozměru abrahámovské tradice (Abrahám jakožto vzor jednání ve shodě se Zákonem), nýbrž svou hermeneutiku opírá o vykoupení v Kristu. Právě proto, že jeho východiskem není Zákon, nýbrž Kristus, dospívá k radikálně odlišným závěrům.

Galatští křesťané se dostali do vlivu judaizujících židokřesťanských misionářů, kteří měli za to, že pro platnost zaslíbení je i pro křesťany z pohanství třeba přijmout observanci Zákona. Pavel opřel svou argumentaci o Abrahámovu víru, na jejímž základě s ním Bůh uzavřel trvale platnou smlouvu, zatímco Zákon přišel jakožto dočasná instituce až o 430 let později. Zaslíbení potomstva Abrahámovi je vyloženo jako zaslíbení potomka, jímž je jednoznačně Kristus. Kristus je naplněním Božího příslibu a zároveň tím, kdo skrze svou smrt na kříži a zmrtvýchvstání završuje a tím i ukončuje platnost Zákona jakožto spásné cesty. V celé Pavlově polemice s židokřesťanskými oponenty nejde primárně o obrízku jako takovou, nýbrž o založení křesťanské identity. Ta stojí na Kristu, nikoliv na Zákoně. Abrahám je proto nikoliv prototypem příslušníka židovského národa, nýbrž křesťana, který se opírá o víru v Boží věrnost, jež našla své vyjádření v Ježíši Kristu.

Klíčová slova

Pavel, Abraham, List Galaťanům, víra, křesťanská identita, ospravedlnění, obrízka

