The Jewish Mother of the Gentiles: Paul and Maternal Imagery in Galatians 4

by

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In Gal 4:19, Paul likens himself to a mother who is "again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed" within the Galatian congregation. Paul then follows this maternal self-declaration with an extended allegory focused upon the matriarchs in the Abrahamic narrative. Galatians is notably an epistle which is primarily concerned with circumcision and Paul's insistence that gentiles should not be circumcised to be part of the Israel of God (Gal 6:16). Yet Paul, in crafting his argument to persuade the (male) Galatians to remain uncircumcised, relies upon female, maternal imagery which reaches its crescendo in Gal 4 with the above-mentioned passages. Why would Paul rely upon feminine imagery in the climax of his argument against circumcision, which is a Jewish male identity marker?

This thesis is a socio-rhetorical examination of Paul's maternal imagery in Gal 4, and I contend that Paul chose motherhood for the height of his argument because it was the most rhetorically persuasive image which would enable Paul to both affirm the gentile Galatians' status as children of God while also addressing the Galatians' social context. Maternal imagery allowed Paul to utilize ancient constructions of maternity to defend his gospel and apostolic calling, while also communicating relationship dynamics that existed between Paul and the church. Once Paul establishes himself as a mother to the congregation, he uses the Abrahamic matriarchal allegory to argue in favour of the gentiles' status as children of the promise, heirs of Abraham, and born of the free woman. Paul insists that physical identity markers are contrary to the gospel of Christ (for gentiles) and are indistinguishable from the Galatians' former cultic life. Instead, the Galatians must be animated by God the Father and accept Paul as the "free mother" who birthed them to embrace their identity as a divergent line of Abrahamic descent.

Acknowledgements

Paul often referred to the congregations he founded as his children, and this thesis is particularly interested in Paul's self-identification as a mother labouring painfully towards the *telos* of his calling (Gal 4:19). Now, having gone through the process of "birthing" a thesis, I can better understand the metaphorical pain Paul references. This has been an endeavor but also one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, and I feel so grateful for the opportunity to learn, study, and write. This "labour" of love, however, was not possible without so many people, only a few of whom I have the time to acknowledge in this humble way.

First and foremost, I must thank Dr. Alicia Batten for her willingness to supervise me, reading my half-formed thoughts and offering wonderfully detailed, constructive feedback even while she was on sabbatical and tirelessly pursuing her own work. Alicia has been a mentor, a sounding board, and put up with my stumbling external processing with grace and humour. I do not have the time to properly express the fullness of my appreciation.

I want to acknowledge my professors, the faculty, and the administrative staff of Conrad Grebel (and the wider University of Waterloo). I have so enjoyed my time there and appreciate all the many ways I have been personally and academically (and theologically!) stretched and challenged. To my fellow students in the two cohorts I straddled, it has been a pleasure to learn and grow with you.

I want to acknowledge and thank Dr. Peter Frick and Dr. Mona Tokarek LaFosse for reading my thesis and being part of the defence process. I so valued their questions and their feedback.

To my parents, a constant source of encouragement and the first people to read this finished product, and to my sisters who always lovingly make fun of this "human encyclopedia": I love you. To Rick and Liz Sytsma, thank you for all the ways you tangibly supported this goal of mine, including your willingness to step in and care for Iris.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my most precious creation: my daughter Iris. I hope and pray that she always follows the God-given desires of her heart.

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Chapter 1: Argument Overview and Methodology

Several years ago, Beverly Roberts Gaventa wrote a theological reflection entitled, "Is Galatians Just a Guy Thing?"[1] The question is a reference to the decidedly male character of Paul's most argumentative epistle. After all, Paul's main concern throughout the letter is circumcision, a surgical procedure that identified a man as belonging to Israel's god. Despite her provocative title, Gaventa does argue that while Galatians *appears* to primarily address circumcision, the epistle is in actuality more concerned with what the Galatians hoped circumcision might achieve for them: the guarantee of a position within the family of God and a new identity in light of this status. And these questions about identity and belonging are questions for both men and women, young and old, in every socio-economic stratum. The epistle's theology and themes speak to the human condition, even if the answers it gives come through an androcentric lens.

Gaventa does correctly draw the readers' attention to the seemingly male nature of Galatians. Paul *is* trying to keep the men of the congregation from adopting a (male) Jewish ethnic identity marker, and this can make his argument seem irrelevant to women. What is fascinating, however, is how frequently Paul uses female imagery, more specifically maternal imagery, to make his point.[2] Indeed, there are more female references within Galatians than most of Paul's other undisputed letters, despite its surface-level appearance of being a text about men and for men.

While the entire scope of Paul's maternal language within Galatians is worth further exploration, Paul's most startling maternal references come in the last half of Gal 4, at the height of Paul's central argumentative section (often referred to as the *probatio*). Here, Paul - a Jewish

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[1] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Is Galatians Just a 'Guy Thing'?: A Theological Reflection," *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (2000): 267–78.

[2] Gaventa often writes about Paul's maternal imagery. She does not, however, focus on this point in the theological reflection cited above.

man - self-identifies as a woman in labour: "My little children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you" (4:19).[3] This verse rarely receives in-depth analysis, and yet it is quite unusual when one considers what Paul states. Roman culture praised the ideals of masculinity and masculine performance and yet Paul willingly self-identifies in a feminine, maternal position. He claims to be the mother of the Galatian church and more than just being the mother who birthed them once Paul is in labour *again* with this same "child," a human impossibility.

Directly after this strange declaration, Paul moves through an allegorical retelling of the Abrahamic narrative, presumably focused on the two matriarchs of the story: Sarah and Hagar (4:21-31). I say presumably because Paul only names Hagar explicitly (4:24-25). Reading allegorically, Paul (re)interprets both the history and the future of the people of Yahweh (Israel), telling the story through the lens of motherhood and insisting that gentile-believers are spiritual heirs of the promised blessing of Abraham because of the mother who bore them.

Despite their proximity within the text, there are few scholars who examine Paul's motherly allegory and his maternal self-identification in conjunction with one another and this is rather intriguing. Again, in a culture dominated by masculine ideals, and in an epistle largely concerned with an androcentric religious rite, Paul employing *two* notable pieces of maternal imagery within his central argument seems significant. *Why does Paul use mothers at the height of his argument to the Galatian church*? This is the question that animates this thesis. Ultimately, I contend that Paul's maternal self-identification and his presentation of the Sarah-Hagar allegory are indeed connected. Both are intentional, associated images that Paul purposefully utilizes for

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[3] All biblical translations will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

his rhetorical purposes with Paul choosing maternal imagery specifically because he could manipulate it in a way that spoke to both the Galatians' exigence and context.

Paul first self-presents as the Galatians' mother to support the legitimacy of the church's formation and to insist on their presence within the family of God, not as ethnic Jews through circumcision but as gentile members of the expanding Israel.[4] Throughout the letter, Paul identifies God as the father of the Galatians (1:1, 1:3, 1:4, 1:16; 4:6), but Paul also focuses on the Galatians' spiritual descent from Abraham through faith which breeds righteousness (Gal 3). After Paul's focus on the patrilineal descent from God (and subsequently Abraham) in Gal 3, Paul then places himself as the mother of this church in Gal 4, "birthing" the congregation with the ultimate goal of seeing Christ formed within them (4:19). As a mother, Paul brings the will of God the Father into action, birthing the Galatian church into the family of God. Whereas circumcision was once the chief identifying marker for membership within Israel, Paul rejects this practice for gentiles who wish to become a part of God's covenant people.[5] It is instead the presence of Christ in gentiles that identifies them as people of God.

Once Paul self-identifies as the Galatians' "mother," Paul returns to the Abrahamic story, only this time he brings attention to the narrative's mothers (4:21-31). Paul moves through a

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[4] In the ancient Mediterranean world ethnicity and religion were intertwined. Judaism was a religion but also an ethnic people. Circumcision was a religious, ethnic marker that identified males as Jewish. See Paula Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission Mean a 'Law-Free' Apostle?" *JBL* 134, no. 3 (2015): 645-50; Amy Genevieve Dibley, *Abraham's Uncircumcised Children: The Enoch Precedent for Paul's Paradoxical Claim in Galatians 3:29: A Dissertation* (Berkeley: University of California Berkeley, 2013), 53-57.

[5] For the relationship between circumcision, ethnic Judaism, and membership in Israel, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 97-98. For evidence which presents circumcision as a necessary rite to convert to Judaism, see Nina E. Livesey, *Galatians and the Rhetoric of Crisis: Demosthenes-Cicero-Paul* (Salem, OR: Polebridge, 2016), 1-2; Philip F. Esler, *Galatians,* New Testament Readings (London: Routledge, 1998), 36-50; Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission," 645-50; Dibley, *Abraham's Uncircumcised Children,* 53.

series of antithetical comparisons connected to the mothers, placing the law, slavery, and the children born according to the flesh as one thematic grouping attached to the slave mother (Hagar). Paul then contrasts this grouping to the free woman, whose children are also free and who are born according to God's promise. Using this antithesis, Paul forces his audience to make a decision at the end of his *probatio*: who will the Galatians acknowledge as their mother? Will they practice circumcision and thus keep the physical requirements of Jewish law, not designed for gentiles, and become like slaves to earthly covenants and physical religious rites? Or, will this community recognize Paul as the mother who birthed the circumcision-free gospel of Jesus among them? By recognizing Paul as their "free mother," the Galatian church chooses to embrace their status as children of the promise and inheritors of the Abrahamic spiritual lineage. Recall, Sarah is never explicitly named within the passage. I posit that this is intentional. Paul is the only mother mentioned (by name) within Gal 4 capable of producing legitimate "free" children, and Paul's fertility, like Sarah's, is dependent on an act of God. Just as God opened Sarah's womb, God called Paul and instructed him to "birth" legitimate heirs of the promise through the gospel of Jesus.

Paul chose female imagery for his rhetorical purposes because it also spoke to the Galatians' socio-cultural context. In the late 1990s, some scholars seemed skeptical regarding the influence of the mystery cults on Christ-cult worship practices and community formation.[6] However, compelling scholarship over the last 20 years connects the Galatian audience with (previous) Mother Goddess worship. Indeed, the prevalence of the Mother Goddess (also called Meter

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[6] Richard Ascough examines these authors in his historiography of ancient Greco-Roman community formation. See Richard Ascough, *What Are They Saying about the Formation of Pauline Churches?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 55-57, 69-70.

Theon, Mountain Mother, Great Mother, Cybele) within Galatia is now well-established.[7]

Among the most devoted of her followers, Mother Goddess worship involved self-mutilation rituals, more specifically self-castration by the male priests, as a sign of devotion and belonging. I contend that Paul, knowing of these practices, draws parallels between Jewish circumcision and cultic castration, arguing that both are religious rites that move gentiles away from being in a covenantal relationship with God.

Bringing these argumentative strands together, Paul is the Jewish mother to the gentile Galatian church, at once challenging the Great Mother worship and circumcision for gentiles while simultaneously strengthening this church's formation and identity by making them legitimate members of God's family through God's paternity and Paul's role as "mother." Paul's maternal references are the central and most persuasive image in his argument, thus explaining why they fall at the climax of his *probatio*.

While scholars have not devoted much in-depth attention to Paul's maternal self-identification (4:19), it has certainly not been ignored.[8] Hans Dieter Betz's rhetorical commentary presents the maternal imagery as a part of the friendship *topos* prevalent in the ancient world.[9] J. Louis Martyn states that the apocalyptic nature of Paul's work led Paul to use imagery that spoke of new creation, motherhood and birth being the ultimate symbols of new

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[7] See Arthur J. Dewey et al., *The Authentic Letters of Paul: A New Reading of Paul's Rhetoric and Meaning* (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2010), 37, 49-50. Susan Elliott, "Choose Your Mother, Choose Your Master: Galatians 4:21-5:1 in the Shadow of the Anatolian Mother of the Gods," *JBL* 118, no. 4 (1999): 661-63; Susan Elliott, *Cutting Too Close for Comfort: Paul's Letter to the Galatians in Its Anatolian Cultic Context* (London: T & T Clark International, 2003); James R. Edwards, "Galatians 5:12: Circumcision, the Mother Goddess, and the Scandal of the Cross," *NovT* 53, no. 4 (2011): 320-21.

[8] It is worth noting that Paul's maternal allegory (4:21-31) has received quite a bit of scholarly attention, particularly in the last twenty years. With that said, few authors have examined Gal 4:19 in conjunction with the allegory.

[9] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Church in Galatia*. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 233-35.

life.[10] Brigitte Kahl contends that Paul's use of feminine/maternal imagery is a continuation of baptismal formulae used in Gal 3:28. Paul calls the church towards the end of social hierarchies, exclusions, and acceptance of Greco-Roman cultural norms.[11] Yet despite the modest attention paid towards Gal 4:19, most authors generally dismiss the strangeness of the image or reduce it to a statement of affection from Paul to this church.[12]

However, several years ago, Beverly Roberts Gaventa pioneered several detailed investigations into Paul's use of maternal language throughout his undisputed epistles. While her first foray into this topic began with the maternal imagery in Galatians (largely Gal 4:19), she expanded upon this topic in her cumulative study *Our Mother Saint Paul* where she looks more broadly at maternal imagery throughout Paul's writings.[13] Gaventa argues that Paul employs maternal language to represent his apostolic calling, seeing his role as both generating and nurturing communities of faith. She assumes an apocalyptic backdrop for Paul's maternal metaphors and argues, like Martyn, that maternal references make the most sense with the new world emerging in light of Christ's presence.[14]

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[10] James Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 423-26.

[11] Brigitte Kahl, "No Longer Male: Masculinity Struggles Behind Galatians 3.28?" *JSNT* 23, no. 79 (2001): 44. Kahl does not use Gal 4:19 as her proof text, but she does use the Sarah-Hagar allegory and connects the allegory to the Abrahamic narrative Paul introduces in Gal 3.

[12] Marion Soards argues that this image speaks of great affection but also Paul's apostolic calling to metaphorically "birth" churches. See Marion L. Soards and Darrell J. Pursiful, *Galatians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2015), 412-13. Pamela Eisenbaum dismisses the maternal nature of Paul's comment and states, "Paul thinks of his preaching to the gentiles as a kind of spiritual birthing process, as indicated by his frequent use of *paternal* imagery for himself" (emphasis mine). See Pamela Eisenbaum "Paul as the New Abraham" in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation*, ed. Richard H. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 136. See also Walter F. Taylor, *Paul: Apostle to the Nations, An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 153.

[13] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

[14] For an alternative opinion, see Eisenbaum, "Paul as the New Abraham," 130-45. Eisenbaum argues that Paul intentionally chose language, including parental language, to make his apostolic calling mimic God's calling of Abraham.

Susan Eastman springboards from Gaventa's work in her own detailed analysis of Gal 4.[15] Eastman presents Paul's emotive argumentation in Gal 4 as an intentional choice within his larger rhetorical strategy, and he utilizes personal, relational language to persuasively affect his audience. She argues that Gal 4:19 is representative of the suffering that Paul endures in the formation and in his ongoing relationship with the Galatian church, and claims that Paul is trying to help this church understand the anguish they too must undergo when/as Christ is formed in them.

In exploring the text's contextual landscape, there is no shortage of material on ancient cultural constructions of mothers and motherhood within the Mediterranean world, though I have continually come back to the celebrated scholarship of Suzanne Dixon and Alicia Myers.[16] Both authors question many of the stereotypes that have long-existed regarding ancient women and their role as mothers, and their work is relevant to this study. Regarding the specific Anatolian socio-cultural setting, Susan Elliott, Lynn Roller, and Stephen Mitchell have been particularly useful resources.[17] While Mitchell focuses on a broad history of the Anatolian territory, Roller and Elliott are more focused on the cultic worship of the Meter Theon and her influence throughout the Greco-Roman world. Elliott's work more specifically concentrates on Galatians, Paul's concerns with circumcision, and the parallels between circumcision and the sacred castration of the Great Mother's most devoted servants (the *galli*).

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[15] Susan Eastman, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

[16] Suzanne Dixon, *The Roman Mother* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1988); Alicia D. Myers*, Blessed Among Women? Mothers and Motherhood in the New Testament (*New York: Oxford University Press, 2017*).

[17] Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 661-82; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*; Lynn E. Roller, *In Search of God the Mother: The Cult of Anatolian Cybele* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, Vols. 1 & 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

To construct my own argument, I will rely primarily upon two methodologies. Both will be interwoven throughout the thesis, though I will not weigh both equally. I will principally be conducting a socio-rhetorical analysis of the maternal language Paul adopts within Gal 4. Socio-rhetorical criticism, a methodology named by Vernon Robbins, marries sociological and anthropological disciplines with the rhetorical interpretation of texts.[18] Robbins argues that socio-rhetorical criticism, at its most basic level, "integrates the way people use language with the way they live in the world."[19] Essentially, the language an individual, in this case Paul, selects as the vehicle to present a specific idea or argument is inextricably linked to the cultural context in which and to which it is addressed. Paul's epistle to the Galatians is a piece of rhetoric and is thus purposefully argumentative. Paul argues against a specific problem and towards a specific outcome, but the exigence and the outcome are informed by both Paul and the audience's context.

The term "socio-rhetorical" has a fairly broad catchment of approaches and there is no universally agreed upon definition for the term "rhetoric."[20] For the purposes of this thesis, I am adopting Ernst Wendland's definition: "rhetoric is the *art* and *technique* of persuasion. In practice this entails the use of a definite and clearly definable literary strategy that aims through conventional but skillfully utilized means of argumentation to modify (i.e. reinforce or change)

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[18] Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1996).

[19] Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 1.

[20] Robbins (*Exploring the Texture of Texts*, 2-6) outlines how broad and/or how myopic one can go with socio-rhetorical criticism. He argues that every rhetorical document has layers, or "textures," and each texture can be analyzed separately or in concert with one another.

the cognitive, emotive, and/or volitional stance of the intended audience."[21] I chose this particular description for several reasons, the first being that it recognizes rhetoric as both a creative practice and a disciplined technique; Paul uses both facets to persuade his audience. This definition also explicitly reminds readers that rhetoric's primary purpose is an alteration in the audience. This thesis assumes that Paul's choice of language was audience focused. Paul believed maternal imagery would speak to the specific conflict within the Galatian church *because* of the Galatians' cultural context and the constructions they attached to maternal images. Because Paul's maternal arguments would resonate with the audience, the Galatians would be compelled to remain uncircumcised. Lastly, Wendland's characterization focuses on changes within the cognitive, willful, and emotional aspects of an individual or a collective as they encounter a persuasive argument. Appealing only to the logical side of his audience would not have worked for Paul, as the Galatians were concerned with deeply emotive, internal, perhaps even intangible identity concerns. Paul needed to engage them logically certainly, but he also had to appeal to that psychological part of them where doubts as to their status before the god of Israel sat.

The secondary methodology employed is Social Identity Theory (SIT). I will use SIT as an auxiliary methodology to explore how Paul's language may have shaped the Galatian church's notions of group social identity. Developed throughout the 1960s and 1970s by Henri Tajfel, SIT examines "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance

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[21] Ernst R. Wendland, "Aspects of Rhetorical Analysis Applied to New Testament Texts," in *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Science Approaches*, ed. Anthony J Blasi, Jean Duhaime, and Paul-Andre Turcotte (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 170. Italics by author.

attached to that membership."[22] Put another way, as a key to attaining positive self-value, groups construct notions of "we" and "us" and place those in opposition to a less-defined "them." This is relevant for Paul's Galatian epistle, as Paul is concerned with maintaining the legitimacy and distinctiveness of this church's identity against those who, according to Paul, would have gentiles use circumcision as a method to gain status and identity within Israel. Paul insists that the communities he founded are already valid members of God's family through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In rejecting circumcision for gentiles, Paul relinquishes one of the most effective identity markers by which the Jewish community maintained their separate identity from the "pagan" world. According to Paul, Israel no longer belongs to only those who are circumcised; it also belongs to those who come into the family of God through faith. Christ formed himself within the Galatian believers and *this* is the identity marker around which the community is bound in solidarity.

In chapter 1, I introduce the letter to the Galatians and its contextual landscape. As mentioned, this study will be largely audience focused and it is important to discuss, to whatever degree possible, what we know about Paul's Galatian audience. While most scholarship in the past has focused on the "North/South hypothesis," I start from a place of recognizing that both the northern and southern regions were occupied Roman territories located within west central Anatolia. The prevalence of the Mother Goddess, whose origins are from this same area, has significant bearing on why Paul chose to use maternal language at the height of his rhetoric. To structure this contextual exploration, I will use Lloyd Bitzer's seminal work on rhetorical

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[22] Henri Tajfel, "Social Categorization, Social Identity, and Social Comparison," in *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (London: Academic Press, 1978), 68.

situations as a framework.[23] As Bitzer notes, only once the rhetorical situation is understood can an argument be properly explored.

With the audience and rhetorical context studied, I move into an examination of motherhood in the ancient Mediterranean world in chapter 2. By choosing to use maternal imagery, Paul suddenly had a trove of socio-cultural constructions available for his rhetorical purposes. I argue that Paul applied these maternal constructions, specifically the differentiation between the social roles of father and mother, to effectively conceptualize and communicate his role as the congregation's mother "birthing" this church at the will of God the Father. While womanhood was an inferior social position in the ancient world, Paul's textual self-identification as a woman in the throes of labour is not without precedent and I will also use chapter 2 to explore contemporaneous sources which employ similar imagery. While Paul's use of labour imagery may not be categorically unique, how Paul constructs his argument around this self-identification is notably singular.

Chapter 3 is where the exploration of Paul's rhetorical use of maternal images takes centre stage. Using both Paul's maternal metaphor in Gal 4:19 and his subsequent matriarchal allegory, I dig into how these maternal images worked together to form the climax of Paul main argument (*probatio*). I contend that Paul places himself as the Galatians' mother in 4:19 and then carries this image throughout the allegory to force the Galatians into a choice. They can choose to embrace "mother Paul" and his circumcision-free gospel, thus becoming spiritual children of God through the promise, or they can align with the "mother" attached to rituals of the flesh and slavery and thus be trapped in slavery themselves. While the language of law and flesh easily

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[23] Lloyd F. Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 25 (1992): 1-14.

connects to Paul's Jewish opponents, I also posit that Paul is trying to delegitimize Great Mother worship, insisting that reliance of physical identity markers will enslave rather than aid gentile-believers in achieving the identity they seek.

In the final analytical chapter, I examine more specifically this notion of identity and the importance of achieving positive group identity in order for groups (such as the Galatian congregation) to flourish. Using both SIT and research on symbolic boundaries, I explore why Paul deemed the adoption of circumcision as dangerous and threatening. I then turn to how Paul tried to construct a positive social identity within the Galatian congregation, bringing this concern to a climax at the same time as bringing his argument to a crescendo in Gal 4. Paul's retelling of the Abrahamic narrative through the lens of the mothers allows the dual maternal figures within the story to stand in opposition to one another and yet also affirms that both mothers represent lines of Abrahamic descent. Paul uses the free mother to construct a positive group identity for the Galatians, one that is still tied to Israel (through Abraham) but also connected to the images of freedom, promise, and inheritance.

This socio-rhetorical and SIT methodological fusion will hopefully help the reader appreciate the enormity of the task that Paul had before him and reiterate the rhetorical importance maternity played within Paul's argument as he tried to reassure this nascent Christ-community struggling to understand their position within the family of God. Identity and rhetoric are intertwined within Paul's epistle to the Galatians and as such make for an interesting combination when looking at Paul's argumentation in Gal 4.

Chapter 2: Recreating the Rhetorical Situation

In reading Paul's epistle to the Galatian church, the reader seems to enter a drama at the midpoint of a conflict.[24] The metaphorical curtain rises upon Gal 1, where Paul references a clash between himself and those who oppose his understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the apostolic calling God gave Paul to preach Christ to the gentiles.[25] The epistle appears to be birthed from a place of anger and frustration. Paul self-presents as terse and exasperated; his tone is sharp and his greeting is abrupt. He is quick to chastise the Galatians for their failure to adhere to the gospel Paul presented while he was with the Galatians (Gal 1:6-8), cursing those who would turn the Galatians away from the "true" gospel of Christ (Gal 1:9). While Galatians appears to be more ad hoc than many of Paul's other undisputed letters, the epistle itself leaves unstated many assumptions regarding the history and relational dynamics between Paul and this church.[26] Readers are forced to infer the exigence using only Paul's epistle and what can be known about the ancient context.

While much of Galatians is shrouded in mystery, there are some generally accepted suppositions scholars rally behind in relation to the letter's composition and purpose. First and foremost, save a few scholars, Paul is undoubtedly the author.[27] In relation to the Pauline biblical

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[24] Martyn begins his analysis with the notion that Galatians reads like a drama. Martyn, *Galatians*, 1.

[25] While Paul writes as though tension and conflict exist, it is impossible to confirm whether that conflict was a reality. See Martyn, *Galatians*, 13; Betz, *Galatians*, 3-15, 23-25, 28-33; Soards, *Galatians*, 5-7; Esler, *Galatians*, 36; James D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 12-20; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 41 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), lxxxix-c.

[26] Ancient sources referring to the Galatian church are scarce. Scholars are forced to rely on Paul's interpretation of the situation. See Betz, *Galatians*, 3; John M.G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 10, no. 31 (1987): 73–93; Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 1.

[27] Keener, *Galatians*, 6; D.F. Tolmie, "Research on the Letter to the Galatians: 2000-2010." *AcT* 32, no. 1 (2012): 119; Longenecker (*Galatians*, lviii) argues that no other epistle has a better claim to Pauline authorship.

letters, Galatians is likely among Paul's earliest correspondence, though there is considerable

debate around the actual year of construction.[28] Regardless of these ongoing conversations,

scholars generally supply a creation date range encompassing no more than a decade between

49-55 CE.[29]

A pivotal area of scholarly consensus, one that this thesis is particularly concerned with,

builds from an observation already made: dissension is at the heart of this letter. Whether real,

assumed, or feared, the Galatians' rejection of Paul's message was his impetus for writing.

Paul's language is not kind towards the Galatians, nor towards those who champion circumcision

to this congregation. Paul uses irony, sarcasm, insults ("you foolish Galatians," Gal 3:1), and a

host of rhetorical tools to convince the Galatians that they *must* return to the gospel that he

preached at the church's inception; a gospel that does not include the circumcision of gentiles.[30]

2.1 Galatians as Rhetoric

Rhetorical criticism, a discipline that takes various incarnations, examines the persuasive

purposes of various elements of a speech or written text, helping scholars ascertain information

about the author, audience, context, or historical situation from which (or from whom) the

rhetoric emerged. Galatians, like other Pauline epistles, functions as a form of ancient rhetoric.

Paul crafted an intentionally persuasive communication with the hope of convincing his audience

to alter their thoughts and behaviours towards his desired objective.

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[28] Keener, *Galatians*, 6-8; Martyn, *Galatians*, 19.

[29] Keener, *Galatians*, 6-8; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 7-8; Betz, *Galatians*, 12; Soards, *Galatians*, 1.

[30] Keener, *Galatians*, 37; Longenecker, *Galatians,* cxiii-cxix; Martyn, *Galatians*, 24, 37-41, 99-101, 250-52, 283-86, 289-94, 307-08, 414-18, 479-80, 570-72; Mika Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians: A Pragma-Dialectical Analysis*, Library of New Testament Studies 344 (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 15; Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 9, 26-27, 39-61.

Scholars have thoroughly examined Paul's rhetorical strategy and argumentative language within Galatians.[31] In the 1970s there was a renewed interest in reading Galatians through the lens of rhetorical criticism, with a particular focus on analyzing the epistle through ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical forms. Despite more recent scholarship which concludes that Galatians does not naturally fall into the confines of a specific ancient rhetorical category, it is still useful to understand ancient rhetoric to better appreciate the character of Paul's argumentation. Paul was after all an ancient man writing to an ancient audience attempting to influence them, and the tools and tricks he employed are those of the ancient world.

Rhetorical analyses of the Pauline epistles often examine Paul's texts using epistolography (the study of the composition and style of letters), rhetorical study (the study of persuasive oratory), or a combination of both disciplines. Notice, however, the definitional problem that emerges from the previous sentence. Modern notions of the term "rhetoric" generally encompass *any* persuasive communication that is designed to sway an audience to a specific opinion. In the ancient world, the term rhetoric did not have so broad a catchment and generally only referred to oratory (or speech transcripts). Indeed, ancient rhetorical handbooks acting as training tools for potential rhetors dealt nearly exclusively with speeches until the 4th century CE. Ancient epistolary handbooks, designed to outline letter-writing formulae, treated rhetoric as an entirely different discipline.[32] Philip Esler points out that while there was no formal relationship between the two disciplines, ancient letters, particularly those designed for an audience, were considered

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[31] D.F. Tolmie produced a historiography on select Galatians rhetorical analyses conducted between 1995-2005. Utilizing only a sampling of the scholarship available, Tolmie still examined over 30 sources. See D.F. Tolmie, "The Rhetorical Analysis of the Letter to the Galatians: 1995-2005," *AcT* 9 (2007): 1–28.

[32] Esler, *Galatians*, 18-19; Longenecker, *Galatians*, cii-cix; Philip H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle,* SNTSMS 101 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30-34.

argumentative in nature and thus related to rhetoric. To be sure, Greco-Roman letters often

resemble speeches in their structure, and a letter's author would work within a framework that

was functionally similar to a rhetorical outline.[33]

This connection between epistolography and rhetoric, though informal, explains why the two

disciplines are so frequently used together. Hans Dieter Betz, whose seminal rhetorical analysis

of Galatians is a flagship within the discipline, presents Galatians as both a piece of judicial

(forensic) oratory and an apologetic letter. For Betz, Galatians utilizes an epistolary framework

to bookend a piece of rhetoric.[34] Richard Longenecker, in his own commentary, first breaks

down the classical Greek letter formulaic elements contained in Paul's epistle before turning to a

diachronic rhetorical examination.[35] J. Louis Martyn argues that because Galatians is first a

letter, epistolary structures are a natural starting place for exegesis. He then adds that Paul's

epistle was intended as a substitute for oral communication that would have taken place should

Paul have been able to travel; since Galatians is a speech turned letter, epistolary analysis must

be supplemented by observing the signs of ancient rhetorical form.[36]

While scholars generally agree that Galatians is both an ancient letter and a rhetorical

composition, there is much debate as to what *type* of letter and rhetoric Paul was attempting to

compose. Both epistolary and rhetorical composition were disciplines that had multiple

frameworks of form and structure.[37] On the subject of epistolary analysis, scholars have

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[33] G.A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 141.

[34] Betz, *Galatians*, 14.

[35] Longenecker, *Galatians*, c-cxix.

[36] Martyn, *Galatians*, 20-21.

[37] While there was prescribed structure to both letters and rhetoric, letters were not generally circumscribed to the same rules nor with the same level of rigidity. See Keener, *Galatians*, 38; Esler, *Galatians*, 18-19.

classified Galatians as a personal letter, apologetic letter, ironic rebuke, or letter of blame.[38] In regards to ancient rhetorical analysis, academics endeavour to fit Galatians into one of the primary rhetorical categories – forensic (judicial), epideictic, or deliberative – and analyze Galatians using the appropriate setting and form of each category.[39] More recent scholarship shies away from this trend. Scholars now maintain that Greco-Roman society was thoroughly immersed in rhetorical knowledge and Paul, as a literate man, would have received, at the very least, an education by osmosis on how to craft an argument.[40] Since there is no tangible proof that Paul was trying to adhere to a strict rhetorical form, forcing the epistle into a specific category seems artificial and hinders possible interpretations of more semantically difficult passages.[41] Galatians is argumentative by design and thus naturally includes conventional rhetorical devices; this does not mean that it must be ascribed a specific rhetorical form.[42]

While Paul was quite free in utilizing the epistolary formulae of his day, Galatians does align with the basic structure of most Hellenistic letters, containing an opening (1:1-2), thanksgiving/blessings (1:3-5), a main letter body (1:6-4:28), paraenesis (4:28-6:10), and a

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[38] Keener (*Galatians*, 41-42) presents various interpretations as to the epistle's "type"; Longenecker (*Galatians*, ci-cv) presents a similar overview though he examines different genres; Nanos (*The Irony of Galatians*, 39-61) classifies Galatians as "ironic rebuke"; Betz (*Galatians*, 14) presents Galatians as an apologetic letter.

[39] Betz (*Galatians*, 14) presents Galatians as Greco-Roman judicial rhetoric. Joop Smit disagrees and instead argues that Galatians is a deliberative speech; see Joop F. M. Smit, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: A Deliberative Speech," *NTS* 35, no. 1 (1989): 1–26. Robert G. Hall argues that Galatians is ultimately an exhortative speech and thus deliberative rhetoric; see R.G. Hall, "The Rhetorical Outline for Galatians: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 106, no. 2 (1987): 277-87. Livesey (*Galatians and the Rhetoric of Crisis*, 8) present Galatians as "Rhetoric-of-Crisis" which has structural units that match the ancient speeches of Demosthenes and Cicero. Kern argues that Galatians should be examined through a mixed-genre lens; see Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, 256-60.

[40] There is some debate about whether Paul would have been tutored in classical rhetoric. Scholars generally agree that Paul would have understood and been comfortable with rhetoric. See Esler, *Galatians*, 15; Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, 4-5; Keener, *Galatians*, 38. Ryan Schellenberg argues that there is no concrete evidence that Paul received formal rhetorical education; see Ryan S. Schellenberg, *Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10-13*, Early Christianity and its Literature 10 (Atlanta: SBL, 2013).

[41] Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, 4.

[42] Keener, *Galatians*, 41.

closing exhortation (6:11-18).[43] Similarly, and more significant for the purposes of this study, Galatians does adhere to a basic rhetorical framework. As a guide for this thesis, below is a chart that offers an approximate rhetorical outline of Galatians, taking note of where the text seems to align with ancient rhetorical categories.

Table 1: A Rhetorical Outline of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Chapter/Verse Reference	Ancient Rhetorical Category	Purpose of Section	Noteworthy Content
1:1-5	Epistolary Prescript/Salutation	• Greetings, initial comments • Paul includes a blessing (1:3-5)	• Paul presents that he was commissioned as an apostle by God the Father (1:1)
1:6-10	*Exordium* *(*sometimes called the *prooemium,* an introduction in a written discourse)	• The *exordium* usually introduces the reason for the discourse (statement of the *causa*) • Paul rebukes the Galatians as an introduction to his cause for writing	• Paul makes no positive comments about the Galatians; this is the only undisputed epistle where this is the case
1:11-2:14	*Narratio*	• The *narratio* generally offers a narrative of events that have led to communication and the nature of the case about to be presented • Paul shares a personal history of his life as a Jewish leader • He then turns his focus to a personal defence of his gospel, calling, and gentile-oriented mission	• Paul reiterates his gospel and divine commissioning (1:11) • Paul begins to centre the conflict/exigence around the issue of circumcision by recounting tension with Cephas in Antioch (2:11-21)
2:15-21	*Propositio* *This is one of the most debated sections in terms of how to classify it.	• The *propositio* provides a summary of the forthcoming argument • Paul introduces the concept of gentile righteousness connected to	• It is possible that the "we" Paul uses in this passage (2:15) might indicate he is speaking to the Jewish Christian agitators present within the congregation

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[43] Longenecker, *Galatians*, cvi; Keener (*Galatians*, 37) agrees with Longenecker, though simplifies the list to prescript, body, conclusion.

	It is sometimes seen as part of the *narratio*, or as an *epicheirema* (a logical chain of arguments where one of the statements is causal)	faith rather that the Mosaic Law; this will become part of his central argument	• There is debate as to whether the text should read "the faith *of* Christ" or "faith *in* Christ" (Gal 2:16, 20)[44] • Christ's death enables gentiles to be made righteous
3:1-4:31	*Probatio*	• The *probatio* is the proof or demonstration of the rhetor's central thesis or argument; it is the strongest argumentative section within a piece of rhetoric • Paul outlines a chain argument to present the Galatians as righteous; they are true children of God because of faith that mimics Abraham's rather than adherence to works of the Law • Paul uses allegory to reinforce spiritual linkage from the Abrahamic matriarchs to gentile-believers; this makes the Galatians heirs to the promise of Abraham (without circumcision)	• Scholar often divide Gal 3 and 4 into multiple arguments within this central argumentative section (labelling them Paul's first argument, second argument, etc.) • Argument(s) appears to utilize both *logos* (3:6-4:7) and *pathos* (4:12-20) • Abraham is offered as example of righteousness for his faith rather than Law observance; children of Abraham are those who follow that example • Belonging to Christ enables people to be "heirs through the promise" (3:29), Abraham's descendants, and thus children of God • Paul encourages the Galatians to imitate him (4:12)
5:1-6:10	*Exortatio* (sometimes called the *paranesis*; both titles are functionally similar)	• The *exortatio* compels specific actions within the audience in light of the rhetor's argument • Paul reminds the Galatians of the fruitlessness of circumcision, hopefully convincing the Galatians to remain circumcision-free	• Strong focus on image of freedom • Paul highlights a dichotomy between the flesh and the Spirit and encourages the Galatians to "walk by the Spirit" (5:16)

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[44] There is debate on whether Galatians 2:16 should read "through faith in Jesus Christ" or "through the faith of Jesus Christ." Debate on the translation surrounds whether Jesus Christ is used in the objective genitive or subjective genitive case. The text does not make clear which translation is more accurate. See Taylor, *Paul: Apostle to the Nations*, 146-47.

6:11-18	Postscript/ *Conclusio*	• Formal closing salutation and concluding remarks • Paul uses final verses to reinforce the Galatians' status of belonging to God	• Paul refers to any who follow after God—whether circumcised or not—as the "Israel of God," extending the boundaries of who can be part of God's chosen people (6:16)

2.2 Re-Creating the Rhetorical Situation

In his influential work titled "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd Bitzer presents the now widely-accepted opinion that every piece of rhetoric speaks to the specific context from which it emerged. Bitzer encourages scholars "to understand that a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance."[45] He insists that rhetoric is pragmatic; it is birthed for the purpose of something beyond itself and performs a precise task. A speech (or in this case an epistle) is given rhetorical significance by the situation into which it is spoken (or written).[46] Certainly, the rhetorical situation is not analogous to the historical situation, and a piece of rhetoric only offers the audience the author's perception of events. However, only once the rhetorical situation is probed can conclusions regarding the author's language, argumentation style, and form be properly discussed.

In outlining the constituents which contribute to the rhetorical situation, Bitzer isolates three key elements: the *exigence*, a problematic situation marked by urgency; the *audience*, the specific person or group that the author is trying to persuade; and a set of *constraints*, composed of persons, events, objects, beliefs, and relations which have the authority to constrain the action needed to counter-act the exigence.[47] Because this study will examine the words and images Paul

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[45] Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 4. Eugene White offers a similar argument regarding rhetoric being situational. See Eugene E. White, *The Context of Human Discourse: A Configurational Criticism of Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992).

[46] Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 5.

[47] Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 6-8.

chose in order to persuade his audience, particularly Paul's use of maternal imagery, re-creating

the rhetorical situation is valuable.

2.2.1 The Audience

Scholars often conjecture about *where* Paul sent the Galatian epistle, thinking this is enough to

understand the people to whom it was addressed.[48] The question "who are the Galatians,"

however, is not a simple one. When Paul writes "to the assemblies of Galatia" (Gal 1:2), Paul

could be referring to one of two (or both) people groups encapsulated by the title "Galatians": a

northern Celtic tribal remnant that originated in the Danube River basin who had come under the

authority of the expanding (and conquering) Roman empire, or Hellenized occupants of the

Roman province that was named Galatia in the first century BCE. Certainly, the term *Galatai*

(Γαλάται) as used in Gal 3:1 speaks to the colloquial (often derogatory) name used for the

northern Celts.[49] However, if readers trust Paul's missionary itinerary listed in Acts, Paul is

likely writing to the Roman provincial area. Commentaries on Galatians often spend several

pages on this "North/South hypothesis" arguing for or against each conjecture.[50] While certainly

an important historical question, this demarcated "one or the other" choice scholars make

between North and South Galatia fails to acknowledge that both fell within west central

Anatolia.[51]

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[48] Both Brigitte Kahl and Susan Elliott note the insufficiency of this "where" question in determining Paul's audience. See Brigitte Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 31-39; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 1-3. Elliott (*Cutting Too Close*, 1) states, "as a turn to the audience, this project represents a departure from much of the work on Galatians to date, not because the question of the audience or their context is in any way outrageous but because the question has so seldom been asked."

[49] Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 25, 31-33.

[50] Most Galatians commentaries address this debate. For a good overview of this discussion see Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxii-lxxii; Keener, *Galatians*, 16-22; Martyn, *Galatians*, 15-20.

[51] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 7; Esler (*Galatians*, 32) notes that restricting the area Paul was addressing to either the North or the South fails to understand the geography of Galatia.

Anatolia was a cultural and historical patchwork of peoples. Archaeologists have exhumed evidence of settlements within west central Anatolia from as early as the sixth millennium BCE.[52] The Phrygian Empire dominated the region in the ninth century BCE but the area changed hands multiple times in the next 800 years. The Celts from beyond the Rhine, named the Galatians, raided and plundered their way through Macedonia, Greece, Thrace, and Asia Minor in the 270s BCE to take control of central Anatolia. While the Roman Empire would eventually subdue this territory in 189 BCE, their hold on the northern regions was tenuous and the transference of Hellenized culture and Roman military infrastructure was fairly slow. It was not until 25 BCE that both the northern and southern areas were annexed and consolidated under the name Galatia.[53]

The Galatians were a people who bore the scars of both imperialism and colonialism. Conquered and subdued, they had a strained relationship with their Roman occupiers.[54] Kahl suggests that Γαλάται (*Galli* in Latin, Gaul in English) was used within imperial ideology to connote lawless barbarism. Not only were the Galatians depicted in contrast to the ideal Greek self, iconography throughout the Empire visually reminded the Γαλάται of their inferior, conquered status.[55] Once the entire territory came under the strict administrative purview of the Roman Empire, the territory presented a very complex amalgam of ethnic and socio-cultural influences, bearing cultural vestiges from the Phrygian, Hittite, Persian, Greek, Gallic, and Roman incursions.[56] These remnants included adopted or adapted polytheistic beliefs from

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[52] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 59.
[53] For this history see Esler, *Galatians*, 29-31; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 58-63; Mitchell, *Anatolia,* Vol. 1, 13-69.
[54] Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 31-33, 43-48.
[55] Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 31.
[56] Esler, *Galatians*, 30; Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 672.

various traditions.[57] In Anatolia specifically, this meant the dual transformation and maintenance

of worship of the Mother of Gods in all of her various forms, a point that will become significant

later in this chapter.

   Paul's Galatian audience likely consisted of a gentile majority.[58] There is some debate as to

whether the Galatian congregation would have existed within close proximity to Jewish

populations; scholars who lean towards the South Galatia hypothesis are more convinced of a

larger Jewish contingency surrounding the church.[59] Paul uses the Jewish scriptures throughout

his argument (Gal 3:6, 8, 10, 12-13, 16; 4:27, 30; 5:14), seemingly assuming his audience is

familiar with them, though it is possible that Paul introduced these scriptures upon his earlier

residency within Galatia or that Paul thought his opponents used the scriptures. While Judaism

was a fairly exclusive religion within the ancient world, it was widely known and many gentiles

took genuine interest and participated in the monotheistic, exclusory faith of their Jewish

neighbours.[60]

2.2.2 The Exigence

We know not how or when, but at some point after his departure, Paul learned that the gentile

members of the Galatian church were being persuaded to abandon the circumcision-free gospel

that Paul proclaimed (1:6-7; 3;1-3; 5:2-4,6,11-12; 6:12-13,15). Agitators entered Galatia (or may

have already been there), insisting that the Galatians' position as people of the god of Israel was

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[57] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 61.

[58] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 8; Keener, *Galatians*, 13; Betz, *Galatians*, 3; Soards (*Galatians*, 3) does not take a side, but concurs that the North Galatian hypothesis assumes a gentile population; Martyn (*Galatians*, 16) assumes the North Galatian hypothesis which supposes a low number of Jewish adherents in the area.

[59] Esler, *Galatians*, 87.

[60] Paula Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2." *JTS* 42, no. 2 (1991): 540-42; Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission," 641-42.

not truly complete without circumcision. Now, there is no way to know with certainty whether or not the Galatians were indeed guilty of adopting circumcision, nor how seriously they took the interlopers' insistence upon circumcision. One of the dangers of "mirror-reading" Paul's epistle is assuming that everything Paul fears is true and/or already happening. In reality, Paul's epistle gives us only a glimpse into Paul's actions and thoughts.[61] However, the rhetorical exigence to which Paul is responding is very real to Paul and this epistle is specifically crafted to correct what Paul views as a crisis.

Like any good rhetorician, Paul does not give his opponents the dignity of addressing them explicitly. The identity of Paul's "opponents" is the source of much-debated scholarship, as are their motivations for insisting upon circumcision.[62] Though it is not within the scope of this work to explore this topic, it is worth stating that readers should not assume Paul's characterization of his opponents is accurate. Not only do rhetorical guidelines dictate portraying one's opponent in the most negative light possible, but we also have only Paul's interpretation of events.[63] While Paul believes these opponents are undermining his efforts and his gospel, it is entirely possible that the agitators truly believed they were bringing the gentiles closer to being people of Yahweh.[64]

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[61] Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter," 75.

[62] Betz (*Galatians*, 7) suggests that Paul's opponents are Jewish-Christian missionaries; Soards (*Galatians*, 6) states that Christian Jews would be a better term. While Soards does not say why, it is likely because the reversal of the words changes which word is an adjective and which is a noun. Martyn *(Galatians*, 18), calls them Christian-Jewish evangelists and teachers. Robert Jewett provides a useful outline of this on-going conversation; see Robert Jewett, "Agitators and the Galatian Congregation," *NTS*, 17 no 2 (1971): 198-212. Jewett calls Paul's opposition "Judean agitators" (210).

[63] Keener, *Galatians*, 1; Betz, *Galatians*, 6; Longenecker, *Galatians*, xciii.

[64] Longenecker, *Galatians*, xciii; Keener (*Galatians*, 31) argues that Paul's opponents likely think that Paul is compromising the gospel by not insisting on law observance; Gaventa, "Is Galatians Just a 'Guy Thing'?," 270.

Many scholars suggest that Paul's opponents insisted upon the Galatians' adoption of "the Law" in order to become members of Israel.[65] While this is possible, the epistle suggests that Paul's primary concern is focused around circumcision, one of the most crucial Jewish rites. Not only did it memorialize the covenant God made with his people (Gen 17), but it was one of the most concrete physical identity markers that rendered a (male) person as belonging to the god of Israel.[66] Holding deep symbolic significance for Jews, within the ancient Jewish world circumcision drew a distinct line which brings all Jews under the classification of "us" and renders the rest of the world as "them."

Paul's concerns with gentile circumcision is thus not just about physical circumcision. For Paul, when the agitators come into the Galatian church insisting upon circumcision, they are suggesting that the faith and identity of the Galatians is not complete.[67] Gentiles cannot be the people of God as long as they remain gentiles; full conversion to Judaism, symbolized through circumcision, is the only proper way to belong to God's covenantal people.[68] Paul interprets his opponents' suspicions as a questioning of both the legitimacy of the gentile Galatians as followers of God and the gospel Paul feels called (by God) to proclaim. Paul staunchly objects to the inappropriate trust in such boundary markers and argues against the need to become Jewish in order to be people of God (Gal 3:6-14; 4:24-31; 5:2-12; 6:12-16).[69] For Paul, the circumcision

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[65] Keener, *Galatians*, 3, 15; Martyn, *Galatians*, 419; Soards, *Galatians*, 205-06, 210; Taylor, *Paul: Apostle to the Nations*, 145-47.

[66] I explored circumcision as a sign of ethnic, religious Judaism in chapter 1. See fn. 4- 5.

[67] Longenecker, *Galatians*, xciii; Keener, *Galatians*, 31.

[68] Keener, *Galatians*, 3, 28, 400; Martyn, *Galatians,* 419; Soards, *Galatians*, 210; Longenecker, *Galatians*, xcv-xcvii.

[69] Taylor, *Paul: Apostle to the Nations*, 145.

message of his detractors is an entirely different gospel (Gal 1:7-8), where trust is placed on external markers rather than with Jesus Christ.

When Paul pens his epistle, he has every intention of being intelligible and convincing to his audience. His task is to offer an argument to the Galatian church that will alleviate any concerns they have regarding their righteousness (right standing) before the god of Israel and assure them that the circumcision-free gospel he received is not only legitimate but the true gospel for gentiles (Gal 1:6-9, 11-12; 2:3-9, 15-21).

2.2.3 The Constraints

A rhetorical situation's constraints can include any pertinent beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, events, and motives that have the power to constrain the language, decision, and/or the action needed to address the exigence. The rhetor may create or utilize constraints for his or her own argumentative purposes, though constraints also naturally exist within the audience's context.[70] Because constraints include such a broad catchment of material, it would be impossible to explore all of the constraints that sit in the background of the Galatian church crisis. For the purposes of this study, I will examine only two, both of which are pre-existing contextual issues.

The first of these constraints is the Jewish ethnic identity, predicated on the belief of being chosen by God and passed down the Abrahamic patrilineal line. In the ancient Mediterranean world cult and ethnicity were inextricably linked notions. As Paula Fredriksen asserts, "cult defined ethnicity and ethnicity defined cult."[71] Religious worship was a key facet to determining

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[70] Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," 8.
[71] Paula Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel," *NTS* 56, no. 2 (2010): 236.

one's ethnic belonging and identity and in establishing a cohesive group identity. Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι), like the Romans, Egyptians, Greeks, and Gauls, had become a large ethnic group of the first-century Mediterranean world and were (among other things) identified by the exclusivity their god claimed upon them as well as their shared patriarch, Abraham. The term "Jewish" was both an ethnic and religious identity, and Jews' exclusive, ritualized worship of their god demarcated their ethnic identity from other groups.

Now, it should be recognized that ethnic membership is different from kinship. Kinship ties are social, familial, and legal relationships recognized as part of the fabric of functioning society, usually (though not always) connected through biological relationship. They are insular and exist at a micro-familial level. Certainly kinship groups existed inside of larger ethnic groups and kinship often determined one's ethnicity. Ethnic identity, however, is an assumed identity that is re-enforced through particular actions, largely surrounding religious/cultic performance. Jews, like other ethnic groups of the first-century world, bore many "standard" marks of ethnic membership:[72] they held a common name that distinguished them from other groups (Ἰουδαῖοι) and this name referred to their homeland from which they descended (Ἰουδαία); they had an in-group name for themselves (Ἰσραελῖται, "sons of Israel"); they shared a common ancestry myth; they also had a common culture, a shared language, and distinctive religious and ethical beliefs and practices (Ἰουδαϊσμῷ).[73]

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[72] For a list of common "ethnic" features, see John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnicity*, Oxford Readers (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-14; Philip Francis Esler, "Paul's Contestation of Israel's (Ethnic) Memory of Abraham in Galatians 3," *BTB* 36, no. 1 (2006): 26.

[73] Esler, "Paul's Contestation," 26-27.

Interestingly, all of the above ethnic markers link back to the Abrahamic narrative. The key physical boundary marker, circumcision, was given to Abraham as a sign of God's promise and a way to mark all (male) members of this ethnic group. It is through Abraham and God's promise to Abraham that the Jews were connected to their land of origin ('Ιουδαία). Their common culture and religious practices originate with Yahweh's command that Abraham live free of idolatry and Yahweh's demand of exclusive worship. Most importantly, the Jewish origin myth and ancestry is directly connected to the Abrahamic familial line with Jews considering themselves Abraham's descendants.[74] For a people in diaspora, as first-century Jews were, the common ancestry to Abraham proved the legitimacy of their lineage, the hope for the restoration of their land, and spoke to the exclusivity of their religious practice.

Certainly, divisions between ethnic groups were not impermeable. Despite their exclusive worship of their god, Jews interacted with the Roman world and navigated and negotiated within Rome's cultural mores around friendship, loyalty, patronage, and citizenship.[75] Alternatively, gentiles encountered Yahweh and those interested in Judaism honoured and performed worship to him. Indeed, there were various levels of gentile inclusion within Jewish communities.[76] One could even go as far as change one's ethnicity: to eschew their familial gods or former ethnicity and adopt those of another people group.[77] However, becoming Jewish required the adoption of the ethnic markers laid out above, including circumcision.[78]

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[74] Atsuhiro Asano states, "assumed common ancestry functions as a significate symbol for the cohesion of an ethnic group." See Atshuiro Asano, *Community-Identity Construction in Galatians: Exegetical, Social-Anthropological, and Socio-Historical Studies*, JSNTSup 285 (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 155.

[75] Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission," 641.

[76] For different forms of gentile inclusion, see Asano, *Community-Identity Construction in Galatians*, 106-12.

[77] Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission," 642.

[78] Asano, *Community-Identity Construction in Galatians*, 111-12.

It is highly probable that the Abrahamic covenant loomed large in Paul's opponents' arguments and weighed heavily upon the Galatian congregants. Indeed, if the agitators presented the need to become Jewish as a prerequisite to be the people of God, circumcision would provide a means to fix gentiles' non-Jewish status. And in presenting circumcision to the Galatians, the agitators offered the full scope of the Jewish ethnic identity.[79] Like Abraham, the gentiles could move from a status of outside to inside the covenant and thus partake in all covenantal blessings. Paul, who did not want gentiles to become Jewish, had to find a way to graft gentiles into the Abrahamic covenantal family without succumbing to full conversion.[80]

In the background of Galatian life was also the long-standing worship of the Meter Theon, the Mother of Gods; this is the second constraint. Significant archaeological evidence attests to thriving Mother cult worship throughout Anatolia with the Great Mother at the centre of indigenous Anatolian religious and cultural life.[81] The cult of the Mother Goddess eventually became widely practiced throughout the Greek world and in 204 BCE the Roman Senate sent envoys to Pessinus to transport a statue of Cybele, an incarnation of the Mother Goddess, back to Rome where she was erected on the Palatine hill adjacent to the palace of Caesar Augustus.[82] The cult of the Great Mother was the first of the eastern mystery cults to reach Rome, and once present it became entrenched within Roman religious life. Susan Elliott writes that the Great

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[79] The Galatians had likely already adopted some of the other markers, including the exclusive worship of Yahweh.

[80] Paul's reasoning for wanting to gentiles to remain gentiles is addressed in subsequent chapters.

[81] Mitchell, *Anatolia,* Vol. 2, 19-20.

[82] Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 34/35.33.1-3; Edwards, "Galatians 5:12," 324-25; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 97-98.

Mother "was as highly placed in the Roman Empire as she was ubiquitous" and the cult enjoyed imperial sponsorship throughout the Roman provinces.[83]

By the time of the Roman Imperial period, the cult of the Mother Goddess was generally practiced regionally where the Mother Goddess was distinguished by a local toponym. Cybele (sometimes called Mother Dindymene) was the most famous representation of the Anatolian cultic mothers and she sat enthroned on Mount Dindymus looking over the city of Pessinus. Elsewhere, the Mother Goddess was known as Rhea, Magna Meter, the Idaean Mother, the Mountain Mother or locatively as Meter [city or mountain name].[84] If Paul did indeed address a Galatian audience from any of the communities mentioned in the book of Acts (or not mentioned in the book of Acts), each Galatian locale would have known the Mother of the Gods in her local form and by her local moniker. Despite the various toponyms she was given, by the first century CE all of these "Mothers" were understood to refer to the same deity.[85]

Traditionally, the Meter Theon was depicted as full-bodied, sitting enthroned with lions at both her feet, crowned with a mural wreath.[86] The mountains surrounding ancient cities were her dwelling place and her namesake, a reminder of her overshadowing presence. Her purview was the mysterious and procreative energies of nature; she represented the powers of fertility, birth, and the propagation of rebirth and regeneration. While fertility was a concern of hers, she was

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[83] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 98; Mitchell (*Anatolia,* Vol. 2, 22) presents that while Zeus was by far the most worshipped God, the Mother Goddess was one of the most widely worshipped and attested deities.

[84] For example, Meter Zizimmene was the Mother of the cult Zizima in Iconium and named because of mount Zizima north of the city. The Mother Goddess worshipped at Antioch of Pisidia was Meter Tymenene for the mountains outside of that area. This was not uncommon in the ancient world and indeed gods like Zeus also often took various names depending upon the locality.

[85] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 98.

[86] Elliott (*Cutting Too Close*, 97) notes that this common likeness was based on the image by the Greek sculptor Agorakritos that have been found in abundance throughout Asia Minor.

not a fertility goddess, or better said she was not *only* a fertility goddess. Ancient epithets applied to the Mountain Mother emphasize her rulership and her guardianship over the communities that worshipped her. She was an enforcer of the law and justice, a harbinger of community order, a tamer of wildness, and protector of records.[87]

Before the Romans came into Anatolia, the Galatians had taken over most of the native cults, inserting themselves into the priestly class, particularly in Pessinus, a temple state and eventual Roman military administration centre.[88] It was in places like Pessinus that the Mother Goddess' priestly slaves, called the *galli (*sg. *gallus)*, dwelt and acted as intermediaries in Great Mother worship. The *galli* came into the role of priest as young men who, in the midst of ecstatic worship, would castrate themselves once overtaken by mania induced by the Mother. While it is unclear if castration was a codified requirement of the priestly office, evidence points towards its wide practice.[89] It is likely that castration was the expected final act to fully initiate a priest of the Mother Goddess.[90] The reward for this bold act was the honour of the priestly office, the *galli* being the exclusive authorities within this widely-practiced cult. However, the *galli* occupied an ambivalent position. While they were given priestly honour they were also stripped of social standing. They became the exclusive possession of the Meter Theon, essentially a priestly slave while simultaneously empowered by her.[91]

Religious initiation solemnized by genital mutilation is a marker for the priestly class of Great Mother worshippers. Yet by that description alone, circumcision could draw parallels to

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[87] Lynn E. Roller, "The Great Mother at Gordion: The Hellenization of an Anatolian Cult," *JHS* 91 (1991): 128-43; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 120; Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 674-75; Edwards, "Galatians 5:12," 325.
[88] Mitchell, *Anatolia,* Vol. 2, 29.
[89] Roller, *In Search of God*, 253-54.
[90] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 231.
[91] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 210-15.

the experiences of the *galli*. Is circumcision not a genital mutilation ritual that initiates a Jew into his ethnic cult? While the practices of each cult were markedly different, the Galatian audience would have no doubt been familiar with both practices and with a skilled rhetor drawing a connection between the two, the audience would likely recognize the parallels.

2.3 Galatians 4: The Placement of Maternal Imagery

Determined to be persuasive and change the thoughts and actions of his audience, Paul (or his scribe) wrote out an argument to convince the Galatian church to remain circumcision-free and to trust in their position as people of the god of Israel. While I have already presented some skepticism in regards to Paul adopting a specific rhetorical category, Paul's argument is highly skillful, well-conceived, utilizes rhetorical strategies and conventions of his time, and is designed to appeal to both the *pathos* (emotional nature) and *logos* (rational nature) of his audience. [92]

Both ancient epistolary and rhetorical frameworks suggest that the most persuasive argumentative section of a polemic (the *probatio*) fall within the central body text (prior to the *exortatio* or paraenesis). Ultimately, in rhetoric the position of the argument matters. In the cases where a chain argument is being constructed, with multiple argumentative layers building upon one another to create a final argumentative position, the strongest of these layers is (usually) presented directly before the shift to subsequent sections. [93] It is at this moment, at the end of the

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[92] For the sophistication of Paul's argument, see Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians*, 328. For reference to employing *pathos* see Keener, *Galatians*, 365-66; Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians*, 148.

[93] For reference to the strongest argument coming prior to the a shift in argumentative section, see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 185; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 16. For reference to multi-numbered sub-arguments forming one cohesive argumentative position, see Taylor, *Paul: Apostle to the Nations*, 153; Taylor calls Gal 4:12-20 and then Gal 4:21-31 Paul's fifth and sixth arguments respectively; Martyn (*Galatians*, 447), calls Gal 4:12-31 Paul's second exegetical argument (the first is Gal 3:6-4:7); Betz (*Galatians*, 220) notes that Gal 4:12-20 is the fifth argument within the *probatio*.

probatio, that the audience must make a choice as to whether they are persuaded to the author's position.

Scholars widely consider Gal 3 and 4 to be Paul's *probatio*, encompassing Paul's chief proofs in favor of his position. It is within this section that Paul utilizes the largest spectrum of rhetorical devices, including antithetical pairs, metaphor, allegory, and using the LXX as a source for proof texts. In laying out his position, Paul provides several smaller linked arguments to make his overall case for the Galatians remaining circumcision-free and accepting their status and gentile members of the family of God. Once Paul brings his argument to a crescendo, he turns to exhortation in Gal 5.[94]

The moment where Paul brings his argument to its ultimate culmination is not clear, however. Using ancient rhetorical convention, Gal 4 should represent the strongest of Paul's arguments, with the final section of Gal 4 "packing the most persuasive punch." Nevertheless, scholars present some hesitancy in adhering to this theory, as the arguments in Gal 4 are filled with strange imagery and difficult language.[95] Paul's argument seems obscure. Scholars have often wondered if Gal 4, specifically verses 12-20, are an afterthought or an outburst that Paul hopes will appeal to his audience's emotions (*pathos*).[96] This emotive outpouring is then

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[94] Gal 3 and 4 are often considered the *probatio*. See Betz, *Galatians*, 19-22; Hall, "The Rhetorical Outline for Galatians," 284-85. Kern (*Rhetoric and Galatians*, 91-92) summarizes various authors' rhetorical outlines for Galatians and notes that the following authors also label Gal 3 and 4 as the *probatio:* Bernard Hungerford Brinsmead, *Galatians, Dialogical Response to Opponents*, SBL Dissertation Series 65 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); Longenecker, *Galatians*; James Hester, "Placing the Blame: The Presence of Epideictic in Galatians 1–2," in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy*, ed. D. F. Watson (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 281–307. Regarding authors who argue for the rhetorical strength of Gal 3 and 4 while not ascribing the title *probatio* to them, see Smit, "Galatians: A Deliberative Speech," 13.

[95] Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians*, 19-20; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 231; Betz (*Galatians*, 220) states, "all commentators point out that the section 4:12-20 presents considerable difficulties."

[96] Dunn (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, 230) presents this section as personal appeal; Longenecker (*Galatians*, 184-89) titles v. 12-20 as the first of Paul's personal appeals which appear after the *probatio* of Gal 3:1-4:11; Soards (*Galatians*, 205) calls the section "an affectionate discussion of Paul's distress." As a counter-argument, Gaventa

followed by an allegory (v.21-31), which appears to be a reinterpretation of Gen 16 and 21. The two sections, placed together, seem to make little argumentative sense and scholars wrestle with why these two sections sit at such a pivotal position in the structure of the letter.[97] The *probatio* should address the heart of the exigence, the end of the *probatio* offering the final proofs to persuade the audience. Scholars are divided as to whether Gal 4 does in fact do this.

However, these two sections, Gal 4:12-21 and Gal 4:21-31, do share a common image: mothers. Indeed, at the heart of his argumentation in Gal 4 Paul draws his audience repeatedly back to the idea of motherhood. Paul first reminds his audience that Jesus was sent by God to be "born of a woman" (4:4). Paul then tells the Galatian church that he himself is their mother and he is impossibly in labour with them again (4:19). He then unveils an allegory of two mothers who represent two strands of the Abrahamic familial line (4:21-31), Paul insisting that the Galatians must choose with which mother they will align.

As already mentioned, Galatians is a letter primarily concerned with circumcision, and yet Paul, at (what should be) the height of his argument, brings his audience back to the image of mothers. We already know that Paul's central thrust is concerned with how to establish the Galatians' full participation as members of Israel and heirs to the promise of Abraham, and yet Paul chooses to use maternal rather than paternal imagery to be the final persuasive act to drive this point home.[98]

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states that is this section is not an emotional outburst but rather an important theological link between personal appeal and the remainder of the letter; see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "The Maternity of Paul: An Exegetical Study of Galatians 4:19," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn*, ed Robert T Fortuna and Beverly R. Gaventa (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 191.

[97] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 16; Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians*, 148-58.

[98] Jeremy Punt, "Revealing Rereading Part 2: Paul and the Wives of the Father of Faith in Galatians 4:21-5:1," *Neot* 40, no. 1 (2006): 103.

The influence of imagery lies in its ability to make an audience (or reader) see things from a different perspective. Its power is found in the tension between what the audience knows to be familiar and then seeing this familiar image in an original and/or strange situation. However, for imagery, be it metaphor or allegory, to be effective it must have a foothold in the audience's experiential world. So the question becomes why was Paul convinced that maternal imagery would be the most effective means to communicate his assurances regarding the Galatian congregation's position as part of the Israel of God (6:16)?

Chapter 3: Motherhood in the Ancient Mediterranean World

In appealing to his audience to remain uncircumcised and embrace their status as gentile children of God, Paul chooses to identify himself as a mother in the throes of painful labour (Gal 4:19). Paul's audience would have held pre-conceived ideas regarding maternity and motherhood, and indeed an image only has power where it is understood and familiar. However, as a modern reader, with modern western notions of maternity, there is a gap between how we might view maternity compared to an ancient audience. My aim is to step into this gap and attempt to unravel why Paul chose motherhood as the final persuasive image for the Galatians. How did ancient audiences understand mothers and motherhood, as well as the birth pangs Paul alludes to experiencing? How might the Galatians understand the image of "mother" Paul?

3.1 Ancient Social Constructions Motherhood

3.1.1 Greco-Roman Motherhood Constructs

Ancient constructions of motherhood cannot be divorced from ancient constructions of womanhood; an ancient woman's physical body and cultural role were most commonly expressed vis-à-vis her procreative ability.[99] To be a woman in the ancient Mediterranean world was both a biological and social role; gender was both inherent and performed.[100] Biological bodies performed cultural ideas of masculinity and femininity to varying degrees, the biological

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[99]Lauren Hackworth Petersen and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell, eds., "Introduction: The Public and Private Faces of Mothering and Motherhood in Classical Antiquity," in *Mothering and Motherhood in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012), 1-8; Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 3.

[100] For an overview on biological sex and gender identity in the ancient Mediterranean world see Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12-20.

sex determining what sort of behaviour an individual was most expected to display.[101] To be feminine was to be associated with weakness, vice, and deficiency (characteristics like emotionality, jealously, greed, salaciousness), while that which was deemed masculine (discipline, self-mastery, strength, virility) was praiseworthy and ideal. These same ideas were mimicked within ancient physiology. On one side of the physiological continuum was perfect maleness, the ideal form, and on the other was defective maleness; this imperfect maleness was called female. Certainly, ancient medical authors appreciated both the sameness and seemingly complementary variation that could be seen between both genders and sexes, but what was female (or feminine) was always assumed to be inferior.[102]

Motherhood occupied a more ambivalent social position. While women's bodies were naturally considered inferior, motherhood was a place where a virile man tamed and used a woman's body for the good of men and for the future security of Roman society. Conception was the site where male penetration and physical ascendency over a woman was thought to be most naturally and concretely displayed. Becoming a mother was a women's biological *telos*, and the intrinsic deficiency of the female body was redeemed only by becoming a mother.[103] As such, motherhood was both publicly encouraged and praised and it improved a woman's status both socially and legally.[104]

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[101] Kraemer (*Unreliable Witnesses*, 18) notes that "gendered identity of individuals did not map easily onto anatomical sex." While individuals had biological sex, a biological woman could be more culturally "masculine" than a biological man. In this case, however, the male would be considered deficient for being effeminate.

[102] Yurie Hong, "Collaboration and Conflict: Discourses of Maternity in Hippocratic Gynecology and Embryology," in *Mothering and Motherhood*, 72. Susan Hylen argues that Roman legal systems naturally assumed women were inferior; see Susan E. Hylen, *A Modest Apostle: Thecla and the History of Women in the Early Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20.

[103] Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 8; Petersen and Salzman-Mitchell (*Mothering and Motherhood*, 8) present female virtue being directly connected to motherhood.

[104] This is particularly true if a woman's children lived past childhood; Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 44.

Despite Greco-Roman (and perhaps even modern-day) notions regarding women's biological destinies being inextricably tied to motherhood, there was significant variance of thought in the ancient Mediterranean world on whether women were in actuality "parents." Though undoubtedly necessary for reproduction, the mother was often viewed as a passive participant in the procreative process, only a vessel to carry and nourish the seed.[105] Aeschylus's *Eumenides* insists that "the woman who is called the 'mother' of the child is not the parent, but rather a nurse of the newly sown embryo."[106] Aristotle later wrote that a male, by virtue of his maleness, could be the only source of generative seed, with women's menstrual blood simply producing an environment to house the seed. In this model (dubbed the "one-seed" theory), the female only produces matter, she does not produce life, rendering her actual parenthood suspect.[107] Galen, who would expand upon Aristotle's views, argued that while women *did* contribute seed to the fetus it was inferior to male seed, and it was only the male, who with his seed, that provided the πνεῦμα (*pneuma*).[108] While πνεῦμα traditionally translates to "spirit" (particularly in biblical sources), it can also mean "air" or "breath" and often medically referred to the material which animated new life. Strikingly, most ancient procreation theories present the father (exclusively) offering the fetus the πνεῦμα.[109] The woman/mother nurtured new life, but only at the will and activity of the father who contributed the main sources of life.[110]

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[105] The belief that women were only a vessel was not the exclusive position of the ancient world. For alternative viewpoints, see Hong, "Collaboration and Conflict," 75-76; Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 46-48.

[106] Aeschylus, *Eum.* 658-661, translation by Hong, "Collaboration and Conflict," 75.

[107] Aristotle, *Gen. an.* 1.2.716a4-7, 2.2.735b33-35, 4.1.765b8-15; Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 48-49.

[108] Galen, *UP* 14.6 [2.301],14.7 [2.304], 14.9 [2.315], 15.4 [2.347]; Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 50-51; Hippocrates, *Gen.* 4.1, 6.1; Hong "Collaboration and Conflict," 75.

[109] Myers summarizes multiple ancient author's opinions regarding the role of the father and his transference of the πνεῦμα to a fetus. See Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 46-51. Interestingly, Paul speaks of God giving his Spirit to the Galatians or the church being formed by the Spirit (3:2-3, 5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:16-17, 22-26; 6:1, 8).

[110] Even in delivery women were thought to be passive. Hong ("Collaboration and Conflict," 81-82) demonstrates that children were thought to violently force their way out of the womb of their own volition. Nancy

While there was debate regarding women's level of passivity in conception (and even birth), it must be (re)stressed that motherhood was esteemed and honoured. Fertility and reproduction had long been associated with the general good of a well-ordered society. Virtuous mothers were publicly praised and immortalized in ancient textual and inscriptional evidence. Authors such as Cicero, Quintilian, and Tacitus all mention the formative influence a mother had upon her children and that raising children well was considered the primary, necessary virtue of a woman.[111] In Latin, expressions like *matron* and *materfamilias*, used to denote an honourable married woman, were derived from the word for mother (*mater*).[112] The behaviour and achievements of one's children were a reflection upon a mother, just as a mother's moral reputation and status were conferred upon her children.[113] While the influence of a mother was never to surpass that of the father, respect and obedience for both parents was praised even into a child's adulthood.[114]

Whereas modern notions of parenthood often include stereotypical tropes involving a soft-hearted, nurturing mother and a more aloof, disciplinarian father, this is not the picture painted in surviving documents which reference the Greco-Roman mother. While appropriate nurturing was encouraged and familial affection praised, the mothers who won praise from ancient Roman

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Demand concludes that even though ancient medical authors recognized the presence of uterine contractions, they retained the assumption of female passivity and the activity of the fetus; see Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 19.

[111] Cicero, *Brutus* 211; Quintilian, *Insti. Or.* 1.1.6; Tacitus, *Dial.* 28-9; Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 3.

[112] Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 71.

[113] Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, is praised for the virtues of her children. See Plutarch, *Life of Tiberius* I. Cornelia's children were deemed exceptional not only because of her status but also because of the education she provided for them. Cornelia, in fact, became the epitome of what a Roman mother should be. See Prudence Jones, "Mater Patriae: Cleopatra and Roman Ideas of Motherhood," in *Mothering and Motherhood*, 173.

[114] Servilia, the wealthy widow and mother of Brutus, was respectfully heeded by her adult children in Cicero's *Epistulae ad Atticum*. See Cicero, *Att.* 15.11, translated by Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 41. See also Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 5.

biographers were those who instilled discipline, respect, and virtue within their children. Indeed, maternal intimacy with one's children is neither assumed nor promoted in much of the literature discussing motherhood.[115] The mother who was honourable was one who did her duty, educated her children in what was moral and right, and appropriately disciplined her children. Cicero stressed the importance of correct speech (not affection) between mothers and their children and later praised Cornelia for the education she provided to her children.[116] Tacitus praised Julia Procilla, "a woman of rare virtue," who was affectionate with her children but also ensured "an honourable education."[117] In his *Dialogus de oratoribus*, Tacitus would praise mothers for their *disciplina ac severitas* – their vigilance to high standards – rather than traits like patience or compassion.[118]

Despite the Roman mother's central role within familial life, she enjoyed few legal rights over her body, property, personal agency, and any children she might have.[119] The well codified reality of *patria potestas* ensured that the male head of any household (*paterfamilias*) was a kind of magistrate within his own domain, holding legal control over all household entities, including children.[120] As such, any and all rights over a woman's progeny were conferred to the father of the child, and children inherited their father's name, legacy, and familial status. Certainly, the authority to which a mother was legally entitled was not necessarily congruent with the social authority mothers could actually wield. Surviving evidence suggests that mothers exercised a

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[115] Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 3.
[116] Cicero, *Brut.* 210, translated by Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 121.
[117] Tacitus, *Agr.* 4.4, translated by Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 130.
[118] Tacitus, *Dial.* 28.6-7, translated by Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 3.
[119] Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 61.
[120] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 34; Dixon (*The Roman Mother*, 61) notes that the *paterfamilias* had the *ius vitae necisque* (the rights of life) over his legitimate children.

large degree of influence over their children, particularly in the realms of education and in choosing their spouses.[121] Whatever influence a mother had, however, it was not legally protected and a woman's authority was understood to be under the ultimate purview of men (father, husband, brother).

3.1.2 Jewish Constructions of Motherhood

Jews lived amongst their fellow Greco-Romans and shared many of the accepted cultural values regarding gender and family, including similarly held ideas concerning maternity and motherhood.[122] There are, however, some distinct beliefs regarding fertility and paternity that seem fairly exclusive to Jewish thought. Whereas Greco-Roman procreative medicine was occupied with questions regarding gendered causative seed, Jewish sources attributed all paternity and maternity to God. Gwynn Kessler contends that "the dominant theory of procreation in the Hebrew Bible" is based upon the foundational belief "that God grants pregnancy, or, in biblical parlance, God opens, or closes, women's wombs."[123] It is God who opens Leah's womb (Gen 29:31) and grants a child to Ruth (Ruth 4:13). It is God who originally restricts the womb of Sarah (Gen 16:2), but then opens her womb when he ordains the correct time (Gen 21:1), and in Hosea, God curses Ephraim with barrenness because of her unfaithfulness to God (Hos 9:10-14). Kessler argues that God's primary partner in procreation is in fact the woman (or mother). This does not negate the biological reality of male parentage, nor

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[121] Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 62; Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 23-26, 82-90.

[122] In contrast to Greco-Roman thinkers, the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish sources rarely outline detailed generative theories. Despite this, Gwynn Kessler argues that Second Temple Jewish sources do convey familiarity and even agreement with Aristotelian ideas regarding a man's virile, causative seed; see Gwynn Kessler, *Conceiving Israel: The Fetus in Rabbinic Narratives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 113. See also Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 61.

[123] Kessler, *Conceiving Israel*, 112.

the primacy of patrilineal heritage, but progeny are only possible when God makes a woman's body ready to procreate.[124] Despite Kessler's attestation regarding woman as God's primary partner, Jewish tradition credits God as the source of *all* life, not man or woman.[125]

While there are references to the maternal nature of Yahweh (Deut 32:11-12,18; Isa 42:14; 49:15; 66;13; Hos 11:3-4; Ps 131:2), the Hebrew Bible and corresponding rabbinic sources give preference to the image of God as the father of his people.[126] God is the giver of all life, the creator and (thus) father of all humankind, and yet he maintains a distinct, familiar, father-son covenantal relationship with his chosen people (Deut 32:6; Jer 31:9; Isa 63:16, 64:8). Certainly, Yahweh's fatherhood (like his maternity) is generally referenced metaphorically. It is not a proper name for God but rather one of many designations by which Israel spoke of and to God.[127]

Yahweh as the father of Israel strengthens the myth of common ancestry and the Jewish cohesive identity as God's people mentioned in the previous chapter. Abraham is the "biological" father of Israel, but only because God willed (and promised) Abraham offspring more numerous than the dust of the earth (Gen 13:6). While the narrative of Israel's ancestry is propagated along Abrahamic patrilineal descent, ultimately all members of Israel are first and foremost children of God. As such, the inheritance of blessing which Abraham passes along generationally is the inheritance of God and it is his to bestow on those *he* deems to be his children.

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[124] Kessler, *Conceiving Israel*, 113.

[125] Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 56.

[126] For references to God as father in rabbinic sources, see Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "God the Father in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity: Transformed Background or Common Ground?" *JES* 38, no. 4 (2001): 470–504.

[127] Goshen-Gottstein, "God the Father in Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity," 499-502.

One additional, vital factor in the Jewish story of common descent is that while Abraham was indeed the God-willed father of Israel, the Jewish ancestral narrative was also dependent on the *mother* to whom God promised a child. Israelites are the descendants of Abraham *and* Sarah.[128] The promise of blessing passed down to Abraham's descendants is only passed along to those offspring who also share Sarah as a matriarch.[129] Isaac was not the firstborn son of Abraham, nor was he the only one marked with the sign of the covenant. Ishmael was also circumcised and thus marked as belonging to the family of God. In the ancient Jewish world, children born from a slave mother and free father were considered as free as children born of two free parents, thus rendering Ishmael a free-born child.[130] If only paternal parentage mattered, along with the adoption of circumcision as symbol of belonging, Ishmael's offspring should have held a legitimate claim to the Abrahamic inheritance, but this is not the case in Jewish thought. In the case of Abraham's first two sons, it seems as though a contrast between the two modes of birth becomes significant, or at least Paul will suggest a significance in Gal 4:21-31 (see chapter 4).[131] Retelling the story for his own rhetorical purposes, Paul insists that Ishmael was born, not from God opening the womb of the woman promised to bear the heir of Abraham, but according to the flesh (Gal 4:23), or of human origin and means. Isaac, alternatively, is the fulfillment of God's promise (Gal 4:23) and born accordingly. The supernatural nature of Isaac's conception and birth, where God opened the womb of a woman deemed barren, is attributed solely to the work

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[128] Most Jewish communities have recognized matrilineal descent since the Tannaitic period (10-220 CE), though it is believed that the practice originated and was passed along through oral laws that may date back to the Sinaitic covenant.

[129] Keener, *Galatians*, 394.

[130] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 107.

[131] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 105.

of God. Abraham and Sarah, as a collective unit, are the parents of Israel, born by the will and activity of God.

3.1.3 The Great Mother: Cultic Construction of the Mother Goddess

In this discussion surrounding ancient constructions of motherhood, one cannot forget to look to the Meter Theon and how she was historically understood in her Anatolian homeland.[132] While the Mountain Mother was not a construction of human motherhood, the people of Anatolia were immersed in her worship and communities called out to their local expression of the Great Goddess – be it through poetry, hymns, or prayer – as "Mother." In Galatia, the term mother was not only connected with a domestic woman who birthed children, but also with a powerful goddess who declared the blessings and curses present in everyday life. Starting in Asia Minor and then spread by the conquering Greeks and Romans, Mother Goddess worship became immensely popular and part of the central milieu of the Roman religious experience by the first century BCE. [133]

Originally a Phrygian goddess, there is evidence of Meter Theon worship from the early first millennium BCE.[134] From the earliest records, the Great Mother is seated on high, housed in the mountains visible from the Anatolian communities over which she looms. The heavens above and the earth below synchronized the rhythms of life, and prayers for the earth – for good soil, for new life, for an abundant harvest – were directed towards the Mother Goddess.[135] She represented homeland, and when people returned to their Phrygian homes from afar they

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[132] The Mother Goddess is widely thought to have originated within Anatolia, specifically Phyrgia. See Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 98; Mitchell, *Anatolia*, Vol. 2, 19-20; Roller, *In Search of God*, 2-3, 264.
[133] Roller, *In Search of God*, 1-3, 272-74, 315-16; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 98.
[134] Roller, *In Search of God*, 1.
[135] Mitchell, *Anatolia*, Vol. 1, 147.

understood that they were coming home to their "Mother."[136] Despite the associations made

between the Mother Goddess and homeland and her status as an individual household deity, the

Great Mother was not a nurturing, domestic figure.[137] She was not a compassionate goddess who

people ran to for comfort. She was an enforcer. Anatolian inscriptional evidence reveals the

operation of a divine judicial system where manifestations of deities were the arbiters and

authoritarians. In the case of the Meter Theon, she was the overseer and administrator of the

legal system, her oversight penetrating the details of everyday civilian life.[138] The welfare of

entire communities rested upon her guardianship and her maintenance of justice and order.

The Great Mother was appropriated and acclimated in both the Hellenic and Roman worlds,

as conquering Empires subdued Anatolia and adopted many of its gods and goddesses. Yet

despite the adoption and evolution of the Mother Goddess, she retained many of the chief

associations connected with her, most notably her reputation as a protector and overseer.[139]

While the Greeks seemed to keep the Great Mother at an uneasy distance, they did expand her

name to include the "Mother of the Gods," securing her place in the Greek Pantheon and

extending the image of her power by making her a matriarch of other gods.[140] The Romans, in

contrast to the Greeks, actively sought out the (then Hellenized) Great Mother, and brought her

to Rome so that she could become an official deity of the state and a saviour of the Republic.[141]

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[136] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 119.

[137] The Mother Goddess was a figure of private, household worship in her original Anatolian context. See Roller, *In Search of God*, 317.

[138] See *CCCA* I, nos. 544-46, 549-51, 564, 571, 575-76, 582-84, CCA II, nos. 1-14; Elliott "Choose Your Mother," 675; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 88, 120-21; S.C. Barton and G.H. Horsley, "A Hellenistic Cult Group and the New Testament Churches," *JAC* 24 (1981), 7-10.

[139] Roller, *In Search of God*, 2.

[140] Roller, *In Search of God*, 4, 15, 263-64, 316. The Greek language would remain the official language of Mother Goddess worship, even when she was adopted into Roman worship.

[141] According to Cicero, the Great Mother brought relief to a tired and weary Rome. See Cicero, *De harus. resp.* 13.27; Roller, *In Search of God*, 4, 264-67, 280-81.

While the Romans would increasingly sanitize the Mother Goddess (giving her a male consort, removing her from her mountain home and placing her in a public temple, adapting her worship practices etc.), they also added to her fame by making her a public deity and spreading her worship throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.[142]

Hellenic and Roman expressions of the Great Mother echoed the images of her power and ferocity, but she was also perceived to be a tamer of all things wild and a civilizer of lawlessness.[143] There is evidence that a connection was made between her position as a "mother" and the traditional (Roman) role of human mothers as socializers and disciplinarians of children. As a mother tames her children, so too the Mother Goddess tames wildness within society.[144] It was also in both Greek and Roman worship where her association with fertility and fecundity gained traction.[145] Despite closer associations with maternal tropes, it would be wrong to assume she was viewed as a nurturing figure. Men owed her their obedience and she was vengeful in enacting her divine purview over the law. She was a symbol for the austere magnificence of the Roman state and was addressed as the protectress of all.[146]

Despite her popularity and placement in the central milieu of Roman worship, Rome maintained a somewhat paradoxical relationship with the Meter Theon. She was sought for her

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[142] The iconic image of the Meter, sitting enthroned with a mural crown with tamed lions at her side, is the Roman vision of the Mother which remained popular until her cult died out in the fifth century.

[143] There were many changes in the representation of the Mother Goddess and her worship as she spread from Anatolia to Greece and then from Greece to Rome. By the height of the Roman Imperial period, the Great Mother was an uneven blend of Anatolian, Greek, and Roman tradition. The image and worship practices of the Great Mother also varied between regions. Lynn Roller (*In Search of God)* offers a well-organized, chronological examination of Great Mother worship.

[144] The ancient writer Lucretius extols the familial function and virtues of the Great Mother as well as her role in fertility. See Lucretius 2.604-60. See also Roller, *In Search of God*, 298; Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 124. This was a construction of the Hellenic and Roman representation of the Mother Goddess as there is little evidence that this was part of her Phrygian representation.

[145] Roller, *In Search of God*, 298.

[146] Roller, *In Search of God*, 7.

power and protective nature and yet she was simultaneously kept at arms-length. Rome took credit for all of the good the Mother Goddess represented, while her decidedly foreign origins were responsible for her un-Roman qualities.[147] Her foreign origins were never fully forgotten and thus she was always shrouded with mystery and suspicion.[148] Roman society reviled her eunuch priests and because she demanded castration as a sign of devotion she was believed to be a seducer and destroyer of men.[149] Her native, untamed, ecstatic worship was deemed barbaric, and she was known to attract the fanaticism of those on the margins of society.[150]

Despite this suspicion, and Rome's subsequent attempts to tame the Mother Goddess, she retained much of her original characterization and associations within her homeland of Anatolia. There she remained the beloved and feared figure, associated with law and justice and housed in the great mountains where she protected communities. She may have been central to worship throughout the entirety of the Roman Empire, but when Paul wrote to the Galatians he was writing to the homeland of the Great Mother.

3.2 Male Mothers and Other Extra-Biblical Sources

It is within this ancient landscape of female deficiency, parental roles, debated embryology, patrilineal and matrilineal lines, and a looming Mother Goddesses that Paul pens Galatians, needing to convince the Galatians that they belong in the family of the Israelite god without the necessity of circumcision. While the earlier discussion of female inferiority may initially render

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[147] Roller, *In Search of God*, 285.

[148] Cicero reminds his audience that the Mother's worship and games came from faraway lands and that her worship did not have proper Latin names. See Cicero, *De harus. resp* 12.24. See also Roller, *In Search of God*, 283.

[149] Dionysio of Halikarnassos emphasized the "un-Roman" nature of the mother and was horrified at the self-castration of the Goddess's eunuch priests. See Dionysios of Halikarnassos 2.19.3-5, Cattulus 63. See also Roller, *In Search of God*, 267.

[150] Roller, *In Search of God*, 4, 283, 285, 293, 299, 301, 309, 317.

Paul's choice of identifying as a woman in Gal 4:19 seemingly nonsensical, claiming to be a mother was, just like ancient motherhood, more ambivalent. Men who metaphorically identified as mothers could use of the full scope of implications attached to motherhood for their purposes without necessarily adopting the negative connotations associated with womanhood. Men comparing themselves to mothers was also not without precedent, and Paul does, in some ways, enter into this ancient trope vis-à-vis his maternal references.

A more comprehensive analysis of Paul's maternal imagery in Gal 4 will be conducted in chapter 4, but it is important to examine how Paul's maternal self-designation compares, if at all, to other sources from the ancient world. In conducting this comparison, I will be using Gal 4:19 only. It is here (and only here) that Paul refers to himself as the Galatians' mother. Only when one sees *how* Paul identifies himself as the Galatians' mother, can one understand how his maternal self-identification is both similar and different from other contemporaneous references to male maternity.

In Gal 4:19, Paul calls the Galatians "my children" and then states that he is once again *in the anguish of childbirth.*[151] The word here to describe this labour pain is ὠδίνω. While the word is not the exclusive term for birthing, ὠδίνω appears in both discussions of actual physical travail and in metaphors that compare various painful experiences to the suffering a labouring woman experiences. The word at its most literal refers to female birthing pains.[152] Paul establishes maternity over the Galatians by jointly claiming the Galatian church as his own ("my"), implying

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[151] Paul refers to other churches as his "children" (1 Cor, 1 Thess). This will be discussed in chapter 4.
[152] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1763.

an initial (likely painful) birth of these (his) children, and then finally sharing that he is once *again* experiencing birth pangs for this community.

Scholars have long noted that Paul's maternal identification in Gal 4:19 - a man being compared to a mother experiencing birth pangs - is not unique to Paul. The image is used by various ancient Greco-Roman authors, likely because both labour pains and motherhood were (and are) highly familiar concepts. Plato, for example, compares struggling to conceive a new idea to giving birth and Pliny discusses the painful labouring over literary projects.[153] Homer generically compares warriors to protective mothers, though in the *Iliad* he compares the battle pain Agamemnon experiences to a woman in the throes of labour.[154]

The metaphorical usage of birth pangs is also common within the LXX, where ὠδίνω is used to describe various forms of physical anguish. Sometimes the sufferer is one of Israel's enemies (Exod 15:14; Deut 2:25; Ps 47:7; Isa 13:8) and yet at other moments it is Israel who experiences pain while sitting under the Lord's judgement (Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; Mic 4:9-10; Nah 2:11). At times it is the (male) prophet who is the subject of travail (Isa 21:3), though in other instances it is the Lord who "gasps and pants like a woman giving birth" to redeem and deliver Israel (Isa 45:10). Later writers would use ὠδίνω as a sign of the final coming of the Messiah on the Day of the Lord, the image taking on apocalyptic significance (1 En. 62:6; 2 Bar. 56.6; 4 Ezra 4:42; Mark 13:8; 1 Thess 5:3; Rev 12:2).

Moving beyond birth pangs into male maternal identification more generally, scholars have also drawn parallels between Paul's motherhood and gnostic sources. Betz connects Paul's

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[153] Plato, *Theaet.* 210BC; Pliny E., *Nat*. pref.1, pref.28; Keener, *Galatians,* 392
[154] Homer, *Od.* 20.14-16; Homer, *Il.* 8.271-272, 11.268-272; Keener, *Galatians*, 393.

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maternity to the words of Hermes Trismegistos in the Codex VI of the Nag Hammadi corpus (*Disc. 8-9*). Here, Hermes explains rebirth to his spiritual "son." When the son asks if the reborn have mothers as well, Hermes answers, "my son, they are spiritual [mothers]" indicating masculine mothership of the spiritually reborn.[155] This text is oft-cited by those who have examined Betz's work, though whether it is an accurate parallel to Paul's maternal language is debated. In the *Apocryphon of John* (second-century), the son of Sophia, called the Archon of Prouneikos, both conceives and gives birth to inferior supernatural beings without the permission of his mother (BG 42,16-43,4).[156] Interestingly, in this example of a male birthing, the male is condemned for his actions because he thwarted his own mother in the process. The *Apocryphon of John* also contains Jesus claiming to be the "Father, Mother, Son" (BG 19,6-22,17; 76,1-5). While this is not an exclusive maternal self-identification, Jesus (male) is still adopting a maternal position.[157]

There are a few observations to highlight from the above-mentioned passages. The first, specifically regarding the gnostic sources, is that the males associated with the role of "mothers" are supernatural beings giving birth (or rebirth) to supernatural and yet inferior beings. This is not the case with Paul's maternity of the Galatian church. The gnostic sources also allude to the supernatural "parent" being both mother and father simultaneously. Paul's self-identification concerns maternity specifically, not paternity.

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[155] Betz, *Galatians*, 233.

[156] Anne Pasquier, "Prouneikos: A Colourful Expression to Designate Wisdom in Gnostic Texts," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L King, SAC (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 2000), 59.

[157] Karen L. King, "Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, 166.

Notice also that while labour pain (ὠδίνω) was commonly used to metaphorically describe a state of anguish, it is never assumed that the subject connected to the metaphor is actually birthing something. Agamemnon's pain is *like* that of a woman in labour. The messianic era will come on suddenly *like* labour pains. There is no object that is being either literally or metaphorically birthed. Paul, however, does not say he is *like* a mother or is experiencing pain *like* a woman in labour without attaching an object to his maternity. Paul's pain may or may not be real, but Paul *is* the mother of the Galatian church, labouring once again to see Christ formed among this community. Gaventa stresses this point repeatedly in her various works on Paul's maternity, highlighting the distinctiveness of Paul's maternal language. Even Betz, who believes Paul's maternity is both part of the ancient friendship *topos* (see below) and congruent with other ancient uses of birth metaphors, concedes that Paul is doing more than simply comparing himself to a mother.[158]

3.3 Galatians 4:12-20, Maternal Imagery, and the Friendship *Topos*

Betz, in his commentary on Galatians, proposes that Galatians 4:12-20 offers a string of *topoi* belonging within the ancient friendship theme: "the argumentative force lies in the topic itself, the marks of 'true' and 'false' friendship."[159] In addressing 4:19 specifically, Betz notes that comparison with a loving mother was part of the ancient friendship theme, thus v.19 is simply a thematic continuation of the friendship appeal Paul makes to the Galatian church.[160] Since the release of Betz's work, a number of scholars have affirmed this supposition or cite Betz's work to offer a similar, if differently nuanced, perspective on Gal 4:19 and the friendship *topos*. Dunn,

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[158] Betz, *Galatians*, 233.
[159] Betz, *Galatians*, 221
[160] Betz, *Galatians*, 233.

for example, does not disagree with Betz's sentiment regarding the theme of friendship, although he contends that Betz does not say enough about the emotional intensity behind Paul's writing. Dunn focuses on the emotive tone of the friendship language rather than the ancient *topos* itself.[161] Alternatively, Alan Mitchell argues that it is in fact the theme of enmity that dominates the text. Paul's discourse on discord highlights the strife that exists where true friendship once did. The Galatians should return to the position of friendship by remembering Paul's love for them.[162] The final image of motherhood thus reinforces the love shared between Paul and the Galatians.

As a corollary to the friendship theme, many scholars present Paul's appeal in Gal 4:12-20 as an act of pathetic persuasion (*pathos*), focused on appealing to the emotions of the audience rather than their logic. In ancient rhetoric it was not uncommon for rhetors to use both *logos* and *pathos* within their central argument.[163] Paul presents a strong logical argument chain in Gal 3 with his discourse on the Law and Abraham, thus it makes sense that he would then turn to pathetic persuasion in Gal 4, forcing the Galatians to reflect inwardly while Paul appeals to the Galatians' emotional side. Paul uses personal and emotive language throughout Gal 4:12-20 to dispel any potential animosity and bias within his audience in order to turn the listeners to his position.[164] He addresses the enmity that the agitators have stirred up within the congregation and offers a personal defence of his character based on the experience the Galatians had with

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[161] Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 231-32.

[162] Alan C. Mitchell, "'Greet the Friends by Name': New Testament Evidence for the Greco-Roman *Topos* on Friendship," in *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, SBL Resources for Biblical Study 39 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 227-28.

[163] For an overview on *pathos*, see Keener, *Galatians*, 365-69.

[164] Troy Martin, "The Voice of Emotion: Paul's Pathetic Persuasion (Gal 4:12-20)," in *Paul and Pathos*, ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Jenny L. Sumney, SBL Symposium Series 16 (Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 191-92.

him.[165] Paul reminds his audience of the good he wishes for the community (4:18), drawing a contrast between himself and the misplaced zeal of his opponents who purport circumcision.[166] The reminder of friendship is thus designed to stir the feelings of the Galatians and turn their allegiance back towards Paul. The ancient friendship *topos*, whether it was consciously or subconsciously developed, serves as pathetic persuasion. The mother imagery placed at the end of this section becomes the final reminder of the deep familial affection Paul shares with the Galatians.

There are, however, scholars who do not agree with Gal 4:12-20 belonging within the ancient friendship theme. Gaventa argues that while parental benevolence was compared to the affection between friends, specific reference to maternal affection is not present in most ancient sources regarding friendship.[167] Gaventa instead presents Paul's self-identification as a mother as a metaphor that best describes his apostolic calling within his apocalyptic view of the world. Mika Hitanen, who offers a dialogical rhetorical analysis of Galatians, suggests that while Gal 4:12-20 does encourage imitation (v.12), popular within the friendship theme, Paul's exhortations and rebukes are made from a position of apostolic authority, not friendship.[168] Paul has both the right and obligation to correct the Galatian church based on the authority God has given him upon his commissioning. The solution to bridging the strife that exists between Paul and the Galatians is not necessarily a return to friendship but rather for the Galatians to adhere to Paul's admonition, given from a (likened) maternal position.

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[165] Bruce W. Longenecker, *The Triumph of Abraham's God: The Transformation of Identity in Galatians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 156.

[166] Benjamin J. Lappenga, "Misdirected Emulation and Paradoxical Zeal: Paul's Redefinition of 'The Good' as Object of Ζῆλος in Galatians 4:12-20," *JBL* 131, no. 4 (2012): 775-79

[167] Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 32.

[168] Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians*, 149.

3.4 Paul: A Mother to a Gentile Congregation

It is entirely possible that Paul's maternal self-identification fits within the ancient friendship theme, as Paul reminds his audience of the friendship/familial affection they once shared. It is also possible that Paul's maternal claim speaks to his understanding of his apostolic calling and authority over the Galatian church. An image can represent more than just one thing. Indeed, skilled authors can collapse several themes within one carefully chosen image. I propose that this is what Paul did. Paul's usage of maternal imagery at the climax of his argument (*probatio*) is not a coincidence. Not only does Paul's use of maternal language give him access to the full range of ancient motherhood constructions, but Paul employs maternal imagery at this crucial juncture because the mothering language allows Paul to weave together the primary themes he introduces in the various rhetorical sections of the epistle. Maternity becomes a forceful proof in achieving Paul's rhetorical purposes.

Paul's claims to motherhood reinforce the truth of his gospel and the nature of his divine commissioning, a concern Paul introduces in both his *exordium* and *narratio*. Just as a woman's biological destiny is to birth children at the will and activity of a father, Paul is commissioned by God, the father and source of all life, to generate communities of gentile-believers to fulfill his apostolic calling. Paul becomes the mother of the Galatians by giving life to new congregations of believers. Paul, as a mother, has the authority and duty to correct the errant behaviour of his children. The rebuke he first presents to the Galatians in his *exordium* (Gal 1:6-10) takes on new meaning in light of Paul's motherhood. Paul now seems to be appropriately disciplining and educating his children, correcting them in how they should behave.

By placing himself as the mother of the Galatian church, Paul also honours the divine role of Yahweh in bringing forth life and reinforces the message that God is indeed the father of gentile-believers (Gal 1:1, 3, 4, 16). Recall that the Galatians seem concerned as to whether or not they are indeed children of God, leading them to consider circumcision. Paul insists that circumcision is unnecessary because the Galatians are already children of God. The spirit (πνεῦμα) of God the Father animates the life of this congregation, with Paul acting as the vessel which birthed this church. Because God is their father, he has the ultimate authority over their very lives. So too, the Galatians receive the inheritance and blessing of God as children of Israel because God deems it so. The gospel of Paul's opponents cannot stand against the will of God.

Paul also claims the pain of his maternal position, feeling an agony that only a mother can understand as he struggles with the Galatian church. Paul views the questioning of his gospel and the (possible) adoption of circumcision as a direct challenge to his apostolic authority (introduced in his *narratio*). The Galatian church is falling away from what they were called to at their birth. The Galatians must return to the family of God as gentiles, throwing aside the messaging of the false teachers who would pervert Paul's mission. In this way, just as the behaviour of children was a reflection upon their mother, Paul insists that adopting circumcision is behaving in a way that reflects poorly on both the Galatians and on Paul since the gospel of circumcision is contradictory to Paul's (true) gospel.

In putting flesh on Paul's maternal imagery, one can begin to see how this image wraps Paul's entire argument together. Paul can employ many of the cultural connotations associated with motherhood and in doing so this image becomes a highly persuasive tool. Paul chooses the image of being the Galatians' mother not only because it captures key relational dynamics

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between Paul and the church, but also because maternal imagery's accompanying cultural subtexts encapsulates important facets of Paul's argument. The image offers a defence of Paul, encourages adherence to Paul's gospel, allows for Paul's discipline of believers, while simultaneously reinforcing the Galatians' position as children of God.

Noticeably absent in the above analysis is a closer look at constructions of the Great Mother and how she interacts with Paul's maternal allusions. The characteristics of the Great Mother that coincide with human mothers would have undoubtedly made the motherhood image stronger. However, the influence of the Great Mother will become more pertinent in chapter 4 as I explore in greater detail the specific maternal references Paul employs within Gal 4 and their rhetorical function. Paul would have been aware of the Great Mother's looming presence as he wrote to a people who had a long history of looking up to the mountains and worshipping the Mother enthroned there.

Chapter 4: The Rhetorical Impact of Paul's Maternal Imagery

In the latter part of chapter 3, I noted that while Paul's metaphorical birth pangs were not conceptually unique, Paul's execution showed originality when compared to contemporaneous sources. In exploring the rhetorical significance of Paul's maternal imagery in Gal 4 further, I want to focus more closely on the singularity of what Paul does in Gal 4:19-31. In taking a closer look at both Paul's maternal self-identification and his exploration of the Abrahamic matriarchs, the distinctiveness of Paul's maternal imagery in these two (connected) passages will emerge, offering a clearer picture as to why Paul used motherhood at the climax of his *probatio*.

4.1 Maternal Images in the Undisputed Epistles

Paul references motherhood, birth pangs, and/or nursing within the majority of his undisputed epistles (1Thess 2:7, 5:3; Gal 1:15, 4:19, 4:26; 1 Cor 3:1-2, 15:8; Rom 8:22). While some scholars have grouped these passages together under the banner title of Paul's "maternal imagery," Paul rarely uses the word mother (Gal 1:15 and 4:26 excluded).[169] While "maternal imagery" might be the best designation for these references, there is large variation in the images that are categorized by this designation. In 1 Thess 2:7, Paul references caring for his congregations like a nursing woman. In 1 Thess 5:3, Paul refers to the future destruction of the world coming suddenly like birth pangs (ὠδίνω). In Rom 8:22, all of creation experiences ὠδίνω, Paul likening the whole of creation to a woman in labour. In Gal 4:19, however, Paul states that *he* himself is experiencing birth pangs, making himself the subject of the verb. Here, Paul likens

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[169] For example, Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 3-5; Jennifer Houston McNeel, *Paul as Infant and Nursing Mother: Metaphor, Rhetoric, and Identity in 1 Thessalonians 2:5-8* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 2-3.

himself to a mother and in order to draw an appropriate comparison to Gal 4:19 one needs to compare this verse with other examples where Paul seemingly positions himself as a mother.

There are, however, only two possible verses within the authentic Pauline corpus with which to draw this comparison between Paul and motherhood: 1 Thess 2:7 and 1 Cor 3:2. In both, a metaphorical nursing of an infant is the central motif, and in both Paul refers to himself or his co-workers as the subject performing the figurative nursing.

> But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. (1 Thess 2:7)[170]

> I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready… (1 Cor 3:2)

Several observations must be made when comparing these verses to Paul's self-identification as a mother in Gal 4:19. First and foremost, while these passages may be labelled "maternal imagery," Paul may not be referencing a mother in either of these verses.[171] While Paul's allusions to nursing certainly could represent a mother nursing her children, they could also signify a wet-nurse caring for children not of her body but of her obligatory purview. Wet-nurses were common throughout Roman society and Paul would have undoubtedly been familiar with their existence and use.[172] Indeed, wet-nursing was so prevalent that ancient rhetoricians often used constructions of the wet-nurse within popular discourse.[173] While there is significant

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[170] This passage contains a text-critical issue. Ancient manuscripts are divided over whether the word in the first clause should read "gentle" or "infant." The NRSV favours gentle. For an overview on this issue, see Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 18-20.

[171] Gaventa (*Our Mother Saint Paul*, 17-28) analyzes these verses as part of her examination of Paul's maternal language, though she presents them as the image of a nurse not a mother. Contrastingly, Longenecker (*Galatians*, 195), argues that Paul presents himself as a "mother caring for her children" in 1 Thess 2:7.

[172] Osiek, *A Woman's Place*, 65.

[173] Abraham Malherbe explores 1 Thess 2:1-12 as part of a Cynical trope to distinguish themselves as true philosophers, speaking with boldness while being "gentle as a nurse." Malherbe cites Dio Chrysostem, Epictetus, Plutarch, and Pseudo-Diogenes as proof texts for his argument. See Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Philosophers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 35-48. Osiek (*A Woman's Place*, 65) notes that ancient thinkers often

variance in how rhetors employed nursing imagery – some focused on negative stereotypes associated with the role while others concentrated on the positive, formative aspects – the nurse was generally thought to be a nurturing figure with a proximate kin-like relationship to the children under her charge.[174] Paul, like other rhetors, may be relying on popular constructions of nursing to convey the care and affection he felt towards the congregations he founded, rather than drawing from tropes that accompanied motherhood.

Paul, however, very well may have crafted his nursing language to convey his metaphorical maternity of these congregations. If we divorce Paul from the ancient rhetoricians who utilized wet-nursing tropes, Paul's language could indeed imply motherhood. Wet-nursing, while common and even normative for wealthy families, was a seemingly ambiguous and paradoxical practice. It was also routinely denounced.[175] Ancient philosophers often argued in favour of women nursing their own children, the act thought to be both virtuous for the mother and highly formative for the infant.[176] Breastmilk was thought to be more than just satisfactory nourishment for an infant; it was often interpreted to have character-forming properties and medicinal qualities.[177] Paul, as a Jew, would have an additional bias towards mothers nursing their own children as Jewish mothers were somewhat insular in their nursing practices. They could not risk

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reflected on the benefits of the wet-nurse's influence. See also Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 21-23; Keener, *Galatians*, 394.

[174] Keener, *Galatians*, 396; Gaventa (*Our Mother Saint Paul*, 23) notes that "Paul's metaphorical use of the nurse would conjure up in the minds of his audience an important and beloved figure."

[175] Dixon, *The Roman Mother*, 120-26; Osiek, *A Woman's Place*, 63-67.

[176] See Tacitus, *Dia.* 28.4-5; Aulius Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 12.1.1-5; Cic. *Tusc. Disp.* 3.1.2; Osiek, *A Woman's Place*, 64.

[177] Myers, *Blessed Among Women*, 82-90; Keener, *Galatians*, 396.

a gentile's formative influence over their children and wet-nursing is perceived to have been less commonly practiced within ancient Jewish communities.[178]

Ultimately, it is impossible for the reader to know with any certainty how Paul intended his nursing imagery to be understood. Regardless, Paul communicated to the church members of both Thessalonica and Corinth that at least part of his role was to nurture, feed, and take care of nascent congregations in their "infancy." Paul, as the subject of both of these units, performs the verb embedded within their main simile (1 Thess) and metaphor (1 Cor). Because we cannot be certain if Paul is actually identifying as a mother in these passages, it is difficult to draw a direct correlation to Gal 4:19, in which Paul more clearly does so. This may make Paul's maternal self-designation in Gal 4:19 even more singular.

Gaventa argues that Paul's use of maternal language in 1 Thess, 1 Cor, and Gal, speaks to his understanding of his apostolic calling, using mothering language in contexts where he is referencing an on-going caring relationship between himself and his congregations. Paul understood himself not only as a founder of churches but as an on-going nurturer as well.[179] Gaventa insists that Paul's maternity is deeply apocalyptic. Because the image of birth pangs (ὠδίνω) appears throughout the LXX, often referencing the Day of the Lord, Paul adopts maternal language to connect his apostolic role to the apocalyptic times Paul believes Christ inaugurated. Susan Eastman's work largely agrees, though Eastman instead cites what she calls Paul's "mother tongue."[180] The mother tongue is relational and emotional language that speaks

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[178] Keener, *Galatians*, 395-96.

[179] Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 4-8.

[180] Eastman notes the term was first used by author Ursula Le Guin. See Ursula K. Le Guin, ed., "Bryn Maw Commencement Address," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 147-60.

from personal experience. It is not the language of public discourse but is instead the intimate communication of home. Paul's language of nurture and care, particularly in Gal 4, are instances of Paul writing in his "mother tongue," highlighting the intimate, familial bond he shared and hopes to share again with the Galatian church.[181]

Both Gaventa and Eastman offer compelling arguments connecting Paul's maternal language to his understanding of his apostolic vocation, and both include 1 Thess 2:7 and 1 Cor 3:2 in their analysis. However, there is one striking detail that must be addressed as I examine Gal 4:19 and the subsequent allegory more thoroughly. While Paul does present himself as a mother or mother-like figure in both 1 Cor and 1 Thess, he also claims *paternity* over these congregations (1 Cor 4:14-15; 1 Thess 2:11), calling himself their father. In both epistles Paul also connects his fatherhood to his apostolic office as the progenitor of the churches.[182] In 1 Cor 4:15 specifically, Paul is not only the father of the church but he begat the church (ἐγέννησα). Begetting refers exclusively to a father's generative role. Some scholars collapse both Paul's maternal and paternal language under the banner of Paul's "parental" language.[183] Depending on the argument or analysis the collapse may be valid, but for the purposes of this work it is important to reiterate that to "birth" a congregation as a mother and to "beget" a congregation as a father is not the same generative concept (chapter 3).

Jeremy Punt states that "all authentic Pauline letters are clear that the converts in the Pauline churches had God as their father. As God's representative and founder of the communities, Paul

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[181] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 1-11.
[182] Martyn, *Galatians*, 423
[183] Dunn, *The Epistle to* the *Galatians*, 339; Eisenbaum, "Paul as the New Abraham," 136.

served as a surrogate father."[184] Yet this sentence is not quite accurate, is it? Paul is only a

mother to the Galatian church, not their father (or even surrogate father). Paul clearly has no

issue referring to himself as a father since he did it elsewhere, and "fathering" might have been a

more natural image since Paul is indeed a man. Perhaps motherhood does naturally express care

and affection, as Gaventa and Eastman argue, but we also know that Paul used nursing

metaphors to convey the same feeling. J. Louis Martyn alternatively posits that the apocalyptic

nature of Paul's work led him to use maternal imagery. The old world was passing away in the

face of Christ and a new cosmos was being born; birth is the ultimate symbol of the genesis of

new life.[185] Any and all of these arguments are plausible, and yet they do not fully explain why

motherhood was employed so singularly within the specific Galatian context.[186] If rhetoric is

only given purpose by the situation it is addressing, what is it about the Galatians' situation that

made motherhood such a singularly compelling image?

4.2 Galatians 4:19

> My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth
> until Christ is formed in you (Gal 4:19).

Despite the fact that the word "mother" does not appear within the verse, commentators on Gal

4:19 largely agree that Paul metaphorically self-identifies as a mother.[187] Ancient textual and oral

discourses, including rhetoric, often used metaphor as a literary tool. Quintilian stated that

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[184] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 110.

[185] Martyn, *Galatians*, 423-26. See also J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *NTS* 31, no. 3 (1985): 410–24.

[186] Note that neither Punt nor Martyn was trying to answer why maternal imagery might have spoken to the Galatian context specifically.

[187] Eastman (*Paul's Mother Tongue*, 96-97) examines several scholarly opinions on this verse and comes to this conclusion. See also Longenecker, *Galatians*, 194-95; Soards, *Galatians*, 212-13

metaphor was "the most common and much the most beautiful" of literary devices and presented metaphor as a transfer: an object is moved from its original context to another.[188] Metaphors, by their very nature, take a commonplace image and place it in a new situation, forcing the audience to encounter the image or concept in new, often challenging, ways. According to Cicero, metaphors were most successful when the object or image seemed at home within its new domain and when the comparison between two often dissimilar ideas appeared completely natural.[189]

Because metaphors work in such a visceral way, functioning on a cognitive level so the audience can easily process their meaning, they have the power to change attitudes and affect behaviour, which is Paul's chief purpose with his Galatian audience.[190] Encountering objects and images in new ways also forces audiences to question the reality within which they find themselves, often challenging assumptions they may have made or their perception of themselves in relation to that reality.[191] An audience always has the opportunity to accept or reject the comparison embedded within the metaphor, yet when they accept the metaphor's entailments, they assent to the new reality or idea being presented to them.[192] In the case of Paul's maternal metaphor, the audience must confront the idea of Paul as a labouring mother who is in travail with the Galatians. The image of labour itself was very familiar and the sights and sounds of birthing would have been normal within the house churches that Paul is

[188] Quintilian, *Inst. 8.6.4.*, translation by G.R. Boys-Stones ed., "Introduction," in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thoughts and Modern Revisions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

[189] Cicero, *Brut.* 247, translation by Doreen Innes in her "Metaphor, Simile, and Allegory as Ornaments of Style," in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, 7.

[190] McNeel, *Paul as Infant*, 8-10, 158.

[191] McNeel, *Paul as Infant*, 22-24, 158.

[192] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 90-91.

addressing.[193] However, Paul, in crafting his metaphor, had to hope that the audience would accept viewing him as such and that the acceptance of his metaphor would force them to re-evaluate the gospel of circumcision. Would the Galatians accept "mother" Paul and if so, how might this alter their understanding of themselves as belonging to the family of God?

In chapter 3, I explored various contemporaneous sources which employ birth pangs (ὠδίνω) metaphorically. In these sources, the verb ὠδίνω is used intransitively, meaning there is no direct object to receive the verb's action. The verb has only one point of focus: the labour (or labour-like) anguish. Recall that Agamemnon experiences pain likened to a woman's labour pains; there is no object present within that construct, and the attention is solely on the pain. When the intransitive form of ὠδίνω is used the verb simply means the sudden and severe pains a woman experiences during labour, and the verb can be used literally (as in the real pains a woman experiences) or metaphorically (comparing the pains of child birth to a dissimilar experience).

Paul, however, uses ὠδίνω transitively in Gal 4:19, attaching a direct object (the Galatians) to his labour. Paul is still speaking of himself metaphorically, yet the verb now has two points of foci: Paul who is experiencing metaphorical travail and the Galatians who are the product of said pains. While the combined transitive and metaphorical use of the verb is already rare, Paul makes this verse even more complex. In other ancient documents where the verb is used both metaphorically and transitively, the object of the birth is also metaphorical in that it does not

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[193] Osiek, *A Woman's Place*, 66-67.

actually exist. The objects of Paul's birth pangs, however, are very real.[194] In exploring Greek

literature for a similar instance, there are few known parallels found.[195]

Beyond the singularity of the transitive verb with a direct object, Paul builds further layers of

involvement into Gal 4:19 by also making the subject of the verb male and the object a plural

people. Indeed, the only arguable equivalent that contains a similar combination of constructions

is found in Isaiah 45:8-11.[196] In these verses, the prophet, speaking on behalf of God, tells of

God creating a corporate people (Israel) using, among others, the image of a woman in the throes

of labour. On the surface, these verses do not read similarly to Gal 4:19, but they do contain

ὠδίνω used transitively, a male (likened) subject, and the object born from these pains is a plural

people. In the case of Isa 45, God speaks of both begetting his children and birthing them,

something Paul does not do, but there are undoubtedly similarities. Martyn argues that Paul

likely had Isa 45:8-11 in mind when constructing his own metaphor in Galatians.[197] While there

is no way to know this definitively, Martyn's argument is strengthened by the fact that ὠδίνω

appears again in Gal 4:27 when Paul quotes Isa 54:1. Martyn contends that Paul's maternal

imagery is an extension of rich prophetic tradition and the apocalyptic understanding of (Second)

Isaiah informed his choice of imagery. This does not detract from Paul's clear focus on maternity

in Gal 4, but rather presents Paul as being either consciously or subconsciously inspired by the

apocalyptic language of Isaiah when crafting his epistle.

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[194] For this sentence's rare construction, see Mary K. Schmitt, "The Communal Dimensions of Birthing Imagery in Paul's Epistles," *Faculty Publications - College of Christian Studies* 226 (2017): 116; Martyn, *Galatians*, 424. Martyn does not list the sources to which he is referring when discussing the metaphorical verb and the metaphorical object. Eastman (*Paul's Mother Tongue*, 99-100) concurs with Martyn, however, she pivots the argument to present Paul's metaphorical birth pangs as connected to actual pain he experienced due to persecution.

[195] Martyn, *Galatians*, 424, 427.

[196] Martyn, *Galatians*, 428-29.

[197] Martyn, *Galatians*, 429.

Because Paul's maternity in Gal 4:19 is singular in both the Pauline corpus and when compared with other ancient extant writings, a closer examination of the verse's content is needed. And indeed, immediately upon reading Gal 4:19, the reader is confronted with difficulties in the sentence's syntax as well as the startling awkwardness of Paul's imagery. Both work together to create a passage that has been very difficult for interpreters.

Beginning with the verse's syntax, Gal 4:19 is divided into two clauses that do not seem to agree in either subject or object. In fact, Paul noticeably shifts the trajectory of the verse halfway through. In this first clause ("my children, who I am again in the pain of childbirth," 19a), Paul is the subject experiencing the birth pangs (ὠδίνω) – the sentence's only active verb – with the Galatian believers as the object of these pains. In the second clause ("until Christ is formed in you," 19b), it seems as though Christ is the grammatical object of the verb μορφόω, but the subject remains unclear. It is possible that Paul is the parallel subject of both clauses, inferring the following reading: "My children, with whom I am again in pangs of childbirth until I form Christ in you." However, Paul uses μορφόω passively (μορφωθῇ), translating as "to be formed."[198] Elsewhere in Paul's authentic letters, he uses what some scholars call the "divine passive," which is where God is the implied subject of the passive verb. While Paul's use of μορφωθῇ is seen only here, he uses related formation verbs in 2 Cor 3:18 (μεταμορφοῦσθαι, transformation), Phil 3:10 (συμμορφοῦσθαι, conformed), and Rom 12:2 (μεταμορφοῦσθε, transformed) where God is the implied subject of each passive verb.[199] This reading of the divine passive in Gal 4:19 is strengthened by the notion that Paul has already claimed that Christ acts

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[198] This is the only time this passive verb appears in the LXX and NT.
[199] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 94-95.

within the will of God (Gal 1:4). Neither Paul or any other human can will the formation of Christ. Christ's formation among believers is the purview of God alone and Paul is thus labouring for God to form Christ among the Galatians.[200]

Yet the previous sentence should give readers pause because the shift in syntax also highlights the verse's strange linguistic content (beyond a man in labour!). Within the same sentence Paul refers to the Galatians as his children yet he paradoxically infers that they have not yet been born (because he is in labour). Paul then implies that the Galatians must have been born once before because Paul is once *again* in labour with them, trying to achieve some form of second birthing. Paul follows this first clause by affirming that though he is in labour with the Galatians the *telos* of these pains will actually be the formation of Christ within the Galatians. It might be tempting to dismiss the rather confusing verse as an ill-conceived metaphor since it seems as though Paul could not bring it to conclusion, but this would be a mistake and the complexity of Paul's imagery warrants closer examination.

I first want to explore the concept of Christ being formed within the Galatians as scholars have long grappled with this idea. E.D. Burton argues that the formation of Christ refers to the spiritual maturation of the Galatian Christ-followers, with Paul reversing the metaphor in 19a. In 19a Paul references his own gestation and birthing of the Galatians; in this reversal the Galatians now develop Christ who has been formed within them.[201] Burton himself acknowledges some difficulties with this interpretation as the image of a Paul undergoing a second, startling birth is not necessarily congruent with the progression towards spiritual maturity. Longenecker, who

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[200] Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 37.
[201] Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Galatians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 248-49; Dunn (*The Epistle to the Galatians*, 240) concurs with Burton.

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largely agrees with Burton, adds that while the words "in you" are the converse of "in Christ" (Gal 3:28) both expressions are about the formation of a vital personal relationship between the Galatians and God through Christ.[202] Paul's purpose is to birth the Galatians towards a relational restoration between themselves and God. Alternatively, Franz Mussner suggests that the formation of Christ within the Galatians is a formation of a correct understanding of Christ and a return to the right doctrine of Christ.[203] While an interesting argument, Paul's epistle to the Galatian church is concerned with a return to the gospel first preached to them (1:6-9), and it is unclear whether Paul was also concerned about the Galatians' Christological understanding.[204]

A more recent and oft-referenced argument uses Paul's own words from Galatians to understand what it might mean for Christ to be formed within believers. In Gal 1:16 Paul describes his apostolic calling as one where Christ is "revealed in him." Later Paul exclaims that having been crucified with Christ it is no longer Paul who lives but rather it is "Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). If one sees Gal 4:19 as continuing this motif, there is no thought of the Galatians birthing or forming Christ amongst themselves, but rather it is Christ becoming alive within the Galatian believers just as he is already revealed and lives in Paul. Thus when Paul exhorts the Galatians to imitate him (Gal 4:12), he is calling them to have Christ live among them and Gal 4:19 reinforces this call. Paul has already told the Galatians that they were baptized into Christ (3:27a), that they have put on Christ (3:27b), and that they are all one in Christ (3:28).

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[202] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 195.
[203] Franz Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief, 4,* Aufl. Herders Theologischer Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 313.
[204] Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 35.

To now have Christ formed among them becomes another image of a repeated theme that runs throughout the entirety of the letter.

Paul's word choice when writing about Christ's formation is also worth closer analysis: μορφωθῇ ("to be formed"). Despite the scarcity of its appearance in both the LXX and NT, μορφωθῇ is found in the writings of Galen and Philo.[205] In these works the ancient authors use the verb to describe the formation of a fetus within a womb, bringing an unborn child to viability.[206] There is no way of knowing if Paul is using the verb the same way but it is interesting to draw this parallel to Gal 4:19. Eastman, when examining Gal 4, notes the odd placement of v.19, sandwiched between two passages referencing Paul's desire to be present with the Galatians. Paul seems to believe that his presence would alter something within the Galatian church and yet Gal 4:19 breaks up this sentiment.[207] However, if we look at Gal 4:17-20 as a cohesive unit, with Galen and Philo's use of μορφωθῇ in mind, something shifts in that perception. Paul is concerned that the agitating "teachers" (Gal 4:17) are leading the congregation astray through their insistence on circumcision. The Galatians are not yet viable on their own, and while Paul believes his presence may shift this, the ultimate *telos* is to have Christ formed within them. Thus while Paul desires to be present with the church (Gal 4:20) to show them that it is he that actually wishes their good, he knows that the solution to this unhappy state of affairs is the presence of Christ to be formed among the believers (4:19). Such a formation will bring the congregation to viability.

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[205] Philo, *Spec. Leg*. 3.117; Galen, vol. 19, p. 181, in the edition by C.G. Kuhn as cited in Martyn, *Galatians*, 424; Schmitt, "Communal Dimension," 115.

[206] Schmitt, "Communal Dimensions," 115.

[207] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 95; Gaventa (*Our Mother Saint Paul*, 30) also notes the strange placement of Gal 4:19, stating that the passage would read more smoothly if the verse was not present.

The image that accompanies this statement is equally perplexing: namely that Paul is birthing a whole community of people at one time. Three times within Gal 4:19, Paul highlights that the birthing that he is (again) performing is not for a group of individuals but instead for a collective, plural people. Paul calls the congregation his children (plural), and then describes these children as those whom (plural) he is once in labour with until Christ in formed in them (plural).[208] Paul's labour is singular, his progeny is a collective. The Galatians are being born together and this communal birthing event has the formation of Christ as the actual product of this birth.

And rather than this communal birth being a one-time punctiliar birth (as all births are supposed to be), Paul is labour with this congregation *again*. This may be the most striking image within this verse. Whatever communal birth the Galatians experienced previously, Paul is in the process of repeating that which he felt he originally accomplished. The word "again" here (πάλιν) seems to connote a return to the basics or going back to the beginning of a process.[209] Paul is likely referencing a return to their initial communal formation when he first came to the Galatians weak and weary, but able to preach the good news of the Christ to the congregation (4:13-14). That Paul needs to birth the community again is likely a sign of how far Paul believes this congregation has fallen.[210] This is not a reformation but a rebirth. The formation of Christ had begun at their first birth but there is something definitely lacking now, and the Galatians must return to a gospel that is centred upon Christ.

Because Paul rebirthing a community is outside the realm of human possibility, this may make the metaphor appear weak. Recall that the audience must assent to what the metaphor

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[208] Schmitt, "The Communal Dimensions," 115.
[209] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 195.
[210] Keener, *Galatians*, 393.

proposes, and a second birth of the same being may be beyond the scope of believability. However, some scholars note that while Paul does stretch the limits of the metaphor, he does so intentionally. Paul's situation with the Galatians is, to Paul, both unnatural and problematic and this is the message he is trying to transmit.[211] Paul wants to shock his audience with the impossibility of the metaphor, hopefully conveying the direness Paul feels at the thought of the Galatians adopting circumcision. He wants them to re-examine their behaviour and beliefs. What is noteworthy about this concept of stretching a metaphor to include a second birthing is that it naturally implies a first birth. Motherhood is not just a role he adopts now but rather Paul has always been the mother of the congregation.

In employing a metaphorical, maternal self-identification, Paul is thus able to convey several ideas at once and I want to bring these strands of analysis together. Paul first re-establishes his maternity over the Galatians, thus maintaining the paternity and generative function of God. Paul cannot be the father of the Galatians because God is the true father of Israel. As a mother, Paul is still in a position where he must submit to the ultimate authority of God the Father, but the Galatians, as both God and Paul's children, must doubly submit and obey both of their parents. In adopting circumcision, the Galatians have betrayed their mother (and father) and turned against a gospel centred upon Christ; this is simply unacceptable. Mother Paul thus uses his authority to chastise affectionately this congregation, correcting their errant behaviour.

Paul's reference to a second birthing also carries with it the possibility of return and renewal. The Galatians can return to the state of their initial birth. In order to do so, however, they must be willing to trust in the status conferred to them upon their first birthing. The Galatians were born

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[211] Schmitt, "The Communal Dimensions," 114.

into the family of God through the effort of their mother Paul and the divine will of God (their father). And just as no human ritual is required to make gentile-believers members of the family of God, Paul's labour (a human ritual) cannot form Christ within this congregation: that is the work of God. It may be Paul who performs the labour but it is God who will form Christ among the believers to mark them as such.

This is the lynchpin for Paul and his message to the Galatians; they *must* return to the status of their inception. Only when they once again accept Paul's (true) gospel can Christ be formed among the believers, and it is the formation of Christ that will see this congregation be made viable and mature, not swayed by those who teach a false gospel that relies upon external identity markers. Paul was tasked to birth this congregation and now through their second birth he hopes they will finally embrace their status as children of God and heirs of Abraham (Gal 3:29; Gal 4:7).

Gal 4:19, however, does not exist in isolation. Only two verses later Paul will turn to an extended allegory that utilizes mothers as the foundational image. An analysis of 4:19 is not complete until we understand the adjacent allegory and recognize how the maternal motif is drawn throughout the remainder of Gal 4.

4.3 Galatians 4:21-31

While only a select group of authors have tackled Gal 4:19 in detail, the succeeding allegory (Gal 4:21-31) is one of the most analyzed passages in recent Galatians scholarship.[212] The passage is commonly labelled an allegory, largely because Paul himself uses the word in Gal

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[212] D.F. Tolmie, "Research on the Letter to the Galatians: 2000-2010," *AcT* 32, no. 1 (2012): 119.

4:24 (using the participle ἀλληγορούμενα), though there is debate as to whether allegory is the correct title for what Paul does.[213] Commentators often note that typology may be a better moniker for Paul's interpretation, particularly since Paul seems to write of the Abrahamic matriarchs and their children as a prototype to the Galatian congregations' current circumstances.[214] While the point is valid, the reader should take seriously that Paul himself states that he is interpreting the story allegorically (ἀλληγορούμενα), assigning a deeper meaning to the characters within the Genesis story that Paul then applies to the Galatians' current situation.[215]

According to Tryphon, one of a few ancient Greek authors who officially defines the term, allegory is "an enunciation which while signifying one think literally, brings forth the thought of something else."[216] Allegory posits that a text is not (or does not have to be) solely what it appears to be about on the surface, and that its interpretive impact can be situated in the hands of an interpreter and their alternative reading of said text.[217] Arguably a word that was originally used by poets, allegory became a popular rhetorical and midrashic tool. Paul, as a Greco-Roman Jewish man is likely borrowing from both traditions in his own work.[218] Betz argues that the

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[213] Betz (*Galatians*, 239) argues that the passage is a combination of allegory and typology; Martyn (*Galatians*, 436) agrees with Betz; Longenecker (*Galatians*, 209) asks the question of whether one might be a better term than the other, though he offers no concrete opinion; Keener (*Galatians*, 406-10) insists that how you define what Paul does is dependent upon how one defines allegory and typology.

[214] While Paul does have individual typological statements elsewhere in his writings (e.g. Paul compares Adam to a proto-Christ figure in Rom 5:14), he never engages in any form of extended typology that could compare to Gal 4:21-31.

[215] This is the only time the word is used in the NT.

[216] Tryphon, *De trop*. 1.1, as translated by Steven Di Mattei, "Paul's Allegory of the Two Covenants (Gal 4.21-31) in Light of First-Century Hellenistic Rhetoric and Jewish Hermeneutics," *NTS* 52, no. 1 (2006): 105-06.

[217] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 103.

[218] Boys-Stones, "Introduction," in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition*, 3; Di Mattei, "Paul's Allegory," 103-05; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 209; Keener, *Galatians*, 404-07.

allegorical method employed within ancient rhetoric was well-developed by Paul's time.[219] Despite this, ancient authors debated on the strength of rhetorical allegory. Betz notes that the ambiguity of allegory could render an argument weaker (and some ancient rhetoricians argued against its use on this belief), but also notes that there is a logical, good-will strategy in the rhetor trusting the intelligence of their audience and leaving the hearers to listen and understand the argument before them.[220] That Paul utilizes allegory at the climax of his *probatio* certainly signifies that he saw the rhetorical benefits of interpreting the Abrahamic narrative in a new way for his audience. Paul must have believed that his tailor-made allegory would be convincing.[221]

Like metaphor, allegory is based upon an association of concepts. Paul's maternal metaphor in Gal 4:19 connects seemingly dissimilar objects to create a (hopefully) impactful and memorable image. In the case of Gal 4:21-31, Paul uses a series of objects, starting with the two Abrahamic matriarchal figures, to argue a position regarding the current condition of the Galatian church and their apparent doubts regarding Paul's circumcision-free gospel. Paul has already leaned heavily upon the Abrahamic narrative earlier in his *probatio* (Gal 3), so the continuation in Gal 4 would not have been strange or abrupt. What is interesting is that Paul moves away from Abraham and instead tells the narrative through the lens of the two mothers. Indeed, the two mothers, one a slave and one free, become the foundational images to which all others in the allegory link back.

The structural backbone of the allegory's compositional framework is itself a common rhetorical device: antithetical comparison. Antithesis presents two (or potentially more) options

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[219] Betz, *Galatians*, 243. Again, scholars cannot know how well-versed Paul was in official rhetoric.
[220] For both sides of this debate, see Betz, *Galatians*, 239-40.
[221] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 103.

for the audience to consider, while naturally guiding the reader towards the option the author

signifies as better by creating positive associations with the preferred position.[222] Paul is

essentially saying "on one hand we have x" but then "on the other hand we have y" and the

audience must choose between the two options. Paul wants to force the Galatians to choose

between the gospel of circumcision presented by his opponents and the circumcision-free gospel

that he proclaimed, obviously presenting his own gospel as the preferred decision. While modern

audiences might find dualistic comparisons artificial and limiting, ancient audiences were

familiar with binary polarities and believed they governed the entirety of the cosmos.[223]

    This antithetical framework is not a hidden device to trick his audience and force their hand.

Indeed, Paul tells his audience that this is what he is doing with his use of the verb συστοιχέω in

4:25 (the verb referencing formation of oppositional military lines). The audience understands

that Paul is creating an oppositional/comparative table based upon the two matriarchal figures

because Paul tells them so. He then weaves these antithetical pairs into almost every verse of the

allegory.

Table 2: Antithetical Comparisons Within Paul's Maternal Allegory

v. 22 "For it is written, 'Abraham had two sons'"[224]		
v. 22	son of the slave girl	son of the free woman	A
v. 23	born "according to the flesh"	born "through the promise"	B
v. 24 "There are two covenants"		
v. 24	from Sinai		

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[222] For antithesis as a rhetorical device, see Keener, *Galatians*, 401-02; Martyn, *Galatians*, 433.

[223]The Greeks (and others) thought universal polarities were the basis of the cosmos with reality structured into binary opposition pairs (air vs. earth, fire vs. water, soul vs. body). See Kahl, "No Longer Male," 44; Martyn, *Galatians*, 100-01, 393-406.

[224] This table is largely based upon a similar one done by Eastman (*Paul's Mother Tongue*, 135-36). Some content has been updated to reflect the original Greek and represent the chiasmic structure of verses 22-23 and verses 30-31.

	bearing children for slavery		
v. 25	Hagar Mount Sinai present Jerusalem in slavery with her children		
v. 26		Jerusalem above free "She is our mother"	
	v. 27 "For it is written"		
v. 27	has a husband fewer children	'Rejoice, break forth and shout barren one who does not bear not in labour desolate one many more children'	
v. 28		You, brothers, are children of the promise, like Isaac	
v. 29	born according to flesh persecutes	born according to the Spirit persecuted	B'
	v. 30 "But what does the Scripture say?"		
v. 30	cast out (implied object of the verb) not inherit	cast out (implied subject of verb) inherits	
v. 31		we, brothers, are children of the free woman	A'

With almost every image in the left-hand column there is a direct opposing image in the right-hand column and these contrasting objects are either within the same verse or in directly adjacent verses. What is interesting about these pairs is not only the antithesis between them, but how this comparison is simultaneously rooted in *sameness*. The two women who ground this allegory maintain divergent social positions and yet they are also both connected to Abraham, are women, and are also mothers. This pattern runs throughout (almost) the entirety of the passage. The similarities of the opposing images are seemingly equally as important as their differences. Readers must remember that the Galatians are ultimately concerned with their status as a people of God. Paul has to legitimize the Galatians' own status as Yahweh's children who come into the

family of God through the work of Christ, while *also* maintaining the legitimacy of Jewish believers who are born into the covenantal family; Jews and gentiles are simultaneously alike and different, but both belong to the people of God.[225]

This antithetical framework is also complemented (and enhanced) by Paul's use of scripture as both proof for his argument and as an organizational tool. Offering scripture as a proof text was a common rhetorical device.[226] By appealing to the authority of scripture, the rhetor suggests that the voice of the divine agrees with the their position, making the argument more persuasive.[227] Paul engages the Israelite scriptures throughout his epistles and certainly within Galatians, particularly Gal 3 (Gal 3:6, 8, 10-14). Paul's allegory is itself an interpretation of narrative scripture and with that comes the assumption that Paul is illuminating the words of God in new ways for his audience.

Paul's first allusion to scripture (within this allegorical section) occurs in the first verse of the passage (Gal 4:21): "Tell me, you who are under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?" While Paul does not cite a specific passage, nor appeal directly to a scriptural source, he makes it clear that what follows will be a discourse on the law, which is housed in Israel's scriptures. His use of this introductory statement implies that he is asking his audience to hear a passage from the scriptures in a way that draws new conclusions. Paul will take a key passage of

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[225] "New Perspective" and "Radical New Perspective" scholarship raises interesting questions on whether Paul's experience of the risen Christ that he refers to in 1 Cor can be considered a conversion or a calling. Paul conveys feeling called to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the gentiles, but it is likely that Paul saw this as an apocalyptic extension of Judaism rather than the formation of a new faith. Paul was not criticizing the law or its practice by Jews, but rather took exception to gentiles who adopted the Torah as a method to gain right standing before the god of Israel. For an overview on recent approaches to Pauline studies, including the New Perspective and Radical New Perspective, see Magnus Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2009).

[226] Betz, *Galatians*, 238.

[227] Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 132.

the Torah to show those who want to be under the law that they actually do not want to be under law.[228] The particulars of the Abrahamic narrative (or the law) have not yet fully come to the audience's attention, but Paul's interpretation will change this.[229]

Paul then continues to make three direct appeals to scripture (v.22, 27, 30), explicitly quoting the scriptures in two of those verses: first in v. 27 (quoting Is 54:1) and then again in v. 30 (quoting Gen 21:10). The position of Paul's final appeal to scripture, in Gal 4:30, is particularly significant. This is the end of Paul's *probatio* and this is where the audience will be left with a decision; will they listen and adhere to the argument Paul presents, or will they reject his argument and side with those who oppose his circumcision-free gospel? In these ending sentences, Paul chooses to step aside and allows the actual words of scripture to speak for themselves. Paul's voice fades into the background and the words of the original text are presented in a new context.[230]

Beyond just their argumentative force, Paul's appeals to scripture also add to the structural framework of the allegory. Three times (v. 22, 27, 30) Paul calls the audience back to the scriptural text by explicitly stating "for it is written" (v. 22, 27) or "what does the Scripture say" (v. 30). Each of these apparent turns to the primary narrative is then followed by a series of antithetical comparisons discussed above. While this combination of scripture and antithesis may not appear to be immediately related, a pattern can be seen when they are viewed side by side.

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[228] Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture*, 130.
[229] Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 664.
[230] Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture*, 133.

Table 3: Scripture References Within Paul's Maternal Allegory

v. 22 "for it is written"	v. 27 "for it is written"	v. 30 "but what does scripture say?"
Two sons (unnamed)	Son born according to the flesh Isaac, born according to the promise	Son of the slave girl cannot inherit Son of free mother will not inherit
One by a slave girl One by a free woman	Desolate woman – less children and no husband Barren woman- many children	Slave girl should be cast out Free woman's son will inherit, live as children of free woman
(Slave) born according to the flesh (Free) born through the promise	Son born of the flesh persecutes Persecuted by the power of the Spirit	Cast out (no mention of flesh) Inherit (implies the theme of promise)

The antithetical images that appear under each scriptural recollection share a near identical combination of repeated motifs: a contrast between the status of the *two mothers* (generally *slave* vs. *free),* a contrast between their *two sons*, and a contrast between *two modes of birth* or each *child's status* based upon the differing modes of birth. Certainly, the flow and order of the images in these scriptural "sections" are not identical and the language used within them is varied. However, the contrast between two similar but opposite figures remains consistent as does the root images.

Gal 4:24-26 seemingly breaks up this apparent scriptural pattern of the *two mothers*, the *two children*, and either their *mode of birth* or the resultant outcome of *their status* (cast out or inheritor). Some scholars consider this section an aside and undoubtedly these verses do not

begin with the typical "for it is written" appeal to scripture.[231] However, they are not devoid of scriptural reference as Paul brings forward the notion of "covenants" for his audience to consider (4:24). Covenants, as divine agreements between God and the people, are recorded and proclaimed throughout Israel's scriptures, and with this mention of covenants Paul does once again introduce the familiar pattern of images: he mentions the *slave woman* and the *free woman*, two "types" of children (children of present Jerusalem and children of Jerusalem above) and a connection between the status of the mother and how she *bears her children* into her status (v.24). Because the images that Paul uses in this section do look different from the rest of the passage, it would be easy to dismiss this as disconnected. Yet, the repeated pattern of objects is present. When the reader reaches the end of the allegory (4:31), they have encountered this pattern and series of images several times.

4.3.1 The Mothers

The prevalence of motherhood within Paul's allegory cannot not be overstated; Paul's allegorical interpretation literally starts and ends with mothers. All of the subsequent images and objects Paul uses to propel his argument forward (birth and children) are predicated upon motherhood. This turn to the matriarchs is a thematic continuation of the Abrahamic familial exegesis that Paul begins in Gal 3, though notably Abraham is referenced only once in the allegory. From the point of Paul's maternal declaration in 4:19, practically every verse following addresses the relationship between a mother and her children/sons. The story of God's people is (re)told through the lens of motherhood.[232]

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[231] Keener, *Galatians*, 413.
[232] Kahl, "No Longer Male," 43.

Paul does not seem concerned with the mothers as actual women but instead seems interested in what they can both represent and how he can use them for his interpretive purposes.[233] While I have already mentioned the simultaneous sameness and difference of these two mothers (and all the objects used in the allegory), one key point should be made explicit: the two mothers are always mentioned in conjunction with their social status (*slave* vs. *free* or *barren* vs. *fecund*) and the progeny they produce. Their social standing cannot be divorced from their maternity, nor from their children's resultant social position. Slavery is a theme that Paul introduces in Gal 3 and freedom a motif he will pick up in his *exortatio* (Gal 5). The mothers act as a bridge between the two topics, with each mother representing one facet of this polarity, and the allegory becomes the epicentre of the two motifs. Starting with the two mothers (Gal 4:22), Paul creates two oppositional linear argumentative strands where all subsequent objects are connected to the concepts of either slavery and freedom by their association with one of the two mothers. For example, the slave woman, whose child is born according to the flesh, is identified as Hagar. Hagar is then used figuratively to represent Mount Sinai. Because Hagar is a slave who represents Mount Sinai and bears children according to the flesh, an association between these children, Mount Sinai, and slavery emerges. Everything links back to slavery because of the ultimate association with the slave woman.

Those familiar with the Israelite scriptures might be quick to label the mothers Hagar and Sarah. Many scholars take these names for granted and simply use both names within their scholarship.[234] However, Sarah is never ever actually named in the passage (the word ἐλευθέρας

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[233] Betz, *Galatians*, 243.
[234] For example, see Martyn, *Galatians*, 441; Kahl, "No Longer Male," 42; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 246-59; Hietanen, *Paul's Argumentation in Galatians*, 152-57.

is used).[235] The omission may have occurred because Paul simply assumed his audience would recognize the original story and insert the names themselves.[236] Yet, the omission of the name Sarah may serve a greater rhetorical purpose; this is an idea to which I will return later.[237]

As mentioned, starting at the left-hand column of Table 2, Paul creates a direct, cascading connection between slavery, children of the flesh, Hagar, Mount Sinai, and the earthly Jerusalem. All of these images are portrayed as less than ideal, and Paul warns his audience that they must turn away from these associations. While Paul makes these connections in quick succession, as though they should naturally flow together or be easily understood by his audience, there is nothing in the original Genesis narrative that supports a relatedness between Hagar, Mount Sinai, and the city of Jerusalem.[238] This connectivity is purely Paul's creation to add force to his argument and he does this by pulling on related thematic associations he made earlier in the epistle and connecting them to the slave mother. For example, the coupling between Hagar and Mount Sinai is likely trying to link the slave woman to the Law of Moses given at Mount Sinai. "The Law" is a motif that Paul uses extensively throughout Gal 3 and by connecting the law to Hagar, Paul now draws an association between the Mosaic Law and slavery. Moving along Paul's argument chain, Hagar and Mount Sinai (the Law) are figurative representations of the present city of Jerusalem (referenced also as a mother). According to Paul, the earthy Jerusalem is enslaved and so too are her children. This notion is a play on words where Paul (likely) alludes

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[235] The son born of the slave woman (Hagar) is also never named in the passage.

[236] Martyn, *Galatians*, 441.

[237] Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 26. Elliott argues that Paul purposefully omits Sarah and the corresponding mountain (contrasted to Mount Sinai). A more detailed discussion on these intentional omissions occurs below.

[238] Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture*, 131; Martyn, *Galatians*, 436-37; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 211. It is worth noting that a connection made between Hagar, her son, and slavery was made in the Jewish tradition regarding Ishmaelites. See Longenecker, *Galatians*, 210-11.

to two realities simultaneously. The avid listener will remember that Paul spends the first part of

Gal 2 discussing his visit to the city of Jerusalem, the cultic centre of Judaism. It is here in Gal 2

where Paul first references false teachers preaching on gentile circumcision (Gal 2:1-10) and

where Paul calls gentile circumcision a form of enslavement (Gal 2:4). Paul, however, may also

be drawing on the present status of the Jews, who lived under Roman occupation at the time. The

Jews, like Paul's native Anatolian audience, were living under Roman rule, perhaps also a form

of enslavement.[239] Regardless, it is important to notice how Paul's argumentative chain works.

Hagar is a slave who confers slave status to her children. By connecting Hagar to the law, the

law is now also connected to slavery. By then having Hagar, already connected to the law and

slavery, figuratively represent the earthly Jerusalem, Jerusalem and "its children" are also drawn

into this connection between the law and slavery. And this continues on throughout the allegory.

All the images on one side of Paul's argument are interconnected with one another and their

conceptual associations (such as law, slavery, present Jerusalem etc…) are drawn together.

The same argumentative progression is repeated in the right hand column (Table 2), though

notably there are omissions in the antithetical comparisons (the free woman is never named and a

contrasting mountain to Sinai is not provided). Despite these seemingly "missing" pieces, an

opposing cascading argument emerges that directly opposes the linkages between the slave

woman, her slave children, the law, the present Jerusalem, and so forth. In this linear

progression, the free mother's child is born through the promise and this mother figuratively

represents Jerusalem above, who is the mother of free children. An interconnectedness is created

between the free mother, her free children, being born of the promise, the Jerusalem above, and

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[239] Keener, *Galatians*, 413.

so on (a parallel association to the law is noticeably absent). Paul's final exhortation of his *probatio* is the meeting of these opposed linear argument chains, where Paul insists that the Galatians live as though they are children of the free woman (Gal 4:31). Notice that the Galatians' final choice is not presented to them as a choice about identity, but about which *mother* they will align themselves with; it all comes back to the mother.

4.3.2 The Modes of Birth

While the allegory's foundational image is two mothers, their identity as mothers is made more significant by the comparison made between the modes of birth each undergo. Paul tells his audience that the son of the slave woman is born according the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα), while the son of the free woman is born through the promise (διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας). The passage does not necessarily contend that being born according to the flesh is inherently wrong - just as being a slave woman was not wrong - but Paul does connect the fleshly birth to birth via a slave woman, a significantly lesser social position. For Paul, how these two sons (or children) are born matters and should matter to the audience.[240]

As stated earlier, the slave woman (Hagar) gives birth κατὰ σάρκα. Employing the Abrahamic narrative as a guide, we can extrapolate what Paul might mean regarding this fleshly birth. Hagar's son's birth was an infamous circumnavigation of the covenant God made with Abraham that said that Abraham would be the father of many nations (Gen 12), specifically through his wife Sarah. While God was going to miraculously open Sarah's barren womb and provide a promised child animated by God's creative work, Abraham and Sarah put their trust in

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[240] Martyn, "Covenants," 179; Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 105-06.

human, fleshly means to produce a child through the impregnation of Sarah's slave Hagar.

Hagar's son was born from a solely human sexual act, not in line with God's divine, creative

provision, and in this way Hagar represents a human means of marking or achieving.[241]

However, flesh (σάρξ) appears to have a double meaning in this passage. While in Gal 4 it

references human means of conception and birth, Paul has already earlier referenced the "works

of the law," namely circumcision (Gal 3:3), and chastised the Galatians for trying to achieve

position within the family of God through "human effort."[242] "Flesh" is another means of

suggesting these human efforts. Paul explicitly opposes these human efforts and contrasts them

against the work of the Spirit (πνεῦμα) and in conflict with Abraham's salvific faith (Gal 3:2, 5,

6-9, 11-14). Paul will follow Gal 4:21-31 with a lengthy exegesis that contrasts the works of the

flesh (circumcision) and the freedom of the Spirit (Gal 5:1-15). The notion of this "fleshly" birth

is thus also an allusion to the act of circumcision Paul believes the gentiles are pursuing in their

efforts to become part of the family of Israel's god.[243] They are trying to use human means to

achieve something that cannot be done by the work of human hands. Circumcision, while a

Jewish initiation ritual, is also a literal fleshy procedure and one that, according to Paul, is not

designed for gentiles. Paul plays with the definition of "flesh" to add layers of meaning and

symbolism to his argument.

Paul connects this fleshly birth to both Hagar (a slave woman) and then her figurative

connection with Mount Sinai. This relays back to Paul's diatribe in the first half of his *probatio*

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[241] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 145; Dunn, *The Epistle to* the *Galatians*, 246.
[242] Some translation of Gal 4:23 translate "according to the flesh" as "ordinary way" (CEV) or "by human attempt" (NLT).
[243] Martyn, "Covenants," 180; Martyn, *Galatians*, 435; Keener, *Galatians*, 411-12.

(Gal 3) regarding the works of the law (of which circumcision is one) and their futility for gentile-believers. Paul's argument is building and coming to a climax. He began with a slave woman, who figuratively represents the present Jerusalem, both of whom have slave children born according to the flesh, and these children and the mother are connected to Mount Sinai (law). Through this reasoning, the law gives life to children born of the flesh, but they are ultimately slaves within the present Jerusalem.

Paul then places this fleshly birth in opposition to birth through the promise (διὰ τῆς ἐπαγγελίας). While the dichotomy between the flesh and Spirit appears frequently in Gal 3, Paul insists that the son of the free woman is born by the *promise* (Gal 4:23, rather than the Spirit). While the notion of "the promise" and "the Spirit" are not interchangeable ideas, they are associated images throughout Galatians, mentioned in direct connection in Gal 3:14 and again when Paul mentions that the son born according to the promise was born by the "power of the Spirit" (Gal 4:29).[244] Neither the verb nor noun form of the word "promise" (ἐπαγγελία) appears within the original Abrahamic narrative, but the notion of Abraham's covenantal "promised" son was well-established within Jewish tradition. In keeping with the maternal theme of the allegory, Paul continues to draws the motif of the son (or children) of the promise back to his mother. While Abraham is still the father of both children, the mode of birth becomes significant. By Paul's logic the promise is delivered through the (free) mother.

The image of "the promise," when allied to the Abrahamic narrative, speaks to the supernatural work of God, who took a woman (Sarah) and a man (Abraham) with no human ability to produce children together and miraculously provided them with a child (*the* child).

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[244] Betz, *Galatians*, 242.

Where human limitations threatened the promise of God, God provided an extraordinary way to achieve his divine plan and generate his chosen people. The promise motif speaks to the power of Yahweh to bring forth his people through his means and within his will. There is no room for human, fleshly activity: God does all the work. It is God the Father's πνεῦμα (Gal 4:29) that animates life.[245]

Yet just as the flesh holds layers of meaning, the idea of the child (or children) of the promise also holds a deeper significance, a detail which Paul shapes for his uses. In Gal 4:27, right after referencing Jerusalem above as the mother of free children, Paul quotes Isa 54:1 verbatim. Isa 54 is considered to be one of the Zion poems, likely composed during the Babylonian exile, which foretold the future restoration of Israel with the coming of the Messiah.[246] While Isa 54:1 does not name the barren woman, Jewish tradition claimed the barren woman as Sarah.[247] She was the once infertile mother of all of Israel's descendants and the recipient of the miraculous, life-giving power of God. When the Messiah returned, the descendants of Abraham - born of him and Sarah - would see Jerusalem restored, made of indestructible jewels (Isa 54:10-12, 1 *En.* 90:28-29). This Jerusalem would descend from heaven and it was from here that God would rule the cosmos. This restored Jerusalem, however, also held the apocalyptic expectation of gentiles joining the family of God *as gentiles*.[248] The promise that Abraham would be a conduit of blessing to all nations would reach its *telos* and gentiles would be included within the fold of

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[245] Recall the chapter 3 discussion on generative theories that the father was believed to provide the πνεῦμα (*pneuma*) which acts as the animating force of life.

[246] Martyn, *Galatians*, 441-42; Keener, *Galatians*, 426-29.

[247] Betz, *Galatians*, 448-49; Keener, *Galatians*, 428; Martyn, *Galatians*, 441-42.

[248] Dibley, *Abraham's Uncircumcised Children*, 2; Frederiksen, "Why a 'Law-Free' Mission," 649-50; David M. Rhoads, "Children of Abraham, Children of God: Metaphorical Kinship in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31, no. 4 (2004): 287.

Israel. Isa 54:1 is thus a picture of God's transforming power and a promise of a lasting communal habitation for *all* of God's people: both Jew and gentile.[249] Paul is able to harness this apocalyptic expectation and draws it into his argument. The free woman, who gives birth according the promise, bears free children who are part of the (future) Jerusalem above. Notice that Paul also states that Jerusalem above is also the mother of the children of the promise, who are again aligned with the free (barren) woman. While this is a circular argument, something of which Paul is probably aware, Paul creates and relies on this connection between the free mother, free children according to the promise, and the promise of citizenship in the Jerusalem above. By drawing this connection together and using Isa 54:1 to confirm gentile apocalyptic inclusion, Paul makes it possible for the children of the promise to be gentiles.

4.3.3 The Children

The products of these two mothers and their two differing modes of birth are two children. The focus on these two children, like their mothers before them, revolves around their divergent statuses and their separate potential to inherit. While the subjects of kinship and inheritance were topical to ancient Mediterranean audiences, for which family was the bedrock of societal stability, Paul's connection between the status of the mothers, the mode of birth, and the status of the children is neither textually nor culturally accurate. The son of a free father and a slave woman was considered freeborn.[250] More specific to the Genesis narrative, Ishmael was not a slave and should have been considered the son of Sarah.[251] Indeed, until the birth of Isaac (and

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[249] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 129; Esler, *Galatians*, 52.
[250] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 107; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 251.
[251] Dunn, *The Epistle to* the *Galatians*, 246. Sarah's insistence on having a child through Hagar would technically make Ishmael Sarah's "son."

after), Ishmael would have been considered a legitimate son with the right to inherit. Paul does not allow for this in his allegory and molds the story to his purposes using the notion of the children as inheriting their mother's status. Rhetorically it may have been effective, but it was nonetheless Paul's argumentative creation.

Undoubtedly, Paul wants the Galatians to think of themselves as the children born of a free woman, through the promise and by the power of the Spirit, belonging to the Jerusalem above; Paul's antithetical argument builds towards this truth. Paul began his *probatio* with the introduction of a familial inheritance motif that comes to an end with this allegory. The Galatians should now be convinced that they possess the status that they desire; they are indeed children of God grafted into Israel as heirs of the promise, born through the will and work of God the Father. The Galatians must not be born of the flesh (circumcision), aligned with the law, and belonging to the present Jerusalem.[252] And just as the son of the flesh persecutes the son of the promise (Gal 4:29), so too the agitators insist on performing an unnecessary and unhelpful rite upon gentiles.[253]

Yet the final urging of the allegory does not ask the Galatians to live as either free sons or slave sons, even though the argumentative progression seems to be building towards this end. Rather, when Paul closes this final section of his *probatio*, he tells his audience that they need to choose the *mother* with which they will align. It is through this choice that the Galatians will either (correctly) live out the circumcision-free gospel that Paul first preached or abnegate this

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[252] This topic has already been introduced in chapter 2, and will be discussed further in chapter 5, but it is important to stress that Paul's audience was largely gentile. Paul is not addressing Jews, nor is he stating that the law, circumcision, and an association with cultic Judaism is a problem for Jews.

[253] Keener, *Galatians*, 435; Martyn, *Galatians*, 445. Again, we cannot know the motives of those insisting upon circumcision, the reader only hears Paul's perspective. See section 2.2.2.

gospel for one that relies on circumcision. Paul maintains that only by choosing to align themselves with the free woman, as children of the promise, can the Galatians fully embrace their identity as part of the family of God.

4.4 Paul: The Mother of the Gentile Galatians

Authentic heirship of Abraham is the dominant theme throughout Paul's *probatio* (Gal 3 and 4). Inclusion into the people of God required sharing in the Abrahamic promise, but for Paul the Galatians must share in this promise while remaining gentiles and this is what he must impart upon his audience.[254] The Galatians need to be connected to Abraham (and the God who chose him) but in a way that will bring them into Israel without the covenantal demand of law-observance (including circumcision). The "promise" theme, first introduced in Gal 3 and contrasted to the works of the law, also needs to find completion with the gentiles being counted as inheritors of the promise through the work of the Spirit.

I propose that Paul employed maternal imagery, particularly the Abrahamic matriarchal figures, because he believed they would provide the most effective means to convince the Galatians they are indeed heirs to the promise and people of God. The reader will notice that Abraham strategically fades from view throughout the allegory, but his fatherhood (and the ultimate fatherhood of God) remains unchallenged with the shift to the mothers, while the comparison between the two mothers connected to Abraham allows for oppositional streams within the Abrahamic line to be contrasted to one another.[255] Abraham could not be contrasted to

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[254] Punt, "Revealing Rereading," 103.

[255] Kahl ("No Longer Male," 43) argues that fatherhood fades within Gal 4 while maternity becomes the sole focus. While I agree that maternity becomes the mechanism to explain the notion of the birth of the promise to the Galatians, fatherhood does not fade. Descent from the Abrahamic line is assumed within the allegory and the notion that the Galatians could be descendants of Abraham is arguably Paul's main point.

Abraham, and Abraham *must* remain the earthly patriarch of the people of God. The mothers, however, can stand in dichotomy against one another, demonstrating the two different lines of Abrahamic descent that produce different offspring through different means. Using these divergent streams of descent, Paul can then challenge the Jewish understanding of being sole heirs to the promise by offering an alternative interpretation as to what it means to be born according to the promise through the manipulation of the free woman as the "mother" of the gentile-believers. Paul tells his converts that, for them, continuity of the Abrahamic line comes through the continuity of the promise, not through birth by fleshly rituals, and the continuity of the promise comes through the free mother.[256] It is more than being of symbolic descent from Abraham but also with which mother the audience identifies. Abraham's fatherhood becomes more specifically defined through motherhood.

Initial logic suggests that Paul should have aligned his matriarchal argument with Hagar, a gentile who bore a child of Abraham.[257] Recall, however, that Jews believed their status as chosen people of God comes from their *combined* descent from Abraham and Sarah (chapter 3). Paul's argument is more forceful if he can find a way to align the Galatians with Abraham and his barren wife who were the promised parents of God's chosen people. Thus when Paul crafts his allegory, he moves away from the traditional Jewish belief where inheritance of the Abrahamic promise is predicated on both an ethnic and spiritual linkage. Paul instead stresses the importance of the spiritual linkage only, still connected to Abraham and Sarah, placing a

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[256] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 140.
[257] Keener, *Galatians*, 399.

renewed focus on the mother who produces this spiritual linkage through miraculously birthing children of the promise.

This, however, begs the question *who is the free woman who is able to birth children of the promise*? Paul overtly encourages the Galatians to align with the free woman as their mother and the free woman is often associated with the figure of Sarah, a connection Paul himself utilizes. Yet the name Sarah is not mentioned in the passage. Only Hagar is explicitly named, and likely because Paul wanted to draw a clear connection between Hagar's slave status and the law; associations from which the Galatians must refrain. I mentioned earlier that Abraham fades into the background of Gal 4, but Sarah never actually appears.[258] In fact, the only mother named within Gal 4 who is capable of birthing children of the promise is Paul (4:19).

Many scholars who look at Galatians do not draw a connection between Paul's maternal self-identification in Gal 4:19 and the allegory which follows. There does seem to be a section break at Gal 4:20, particularly with Paul's use of a rhetorical question in Gal 4:21. Yet both Paul's maternal self-identification and his matriarchal allegory appear in the final verses of Paul's *probatio*, an extended argument bookended by the parental figures in the Abrahamic narrative. Recall that the *probatio* generally builds in persuasive power as it moves along. As Paul approaches the height of his argument, he first makes himself a mother and then spins a discourse about mothers to tell the Galatians about who they are and how they must live. While Paul's maternal self-reference allows him to draw upon ancient constructions of motherhood to explain Paul's relational role to the Galatians, I also contend that Paul's allegory extends from Gal 4:19 and assumes Paul's self-proclaimed maternity to add argumentative force. Paul

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[258] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 144; Martyn, *Galatians*, 434.

positions himself as a Sarah-like figure, a barren "mother," called by God to give birth miraculously to children of God through divine promise and divine will. Paul is the free mother with which the Galatians should align.

Sarah remains in the background of the allegory certainly, but Paul is much more closely associated as the Galatian believers' mother in that he actually names himself as such. Paul implicitly inserts himself in the empty oppositional column where the free mother is left unnamed and in doing so is able to further solidify his argumentative position on a circumcision-free gospel.[259] Isaac, the child of promise, is born supernaturally to a barren woman by the will of God, and Paul can draw a parallel to himself as one who has no means to naturally birth children and yet is called to be the mother of gentile congregations. Indeed, the same mechanism through which Sarah gave birth to Isaac is how the Galatians are born: they are born through the will of the Father and the presence of the Spirit. Paul, as mother, produces an even more miraculous birth in that as a man he has even further physical limitations on him in producing children. Since the barren mother's ability to produce children is inversely related to God's power, the divine creative power of God is on display in greater quantities in Paul's "birth" of gentile congregations.[260] In the same way, since God's miraculous ability to produce children from the barren mother is connected with the motif of the promised birth, the promise is on display in increasing measure through the Galatians' communal birth via Paul.

Paul is telling the Galatians the story of their true birth.[261] They cannot be born by human, fleshly means; the Galatians must be born through the Spirit. Paul facilitates this birth as their

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[259] Keener, *Galatians*, 394.
[260] Eastman, *Paul's Mother Tongue*, 146.
[261] Martyn, "Covenants," 184.

mother, but it is Christ who will be formed in them as a result truly marking them as belonging to the family of God. Looking at Gal 4:19 and the subsequent allegory as a connected strand in Paul's argument, the allegory becomes about the (re)birth of the Galatian church and the status they possess at their birth. Paul argues that the status of the Galatians is not determined by physical descent nor marked by ethnic ritual.[262] Their position as part of the family of God comes from the fact that God is their father, who commissioned Paul to be their mother, and their status is confirmed by the formation of Christ within them.

4.5 The Mother Goddess Emerges

Beyond the Galatians' pursuit of status within the family of God, there is another piece of the rhetorical situation to which I want to return: the Anatolian contextual landscape and the prevalence of Mother Goddess worship. Paul used maternal imagery because motherhood was simultaneously the best backdrop for his antithetical argument which also allowed him to confer the "children of the promise" status onto gentiles. But the Galatians were also a people influenced by the worship of the Meter Theon, and I posit that Paul's maternal references also reflect Paul's concern for her presence within the Galatians' contextual landscape. Paul needs to provide the Galatians with a new mother.

In Gal 4:24, Paul makes a connection between Hagar and Mount Sinai; a connection not supported by the Genesis narrative. Scholars have long been baffled by this association and there have been multiple interpretations to explain away this strange connection. Generally, scholarship on Paul's allegory quickly shifts to the relationship Paul draws between slavery, the

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[262] Martyn, "Covenants," 171.

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law, and a birth according the flesh. Yet, the reference to Mount Sinai may not be so strange when considering the Anatolian context.

The Mother Goddess was housed in the mountains where she overlooked the cities and people she protected. Part of this protective detail was the Mother as an administrator of justice and a maintainer of order; she was closely linked with the *law*. The connection between Hagar (the slave mother) and Mount Sinai (the law) is likely Paul setting up an association by which he can create a deeper double meaning. Circumcision is an act of the law (Gal 3:10) and the Mountain Mother was the protector of the law. Paul explicitly connects Hagar to the law to keep the allegory grounded within the Abrahamic narrative, but the Galatians would have understood the socio-cultural connection between a mother, a mountain, the law and the Mother Goddess. By drawing on this association, Paul could speak to the Galatians regarding their own legitimacy in contrast to the gospel of circumcision (they are not children of Hagar who is associated with the Jewish law), while also offering a contrast to the Goddess cult practiced within their contextual landscape. Paul essentially indicates that the adoption of the law, a mountain authority, and any fleshy rituals associated with the law will not give the Galatians the identity they desire, but rather reflect their previous cultic worship.

This connection to the Mountain Mother may also explain why there is no antithetical comparison made to Mount Sinai in the allegory. If Paul does indeed introduce the mountain image to address Great Mother worship, drawing connections between Goddess worship and the circumcision-based gospel of the agitators, the lack of an opposing mountain makes sense. Paul does not want the Galatians to turn to a new version of the Mountain Mother or an associated law. No mountain is mentioned because Paul wants to make it clear that no mountain authority,

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be it goddess or covenantal law, is an option for gentile-believers.[263] Paul wants the Galatians to

be free of such beliefs and practices; indeed the Galatians' free status demands the freedom from

such beliefs and practices (Gal 5:1).

The relationship made between slavery and the flesh also takes on new dimensions in light of

the Great Mother. While most scholars (correctly) focus on the connection between the birth

according to the flesh and circumcision, the Jews were not the only people to undergo a fleshly

initiation ritual within the Galatians' context. The *galli*, the priests of the Mother Goddess, also

underwent a genital mutilation ritual in order to become devoted followers of the Great Mother,

essentially born into the official Mother Goddess priesthood through a work of the flesh. While

they were indeed considered priests, the *galli* maintained a socially ambiguous position and were

often relegated slave status; they were honoured priests, yet ruled and owned by the Great

Mother.[264]

Paul is able to accomplish a great deal through his maternal images. Not only is he able to

draw a connection between a slave mother, children born according the flesh, a mountain, the

law, and slavery, but Paul draws these connections towards a conclusion that argues for Paul's

circumcision-free gospel as the only option for gentiles. Paul's argument, however, can also

speak directly to Mother Goddess worship and her strong presence throughout Anatolia. While

scholars debate on how well-versed the Galatian audience would have been in the Abrahamic

narrative, the Galatians would have undoubtedly recognized the associations between the

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[263] Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 682.

[264] The *galli* were thought to be sexual transgressors and considered neither male nor female. See Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 675-76; Roller, *In Search of God*, 301-09. For a detailed description on the *galli's* initiation, dress, and change in social status, see Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 159-229. This section is entitled "The *Galli*: The Mother's Slaves" reinforcing the notion of their slave-like status. For primary references to the *galli* being compared to sacred slaves, see Strabo 11.8.4 and 12.5.3, 31, 32. See also Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 674-75.

mother, law, and a mountain and drawn a connection to the Mother Goddess. Paul was using a

very culturally-specific contextual bridge to link a well-known Goddess cult to the circumcision-

based message of Paul's opponents, resultantly challenging both practices.[265] In doing this, he

not only presents a case for the Galatians to remain gentiles but he is able, in a single rhetorical

swipe, to knock-out the law (circumcision) and the Great Mother from positions of authority to

those of ineffectualness.[266]

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[265] This is Elliott's thesis in *Cutting Too Close*.
[266] Elliott, "Choose Your Mother," 681.

Chapter 5: Social Identity Theory, Group Identity, and Motherhood

As I finish this exploration of Paul's maternal imagery in Gal 4, I want to make a slight shift and look at Paul's rhetoric from a different perspective, more specifically through the lens of Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT offers an alternative way of understanding not only the situation within Galatia but also Paul's maternal self-identification and subsequent allegory. Using SIT, the reader can understand, perhaps in a new way, the identity questions at the heart of the Galatian exigence and how Paul's maternal language spoke to these specific concerns.

5.1 Social Identity Theory and Boundary Markers

Social Identity Theory (SIT) derives primarily from the work of social psychologist Henri Tajfel and his chief collaborator John Turner. Both were interested in the complex relationship between human psychology and the large-scale social processes which affect and are influenced by human psychology.[267] According to Tajfel, social identity is "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership."[268] Put differently, SIT is concerned with understanding how individuals choose to identify and thus act as members of a group. While SIT is ultimately concerned with the behavioural psychology of individuals within social groups, it has led to interesting scholarship on intergroup relations and how competition between groups manifests itself in both individual and group behaviour.[269]

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[267] For a chronology of Tajfel's work, see John C. Turner, "Henri Tajfel: An Introduction." in *Social Groups and Identities: Developing the Legacy of Henri Tajfel*, ed. W.P Robinson, International Series in Social Psychology (Butterworth: Oxford, 1996), 1-23. See also Jeremy Punt, "Hermeneutics in Identity Formation: Paul's Use of Genesis in Galatians 4," *HvTSt* 67, no. 1 (2011): 2.

[268] Tajfel, "Social Categorization," 68.

[269] Tajfel, "Social Categorization," 28; Esler, *Galatians*, 42.

Social psychologists posit that individuals are continuously actively engaged in constructing

and reconstructing the world in which they live. As part of this on-going social process, people

attach emotional self-value and significance to their place within social groups and differentiate

their group (ingroup) from other groups (outgroups).[270] Vital to attaining self-value and positive

identity construction, individuals must form self-constructed notions of "we" and "us" and place

those in opposition to a less-defined "them." On a more macro level, groups use these collective

notions of "us" to establish positively valued distinctiveness from other groups.[271] And there are

outward manifestations of this internal psychological process. Simply by recognizing themselves

as part of a specific group, individuals engage in discriminatory thoughts and actions that favour

their ingroup at the cost of positive valuation towards outgroups.[272] Behaviourally, group

members naturally try to adopt similar mannerisms or actions, partially based on the values that

the group deems meaningful but also because people want to identify within a group structure

and similar patterns of behaviour help foster group cohesion and collective identity.[273] Positive

self-identity is thus attached to group identity, social differentiation and demarcation, and

positive (or seemingly positive) ingroup behaviours.

While some biblical scholars hesitate to employ SIT when exploring the scriptures, there is a

growing amount of scholarship that perceives SIT as a useful heuristic model for examining both

biblical texts and ancient audiences. The ancient Mediterranean world was after all largely

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[270] Coleman A. Baker, "Social Identity Theory and Biblical Interpretation," *BTB* 42, no. 3 (2012): 130.

[271] Esler, *Galatians*, 42.

[272] Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour," *in Psychology of Intergroup Relation*, ed. W.G. Austin and S. Worchel (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1986), 17; Baker, "Social Identity Theory, 130.

[273] Stephen Reicher, "The Determination of Collective Behaviour," in *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. Henri Tajfel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 69.

collectivist and emphasized the needs of groups over the needs of individuals. Ancient audiences would have understood themselves as part of various social relationship groups including ethnicity, cult, trade, kin, *polis,* and so forth. As such, individuals were more susceptible to concerns regarding cohesive group behaviour.[274] Because ancient audiences believed that all things which were honourable and good existed within finite quantities, there was a strong stimulus for intergroup competition as groups competed with one another to grasp the limited honour available and establish it for their ingroup.[275] Since both collectivism and intergroup competition are important preconditions for using SIT as an analytic framework, and considering that ancient Mediterranean texts are written within this context and composed for communities forging a common ingroup identity, SIT is a valid exploratory model.

While group thriving depends on fostering a cohesive, positive social identity, social identity is better understood as fluid rather than static and it exists on multiple levels. For example, both individuals and groups can emphasize one facet of their identity while situationally suppressing others. Group identities are also not impermeable, and individuals can move between and within social groups. While phrases like "group behaviour" may perpetuate the thought that all group members behave uniformly, most groups are not that monolithic. Within any group there are also intragroup dynamics which allow for the possibility of smaller sub-groups, hierarchal structures, and individual expression.

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[274] S. Hinkle and R. Brown, "Intergroup Comparison and Social Identity: Some Links and Lacunae," in *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, ed. D. Abrams and M.A. Hogg (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), 48-70; Esler, *Galatians*, 46; Baker, "Social Identity Theory," 133.

[275] Esler, *Galatians*, 47-48; Baker, "Social Identity Theory," 133.

Because most evaluative statements are comparative in nature, positive social identity is generally achieved by rating one group against others. This is referred to as social competition. Groups naturally "compete" against one another to establish their group identity as correct or superior. In the ancient world, where what was good and honourable was also finite, the idea of social competition takes on new meaning since groups would literally compete to achieve positive group identity.

While the term competition may seem pejorative, competition more neutrally refers to differences in the objectives between separate groups. Indeed, intergroup conflict and/or competition can be overcome by fostering a superordinate identity between two or more groups. This theory, known as Common Ingroup Identity Theory, argues that groups or subgroups can be brought together through a high-level commonality and view one another as members of the same group while maintaining some elements of their subgroup or ingroup identity. [276] In this instance, each group (or individuals within each group) still recognize demarcation between groups but groups choose to suppress competition in favour of unity.[277] Essentially, recategorized groups come together to forge a positive identity as a larger ingroup while simultaneously maintaining their salient differentiating features.

Studies on the group recategorization often focus on the essential role leaders play within this process and their role in speaking with the ingroup with which they primarily identify/lead. The leader of an ingroup must establish themselves as properly belonging within that ingroup, must

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[276] See S.L. Gaertner et.al., "The Common Ingroup Identity Model for Reducing Intergroup Bias: Progress and Challenges," in *Social Identity Processes: Trends in Theory and Research*, ed. D. Capozza and R. Brown (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 133-48; Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2003*),* 29-33.

[277] For example, all ethnic identifications can be encapsulated under the broader categorization of "human." Human becomes the superordinate identity.

make it clear what makes the ingroup distinct and affirm this unique identity as positive, all the while remaining persuasive that a positive, larger superordinate group exists. When leaders can inspire group members to move towards the adoption of a superordinate identity, the possibility of dialogue, negotiation, argument, and persuasion between groups exists and thus a positive identity construction for everyone in this larger group. [278]

5.2 Boundaries and Rituals in Social Identity Construction

In recent years, social scientists have devoted increasing attention towards social boundary construction and its natural affinity with SIT. Social boundaries (sometimes called symbolic boundaries), be they conceptual or concrete, are distinctions made by members of a group to categorize those things which should belong within the group while excluding those that should remain outside.[279] Social boundaries are often a way that groups order and construct social cohesion and, in SIT specifically, they are the identity markers that distinguish ingroup and outgroup. Often binary in structure, social boundaries are the normalized, tangible behavioural outputs that delineate that which is "in" versus what is "out."

Boundary formation is an essential part of forming a collective group identity and maintenance of these boundaries is of paramount importance for preserving group cohesion. Humans draw boundaries between their ingroup and others because it provides a heightened sense of belonging and order. As such, social boundaries effectively promote a sense of unity and solidarity because there is a clear imagining of others who do not share the core values or

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[278] Baker, "Social Identity Theory," 131-32; Esler, *Conflict and Identity,* 30-39.
[279] Kwanghyun Cho, Ernest Van Eck, and Cas Wepener, "Paul's Community Formation in 1 Thessalonians: The Creation of Symbolic Boundaries," *HvTSt* 71, no. 1 (2015): 1; Esler, *Galatians*, 45.

characteristics of the ingroup.[280] Boundary crossing or boundary dismantling can thus be seen as dangerous or threatening.[281] If boundaries are stretched in one way or another, the shape of the group experience may be altered and this can be uncomfortable for people who attach positive identity within the group experience.

Social boundaries are not impenetrable, however. Groups actively form collective identities through interaction with other groups; ingroups and outgroups live, work, trade, and socialize with one another. Ingroup members also exist in multiple (other) groups at any one time. Permeability, however, does not erase the fact that group boundaries are generally enforced and maintained by ingroup members to protect social cohesion.[282]

Because ingroup identity requires boundaries from those outside of the group, there must be some means of boundary crossing that will allow groups to grow and flourish with new members. These often take the form of initiation rites which are typically focused around ritual; ceremony is attached to key features which identify ingroup members.[283] Ritual is primarily useful in that it connects new members to those who previously adopted a social boundary.[284] Ritual, however, also sacralizes the boundary markers both within and outside of a group. By virtue of its sacred nature, ritual boundaries are able to act as loci of attraction and power. The insistence of a ritual boundary is a method of both subconscious and conscious control over a

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[280] Cho, "Paul's Community Formation," 2.
[281] Steven C. Barton, "Paul's Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth," *NTS* 32, no. 2 (1986): 227.
[282] Esler, *Galatians*, 79-83; Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1969).
[283] Asano, *Community-Identity Construction*, 49.
[284] Baker, "Social Identity Theory," 131.

group while also providing an allure to outside audiences who may attach prominence or
significance to an exclusive ritual.

5.3 SIT and Galatians: Creating a Positive Identity

Scholars have long argued that Galatians seems to be answering the textually unspoken question
"who are the people of God?"[285] Said another way, Galatians is an epistle about identity and an
ingroup searching for positive identity affirmation. SIT, concerned with social identity, offers a
new lens through which to view this letter and its methodology complements a rhetorical
analysis. After all, if one of Paul's primary concerns is to establish a cohesive identity within a
nascent Christ-following community, his argument is likely targeted to address this concern.
While no one can know with certainty how Paul established the early church in Galatia, the
reader might surmise that this community was formed in part because the Galatians thought that
they too were people of the god of Israel and had entered into the family of God through the
revelation of Christ (3:1-5). While the church was likely encouraged to adopt certain (typically
Jewish) social boundaries – which would have included exclusive worship of Yahweh as well as
the rejection of civic cultic rituals and worship – the congregation was not initially engaging in
the circumcision, a symbolic boundary of the Jewish ingroup.[286]

Yet, according to Paul's epistle, the identity upon which he "birthed" the Galatian church had
been challenged (1:9; 3:1; 5:7). Jewish believers contested Paul's circumcision-free gospel (for
gentiles), instead insisting that it was not possible to be part of the Israel ingroup without
circumcision. Circumcision is, according to SIT verbiage, the sacred, ritualized initiation rite that

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[285] For example, see Keener, *Galatians*, 29-36; Martyn, *Galatians*, 32; Rhoads, "Children of Abraham," 282.
[286] Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission," 643-49.

demarcated the Israel ingroup from the rest of the world, and without this rite the Galatians' identity as people of God was not complete.[287] The Galatians were thus still an outgroup and with this notion is the implication of the Galatians' inferior identity.

Again, we cannot know with certainty how this argument was made to the Galatians, nor which part of Paul's opponents' message was most convincing. In truth, we cannot know that Paul's opponents *were* successful, only that Paul urgently wrote to the Galatians fearful that they were. However, one should not underestimate how attractive the agitators' message would have been to a new and possibly fledgling Christ-community. In the ancient Mediterranean world, the longevity of a religious tradition spoke to its legitimacy. Judaism's long history, as well as its exclusivity, piqued the interest of gentiles. Jews were exempt from participating in Roman civic cult worship and those rights would likely not extend to Christ-followers even though these gentiles were told to refrain from such festivities. Membership in the Jewish ingroup would normalize the (former) gentiles' status and would give them an established community in which to participate, one that had well-known beliefs, rituals, and requirements.[288] Judaism successfully maintained a demarcated ingroup identity from the gentile world for centuries, proving that their social boundaries worked for group identity maintenance.[289] All of this was available to Christ-followers if they would accept circumcision and enter into the more dominant Jewish ingroup. Indeed, Paul's opponents seem to present circumcision as the solution to the Galatians' problem, even though the problem remains elusive to readers.[290]

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[287] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 97, 167; Keener, *Galatians*, 33. See also sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3.
[288] For the potential attraction of Judaism, see Keener, *Galatians*, 33-37; Punt, "Hermeneutics in Identity Formation," 3.
[289] Esler, *Galatians*, 77-84.
[290] Esler, *Galatians*, 73.

It is also worth noting that the Galatians may not have perceived themselves to be in competition with the Jewish outgroup.[291] They may have naturally assumed that they were already part of the people of God, based on Paul's initial proclamation of the gospel. If circumcision was the only piece missing to this identity, as Paul's opponents may have claimed, circumcision would be seen as the next logical step for the Galatian congregations. Thus, the Galatian churches pursued circumcision because of both the positive group identification it represented and because it was simply their final initiation into the people of God.

Interestingly, SIT also helps to examine the motives and actions of Paul's opponents encouraging the gentiles to pursue circumcision. By insisting that gentiles inherit the status of the Abrahamic lineage without circumcision, Paul effectively challenged both the status quo and the sacred, ritual boundaries of a very ordered and established group. Gentiles claiming a new identity as people of God without adhering to what had, for thousands of years, marked those very people, would have likely led to tension, animosity, and conflict between the two groups.[292] Jews, either within or entering Galatia, may have felt that their own social identity was at risk with these new gentile "members" of Israel forcibly attempting to establish new terms for Jewish group identity. It is also very likely that gentiles were becoming a majority within the early church movement. This new "subgroup" had the potential of becoming increasingly powerful and might further challenge Jewish social boundaries and thus social identity. This may explain why Paul's opponents attempted to fold the gentiles into the existing Jewish requirements of belonging to Israel. They were not trying to prohibit new members but rather wanted to re-

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[291] Ascough, *The Formation of Pauline Churches*, 27.
[292] Punt, "Hermeneutics in Identity Formation," 1, 6.

establish control over the group identity through the affirmation of ritual requirements. Paul's

opponents used their status as a more dominant outgroup with an already existing positively

established identity to attract gentiles into Judaism.[293]

While Paul's opponents challenged Paul's circumcision-free gospel, readers must remember

that Paul also had to contend with the dominant gentile world when constructing the ingroup

identity of the gentile-believers. The Galatian church was relatively new and church members

likely still maintained residual affiliations with former groups.[294] Roman civic cult practices

saturated everyday life, and while Jews were exempt from participation, Christ-followers were

likely not included within that exemption (even though they considered themselves worshippers

of the same god).[295] Also, according to Paul, the issue of circumcision is particularly problematic

in regards to the Galatian congregation and this may be, in part, because of the Mother Goddess'

presence and the similarities circumcision drew to the *galli's* ritual castration. Elliott argues that

Paul's primary concern with Galatian circumcision was the parallels it drew to the gentile-

believers' former cult worship.[296] Paul wanted to distance the congregation from the cult practice

and viewed circumcision as a threat to this process. Indeed, when Paul's gentile audience turned

towards circumcision after being baptized in Christ, Paul suggests that they are embracing an

identity that is indistinguishable from the cultic religion in which they were born.[297] Paul's fear

for the Galatian church's identity is thus twofold. On one hand, adopting circumcision and

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[293] Esler, (*Galatians*, 72) argues that the Jewish identity would have been both powerful and attractive to those who wanted to align themselves with the god of Israel.

[294] Esler, *Galatians*, 91.

[295] For gentile-believers' refusal to engage in Roman civic cult worship, see Fredriksen, "Why Should a 'Law-Free' Mission," 642-47.

[296] Elliott's entire work is concerned with this question. For the specific reference to her thesis see Elliott, *Cutting Too Close*, 14.

[297] Martyn, *Galatians*, 39.

becoming ethnic Jews would mean the gentiles would no longer identify with the church and instead identify with Judaism and the synagogue. This would abolish the presence of gentile-believers which, as I have already mentioned, was a theological necessity for Paul's understanding of the significance of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, if the Galatian congregation cannot forge an identity separate from the gentile (pagan) world, they may re-assimilate into the cult world from which they came.[298] Paul believes that both are derogations from the gospel he preached and both threaten the will of God.

Paul's challenge is both a theological and a social identity issue. Theologically, Paul must communicate a particular understanding of God's plan for humanity and how the Galatians should align themselves with the will of God while retaining their status as gentiles. Socially, Paul must convince the Galatians of their own positive identity construction, distinct from both the Jewish outgroup that insists upon circumcision as well as from the dominant gentile (pagan) world.[299] Paul must also do this in a way that maintains the internal cohesion of this Christ-believing ingroup and honours the church's original formation. Seeing the Galatians' social context framed in this way, Paul's rhetoric takes on new dimensions. Paul is building a positive identity for the Galatian believers, essentially contending that a more positive identity is found within the circumcision-free gospel Paul proclaimed.

Readers should appreciate Paul's use of social language and the social function of his argument. Indeed, Paul roots his *probatio* in the Israel familial story, bringing the Galatians into

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[298] Esler, *Galatians*, 51.
[299] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 167-68; Esler, *Galatians* 39-40. While not rooted in social identity theory, Longenecker (*Galatians*, cxvii) notes that "the dissociation of the Galatians ('you') from the Judaizers ('they') is an important feature in the structure of the argument."

the Abrahamic family, and thus the family of God, through faith which breeds righteousness (3:6-14). While Paul's opponents tout circumcision as the necessary marker for belonging to the family of God ingroup (Gal 5:11-12), Paul challenges this idea and the notion that the family of God belongs exclusively to one ingroup identity. Instead, Paul instructs the Galatian converts to construct their own social world together, based upon the gospel he first proclaimed, where they identify as heirs to the Abrahamic line but without the Jewish requirement of circumcision.[300] Instead of physical social boundaries, Christ becomes the chief identity marker and unifying factor of the gentiles who experience spiritual transformation by faith.[301] However, Paul does not leave this gentile community without rituals or symbolic boundaries to build ingroup cohesion and create social boundaries. Gentiles participate in new rituals which mark the death and resurrection of the Christ and the transformative power of these events.[302] Paul also affirms that physical social identity markers that divide groups from one another, like slave and free, male and female, Jew and gentile (Gal 3:28), are removed in favour of a unified identity as members of the family of God in Christ.[303]

And yet, using Gal 3:28 as an example of Paul's reasoning, the Galatian epistle also exposes Paul's attempts at social recategorization in line with Common Ingroup Identity Theory (see above). While Paul affirms the unique ingroup identity of gentile-believers throughout the epistle, Paul also attempts to align the gentile ingroup under the superordinate identity of "people

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[300] Baron, "Paul's Sense of Place," 229. While Baron's argument is largely focused on the church of Corinth, his early remarks and exploration of community boundaries are applicable to any Pauline audience.

[301] Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 36.

[302] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 168. While Meeks does not name the rituals he is referencing, it is logical to assume he is referring to the Lord's Supper and Baptism.

[303] Punt, "Hermeneutics in Identity Formation," 5.

of God" *along with* Jewish believers.[304] Indeed, Paul cannot demarcate gentile and Jewish believers too stringently because he must maintain that both are part of the family of God which builds a natural bridge between them.

Recalling the features of social recategorization, Paul's epistle bears many of the signs of this process. Paul first establishes that while he is/was a zealot Jew (1:13-14), Christ has been formed and revealed through him (1:15-16) and he, like gentiles, is justified by faith (2:15-16). Paul identifies that he belongs to the gentile ingroup, not only because he was called to go to them but because Christ is also an identity marker for Paul. Paul affirms the unique position of gentiles and suggests that, for gentiles, the law will be a curse that leads to enslavement (Gal 3:10-13; 5:1-2) and that Christ's work was meant to release gentiles from the requirement of the law (5:1-4). Righteousness rooted in faith is a superior social identity for gentiles. Yet, Paul also reminds his audience that Jews and gentiles do share a higher-level commonality with one another as children of God through spiritual descent from Abraham. Indeed, the "Israel of God" (6:16) becomes the final social group that is named within the epistle and is comprised of both Jewish and gentile members. The reminder of the superordinate identity allows Paul to draw the gentiles into the Abrahamic family line but also further delineates the gentile-believers from the rest of the gentile world. Paul's goal was not to permanently separate Jewish and gentile ingroups, but rather to bring them together. Any demarcation between the two groups was a theological anomaly and thus only a temporary necessity.[305]

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[304] Throughout history, many Christians have used Gal 3 and 4 as justification for anti-Semitism. Readers should remember that Paul's conflict is with "the agitators" who have infiltrated the Galatian congregations insisting that gentiles become circumcised. This does not necessitate that Paul is undercutting circumcision as Jewish rite (for Jews) or that Paul opposes Judaism. The inclusion of gentiles *into* Israel, as gentiles, was a theological imperative for Paul. See Fredriksen, "Why a 'Law-Free' Mission," 641-51; Keener, *Galatians*, 29-32.

[305] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 168.

When Paul comes to his *probatio* he argues that righteousness, Abrahamic descent, and an identity as children of God already belong to the Galatians (Gal 3). The Galatians share a cohesive group identity predicated on their status as children of God in Christ through the Spirit, and their kinship (fictive in this case) with one another vis-à-vis their adopted patriarch and matriarch: Abraham and Sarah.[306]

5.4 Maternal Imagery and Group Identity

I mentioned earlier that Paul had both a theological and social identity challenge with the Galatian church. I want to turn to how Paul meets his challenge by providing both a theological and social identity answer through his use of maternal imagery. Paul's maternal allusions confirm a positive social identity construction for the gentiles through an affirmation of their identity within the family of God.

Throughout Gal 3 and 4, Paul engages his audience in a retelling of the Abrahamic familial narrative. Abraham, introduced at the start of Gal 3, is the basis from which the Galatian ingroup identity takes root. Paul's audience would already know that Abrahamic descent is a vital feature to being people of Yahweh and Paul establishes that a connection to this patriarch is available to gentiles through faith (Gal 3:6-14).[307] Notice, however, that the virtues and images associated with Abraham throughout Gal 3 - faithfulness, righteousness, blessedness, inheritance, and promise - are images that Paul returns to in his allegory (Gal 4:21-31) and associates with the free mother and her children.

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[306] Esler, *Galatians*, 38.
[307] Asano (*Community-Identity Construction*, 166) argues that common ancestry would be a highly valued positive identity construction for an emerging community.

By using Israel's foundational patriarch at the beginning of his central argument, Paul achieves a key objective: he reminds his audience that they share an ingroup identity with one another and a superordinate identity with Jews. Abraham remains a static figure throughout Paul's argument and a vital ancestral figure for both Jews and gentile-believers. Assumed common ancestry, important for the Jewish faith, would have been a potent symbol to foster superordinate group cohesion and a highly positive identity construction for the Galatians.[308] While Paul makes it clear that circumcision and the law are not options for gentiles, Abrahamic descent was still a pivotal piece of the gentiles' story. Gentiles enter into a shared identity history with Jews who remain descendants of the Abrahamic line.

While Paul uses Gal 3 to establish both ingroup and superordinate characteristics that gentiles possess, Paul then uses Gal 4 to affirm the church's demarcation from both the dominant Jewish outgroup and from the other pagan gentiles. Paul reminds his audience that they must not be enslaved by either the Jewish or pagan observance of "special days and months and seasons and years" (4:10).[309] While Paul's opponents zealously insist circumcision is good for the new believers, Paul clarifies that it is not actually good for gentiles (4:17-18) and therefore must not be part of the Galatians' identity. Instead, the Galatians must remember that Paul is their mother, that he birthed the congregation by the will of God the Father, and that Christ's formation is the *telos* of Paul's pains (4:19). Christ formed within the Galatians is the positive identity construction the Galatians must pursue.

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[308] Asano, *Community-Identity Construction*, 155.

[309] There is significant interpretive variance as to what "special" observances Gal 4:10 specifically references. Some scholars argue that this is a reference to the Galatians' adoption of Jewish rites and celebrations along with circumcision. Others contend that Paul is reminding the Galatians of their former cultic worship. I propose that Paul could be employing a double meaning within the verse to encapsulate both. Paul utilizes double meanings for law and flesh (see chapter 4.3.2) and he may be doing the same thing here.

Paul's allegory then closes out the *probatio*, and here Paul returns to rereading, that is recreating and recomposing, Israel's history through the Abrahamic line. However, Paul tells the ancestral narrative through the mothers.[310] While promise, inheritance, and freedom are linked to Abraham in Gal 3, those identity features are connected to the free woman in Gal 4 – an allusion to both Sarah and Paul (see chapter 4) – and her child(ren). Paul, as the Galatians' mother, uses motherhood to further strengthen the identity of the Galatians as they become connected to the free mother through their birth.[311] Examining the allegory through the lens of SIT, Paul's antithetical maternal comparison provides gentiles the positive identity construction of heirs to the Abrahamic line through the promise, while demarcating them against an identity construction connected to the law-slave-flesh theme. The Galatians are affirmed as possessing a positive and authentic identity, connected to the righteousness of Abraham, and borne as children born of the promise, all of which is conferred through their mother (Paul).

This positive identity as inheritors of the promise is contrasted against children born through the flesh, an allusion to children born of circumcision but also to the Mother Goddess' *galli*. Paul uses the principles of social competition to affirm his ingroup and their positive identity while challenging multiple dominant outgroups. Again, readers must remember that Paul's epistle is intended for gentiles. It would be erroneous to mirror-read Paul's opinions on Judaism as a whole through this allegory. While Paul opposes circumcision *for gentiles*, his opinions on the law and circumcision for Jews remains hidden.

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[310] Punt, "Hermeneutics in Identity Formation," 4. Punt uses the rereading, recomposing, and retelling verbage.
[311] Punt, "Hermeneutics in Identity Formation," 7.

Paul's allegory is rhetorically designed to confirm that the Galatians are heirs by spiritual descent, their status conferred by their free mother (Paul). Put another way, the Galatians' mother (Paul) imparts both a theological and social identity upon the congregation. They are children of the spiritual promise, birthed by the will of God and the action of the free mother (Paul), through the power of the Spirit (4:28-31). While Paul's opponents insist that Israel's members require both a spiritual and physical connection to the line of Abraham, marked by circumcision, Paul insists that the spiritual lineage to Abraham, through Christ, is the true gospel for gentiles.

In the final lines of his *probatio*, Paul uses the words of Sarah to urge the Galatians to "drive out the slave and her child" (Gal 4:30, Gen 21:10). The agitators who pervert Paul's gospel must not be welcome within the Galatian community. While these words may appear harsh - rhetoric often is in nature - what Paul is doing is reinforcing the social boundaries around the gentile-believer ingroup. The Galatians may have a superordinate identity with their Jewish brethren, but the agitators and their gospel of circumcision threaten the Galatians' identity as gentile children of the promise. Circumcision must not be a marker for the gentiles; the only identity they need is that of Christ's formation. In order to see Christ formed among the Galatians, and in order for them to grasp their identity as children of God, a line must be drawn between Paul's opponents and the Galatians. There is no room for compromise. The Galatians must embrace the gospel of Paul (the free mother) and remove those who insist upon circumcision (represented by the slave mother) from their presence.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

In her study on Paul's self-identification as a nursing mother (1 Thess 2:7), Jennifer McNeel encourages other contributors to take up the scholastic mantle and devote more sustained scholarship to understanding each of Paul's maternal images within the their own context.[312] This thesis is an attempt to do just that. Paul's choice of maternal imagery for the Galatian audience was in no way incidental; it was a strategic rhetorical move meant to address a specific audience, in a specific context, and a specific exigence. While it may not have been the only image Paul could have used, it was one that could cohesively and effectively communicate what Paul needed to convey. Through the lens of motherhood, Paul was not only able to affirm the divine birth of this collective people and the hope for Christ's renewed formation within them, but he was also able to reinterpret both Israel's history and future to reveal how gentiles could be incorporated as children of God. The Galatian believers, already possessing the identity of children of God at their first "birth," must now reclaim this identity through adherence to the gospel Paul proclaimed at their inception.

As Paul reaches the crescendo of his *probatio* in Gal 4, the Galatians are left with a choice: which mother will they call their own? Their decision will be evident by the gospel to which they will adhere. The Galatians could accept the gospel of circumcision and effectively become ethnic Jews, putting their trust in physical identity markers to make them children of God. In doing so, however, Paul warns them that they will now have to keep the whole law (Gal 5:2-6) and the law was not designed for them, thus they will be enslaved by it. Such fleshly rituals are

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[312] McNeel, *Paul as Infant*, 7.

indistinguishable from the cultic life they left to follow after Christ. Or, Paul has convinced the Galatians that he is their true mother, who birthed them at the commissioning of God and who longs to see Christ formed within them as evidence of their faith. The reader is, of course, left unaware of which choice the Galatians made. We know much more about the ingenuity of Paul's argument than about the actual effectiveness of it.[313]

Paul's letter to the Galatians is centred around this notion of identity and a questioning of who are the people of God. Paul chose mother language because he hoped to quiet the internal identity doubts that he believed plagued the Galatians. Paul had to communicate complex, abstract concepts in ways that could reach his audience in both cognitive and affective ways, and motherhood was Paul's vehicle for the Galatians. I think that these deep questions around religious identity and "who are the people of God" still remain with us today, and while I appreciate Paul's rhetorical skill in drawing stark lines between groups to force his audience to make a decision about who they are, I do not know that language of "this or that," "in or out," or "right or wrong" are argumentative lines that we should necessarily emulate today.

There is no shortage of implications and tangential work that could build upon this study, but there are two topics specifically which I wish I could have explored further had the scope of the project allowed it. The first I have just alluded to and that is the polarizing nature (and consequences) of starkly demarcated language throughout biblical texts. Many of Paul's writings, and Galatians more than most, have been used throughout history as formative texts that contribute to dominant constructions of self versus "the other," Christians versus Jews, same versus opposite, ally versus enemy, and so on. Pauline letters have historically (and even today)

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[313] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 166.

been used to propagate the idea of a superior Christian identity and create hierarchies that divide

and favour insiders over outsiders and orthodoxy over "heresy."[314] While I only had the space to

briefly address anti-Jewish readings of Galatians, understanding Paul's context, purpose, and the

nature of ancient rhetoric is a key ingredient for challenging dangerous and exclusive readings of

texts that were not written with modern audiences in mind. I agree with Brigitte Kahl, who

challenges readers to re-imagine critically biblical texts to "recover the precious seeds of an

alternative meaning that never took root within the dominant history of occidental Pauline

interpretation."[315] This critical reimagining requires readers to turn "scripture" against

"tradition," examining the text itself over its normative received reading. Paul's letters deserve

such attention.

The second topic would be a deeper dive into the potential implications of Paul self-

identifying as a mother. Recent scholarship within Pauline studies claims Paul's subversion of

masculine norms was a challenge to Hellenistic and Roman discourses of masculinity. Paul

highlights his own "misperformance" of masculine ideas to highlight the destabilization Christ

exhorts against the cultural ideals of his time. [316] Certainly, Paul's maternal identification in Gal

4:19 could be considered a "misperformance" of masculinity. While I have argued that Paul's

maternal self-identification serves a rhetorical purpose within the context it is used, what are

alternative rhetorical and non-rhetorical implications of using this language, particularly when

written to a people group ruled within an imperial context? Further investigations on men using

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[314] Kahl (*Galatians Re-imagined*, 1-5) spends the first part of her introduction moving through these ideas.
[315] Kahl, *Galatians Re-imagined*, 4.
[316] Brian J. Robinson, *Being Subordinate Men: Paul's Rhetoric of Gender and Power in 1 Corinthians* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), 1-2.

female language within biblical texts to challenge cultural normativity is a topic that could

continually unearth new conclusions and substantively add to the ongoing conversation on the

interplay between gender and language.

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