

WERE THE OPPONENTS AT PHILIPPI NECESSARILY JEWISH?

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Paul's allusion in Philippians to a group or groups of opponents has resulted in a myriad of suggestions. "One of the most hotly debated issues in the contemporary study of Philippians is that of the nature and identity of the opponents to whom Paul alludes in his letter."¹ Some suggest the opponents (or at least one group of opponents) were Jews who invaded Philippi in order to "reconvert" Gentile Christians.² Most writers, however, contend they were Jewish Christian missionaries whose mission was to influence Gentile Christians to adopt Jewish rituals.³ Yet should

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¹ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 26–27. Similar sentiments are expressed by Fee, who observed that "the secondary literature on this issue is second only to the huge output on 2:6–11" (Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 7).

² Beare refers to them as "Jewish propagandists" (F. W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries [New York: Harper, 1959], 3–4, 100–102). Peter Richardson suggests they were Jews from Thessalonica (*Israel in the Apostolic Church* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969], 111–17). The Jews in Acts, however, are generally depicted as persecuting Christians, not reconverting or proselytizing them, especially in Thessalonica (17:5–9; cf. 9:1–3). Yet this is not to deny Jewish "missionary" activity. The increase of the Jewish population seems to argue that some form of proselytizing was taking place (Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1952], 1:370–72). Also see A. F. J. Klijn, "Paul's Opponents in Philippians iii," *Novum Testamentum* 7 (1965): 278–84; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 124–26, 153; and Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1983), xlv–xlvii, 122–23.

³ Ellis refers to them as "a segment of the ritually strict *Hebraioi* in the Jerusalem Church [who] with variations in nuance continued to post . . . a settled and persistent 'other' gospel" (Earle E. Ellis, "Paul and His Opponents," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults*, ed. Jacob Neusner [Leiden: Brill, 1975], 264–98, esp. 298; 280–81, 291–92, 298). Also see R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippi-*

these opponents—who are typically called “Judaizers”—be limited to Jewish Christians or perhaps even non-Christian Jewish “missionaries”? Is it possible that they were merely local Gentiles who sympathized with and practiced Judaistic rituals?

THE PEOPLE OF PHILIPPI

Located about ten miles from the Aegean Sea on the eastern end of the *Via Egnatia*, Philippi is identified as a Macedonian city (*Μακεδονίας πόλις*, Acts 16:12). Philippi, however, was at one time a Greek settlement known as Krenides (from *κρηνήνδε*, “spring”) and under Thracian control.⁴ In his quest to strengthen Macedonia’s situation in the east, Philip II (Alexander the Great’s father) managed to seize control of the flourishing Greek gold-mining town of Krenides. After he drove the Thracian ruler Ketriporis from the city, Philip promptly repopulated Krenides with Macedonians, renamed the city Philippi, and incorporated the city into his ever-growing Macedonian state in 356 B.C.⁵ Thus Philippi’s earliest history indicates that it was a Greek city-state, populated by Greeks.⁶

ans (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 828–30; Jean-François Collange, *L'épître de saint Paul aux Philippiens*, Commentaire du Nouveau Testament (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1973), 28–30, 110; O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 33; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 3–5, 168–71; Mikael Tellbe, “The Sociological Factors behind Philippians 3:1–11 and the Conflict at Philippi,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 55 (1994): 97–121; and Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 9, 293–97.

⁴ Krenides was founded as a result of Greece’s expansion activities during the sixth century B.C. Paros initially colonized the large island of Thasos, an island in the north Aegean Sea, which in turn secured gold and silver settlements on the mainland. These mainland settlements, however, were not without struggles against the warlike Thracians. Krenides was one such settlement (Strabo, *Geography* 7. 34; Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 16. 3. 7; Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger, eds., *Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 of *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988], 1:215; Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece*, 2d ed. [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993], 102–23, esp. 115–17).

⁵ Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 16. 8. 6–7. When Berisades, the Thracian ruler of the Pangaion mining area, died, his children divided their father’s kingdom among themselves. Ketriporis received the Greek gold-mining town of Krenides. However, a dispute arose between Ketriporis and the people of Krenides. Errington describes how “Philip executed his program of aid for Krenides with his usual uncompromising persistence” (R. Malcolm Errington, *A History of Macedonia* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990], 45–48; cf. Paul Collart, *Philippes, ville de Macédoine depuis ses origines jusqu' à la fin de l'époque romaine* [Paris: de Boccord, 1937], 157–60).

⁶ Murray has suggested that Greeks may have intermarried with Thracians during their early expansion activities on Thasos. After the colony was established, however, the practice was discouraged or prohibited (Murray, *Early Greece*, 115). If this is true, it may explain Thracian carvings of the so-called Thracian Horse-

Although Philippi was part of the Macedonia state for nearly 190 years, Rome's aggressive activities in the east eventually terminated Macedonia's autonomy. After the battle of Pydna (Third Macedonian War) in 168 B.C., Rome dismantled the Macedonian state and eventually annexed Macedonia as a Roman province in 148 B.C.⁷ With its gold mines exhausted, Philippi's population declined to a small Greek settlement. However, because of circumstances in Rome, Philippi eventually rose to a place of prominence as a Roman city. Octavian and Antony, who desired to avenge the assassination of Julius Caesar (on March 15, 44 B.C.), pursued and defeated Cassius and Brutus (Julius Caesar's assassins) on the plains of Philippi in 42 B.C.⁸ As a result of this victory, Octavian refounded Philippi as a military colony, repopulated it with retired veterans, and named it *Colonia Victrix Philippensium*. After his defeat of Antony at Actium in 31 B.C., Octavian further colonized Philippi with veterans, this time discharged veterans from Antony's army, and renamed the city *Colonia Julia Philippensium*. In 27 B.C. when Octavian was designated Augustus, he once again lengthened Philippi's name—*Colonia Augusta Julia Philippensium*. He also bestowed upon the people of Philippi Roman citizenship.⁹ Thus Octavian (Augustus)

man (a Horseman/Hero cult comparable to Asklepios, a Greco-Roman healing god) on the acropolis—a hill near Philippi that served as an open-air shrine for pagan cults. Abrahamsen suggests that Thrace "deeply influenced Philippi's religious development" (Valerie Abrahamsen, "Christianity and the Rock Reliefs at Philippi," *Biblical Archaeologist* 51 [March 1988]: 46–56). Perhaps this influence began on Thasos and was transported to Krenides when Thasian Greeks expanded to the mainland. Regardless of these archaeological findings, Philippi was a Greek-speaking, Greek-populated, Greek-cultured city-state.

⁷ Errington, *A History of Macedonia*, 216–17; and Pliny, *Natural History* 4. 10. 39. Although Macedonia functioned as an independent Greek state after the Second Macedonian War, the Battle of Cynoscephalae in 197 B.C. led to Macedonia becoming a Roman province. Errington contends, "The external spheres of dominion and influence that had turned Macedonia into a great power had been abolished, and the Romans took care that they were never reestablished" (Errington, *A History of Macedonia*, 204).

⁸ Plutarch, *Lives* 6. 38. 1–52. 5; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 47. 42. 1–49. 4; and Collart, *Philippes*, 191–219.

⁹ Julius Caesar and Octavian (Augustus) are credited with establishing most of the military colonies for veterans and civilian settlers. Paul visited and established churches in five such military colonies: Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13–50), Lystra (14:4–20), and Troas in Asia Minor (16:8–11; 20:6–12; 2 Tim. 4:13); Corinth in Achaia (Acts 18:1–18); and Philippi in Macedonia (16:11–40). See A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 176–78. During New Testament times Roman citizenship outside of Rome was rare. Even Caracalla's extended Roman citizenship in A.D. 212 was limited to male free (nonslave) people (Chris Scarre, *Chronicles of the Roman Emperors: The Reign-by-Reign Record of the Rulers of Imperial Rome* [London: Thames & Hudson, 1995], 136–46, esp. 146). For archaeological discussions see Col-

transformed the ancient Greek city-state Philippi into a Roman municipality with significant rights and privileges granted only to Roman citizens (i.e., it possessed *lex Italicum*). In essence Philippi was a Greco-Roman city with clout.

By the time Paul came to Philippi in A.D. 50/51 the city was populated by both Greeks and Romans. In fact the few people Scripture specifically mentions in connection with the Philippian church had Greek (Lydia, Acts 16:14–15; Euodia and Syntyche, Phil. 4:2) and Roman (Clement, Phil. 4:2) names. Although the “frequent theme of Acts,” might support Schwartz’s claim that “Paul’s accusers in Philippi are Jewish not Gentile,”¹⁰ Acts clearly indicates that no significant Jewish population existed in Philippi. When Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke arrived at Philippi, they went outside the city gate to the Gangites River, where they expected to find a “place of prayer” (*προσευχή*, Acts 16:13a).¹¹ Traditionally ten men are needed to establish a synagogue (*Pirke Abot* 3.7). Philippi’s Jewish population, however, seems to have been unique in that it consisted only of women; Luke wrote that he and the others spoke “to the women who had assembled” at the place of prayer (16:13b). Thus the Jewish population at Philippi was not only scanty in number,¹² but also it seems

lart, *Philippes*, 240–41; and Marcus N. Todd, “Notes on Two Published Inscriptions,” *Annual of the British School at Athens* 23 (1918–19): 94–97.

¹⁰ Schwartz believes the accusers in Acts 16:20–21 were Jewish. He cites three reasons in support of this. (1) “Acts frequently shows born Jews, who are now Christians, practicing and teaching non-Jewish practices (and beliefs)—and at times attacked by Jews for doing so” (Acts 4:1–3; 5:17–18; 6:8–14; 7:52, 57–58; 8:1–4; 9:1–2, 23; 12:3; 13:6–8, 45, 50; 14:19; 17:5, 13; 18:6, 12; 19:9; 20:3; 21:11, 27; 22:22; 23:12–15, 30; 28:19). (2) “Conversion to Christianity was not forbidden by law until the mid-second century, well after both the incident and the composition of Acts.” (3) Paul and Silas were charged with teaching Christianity, not Judaism (1 Thess. 2:2). Consequently Schwartz suggests translating Acts 16:20–21 in the following manner: “And they brought them to the magistrates, saying: ‘Although they are Jews (*Ἰουδαῖοι ὑπάρχοντες*, concessive ptc), these men are upsetting our city for (*καί*) they are teaching practices which are unlawful for us (i.e., Jews) to accept or do, being Romans” (Daniel R. Schwartz, “The Accusation and the Accusers at Philippi,” *Biblica* 65 [1984]: 357–63). Although Schwartz’s rendering of Acts 16:20–21 is grammatically possible, the historical and immediate context does not support his translation. In addition Gentile insurrection against Paul in Philippi is not an isolated event in Acts, as Schwartz suggests. Gentile insurrection occurred in Ephesus (16:23–34) and insulting Gentile reaction against Paul occurred in Athens (17:18, 32).

¹¹ Although “place of prayer” (*προσευχή*) can mean a synagogue, Conzelmann contends that “it is strange that the author then says *ὅν ἐνομιζομεν*, ‘where we supposed there was a place of prayer.’ It is even stranger,” he continues, “that only women were there” (Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, Hermeneia [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 130).

¹² “To the scanty numbers and feeble influence of the Jews,” Lightfoot believes, “we may perhaps in some degree ascribe the unswerving allegiance of this church to

to have been composed exclusively of women. Hence no synagogue or large population of Jews existed in Philippi.

Before Paul's visit, Philippi was composed of Greek and Roman Gentiles, with some Jewish women, and at least one woman, Lydia, who was a God-fearer or "worshiper of God" (*σεβομένη του θεού*, v. 14). Of course the lack of a Jewish synagogue, the presence of a small Jewish population, or the mention of only Gentile conversions in Acts 16 does not eliminate the possibility that Paul's opponents there were Jewish. Nevertheless it helps to know that historical reconstructions are necessary to support Jewish ethnicity of the opponents typically referred to as Judaizers. Two reconstructions are noted.

One reconstruction is that Jewish missionaries followed Paul to either "reconvert" or to further convert Gentile Christians. However, the Jews in Acts are depicted as following Paul not to reconvert or proselytize Christians but to persecute them (14:19; 17:5-9; cf. 9:1-3). In addition Jewish Christian Judaizers, whose supposed mission was to follow Paul and "further convert" Gentile churches, seem to have limited their appearances to Galatia, Corinth, and Philippi. Why? Why not Ephesus and Colossae as well? Also lexical parallels frequently made with Galatians and 2 Corinthians to support the Jewish Judaizer viewpoint¹³ overlook the different tones and emphases that exist between Philippians, Galatians,¹⁴ and 2 Corinthians.¹⁵

the person of the Apostle and to the true principles of the Gospel" (J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* [London: Macmillan, 1913; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953], 53). Also see Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1990), 2:196, n. 4; and F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 331.

¹³ Several plausible arguments have been presented to connect Galatians and 2 Corinthians with Philippians in an attempt to identify Paul's opponents as Jewish. See Ellis, "Paul and His Opponents," 264-98; Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 294-97; and O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 355-56.

¹⁴ According to Lea the teachings of the Jewish Judaizers in Galatia were viewed as "a threat to the spiritual condition of his converts" (6:12) and "if legal obedience were a method of salvation, the death of Jesus was unnecessary (Gal. 2:20-21 [sic])" (Thomas D. Lea, "Unscrambling the Judaizers: Who Were Paul's Opponents?" *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 44 [1994]: 23-29). In Philippians, however, the opposers were not a threat to the spiritual condition of the saints in Philippi nor was their method of salvation based on obedience to the Law. It seems that despite their motivation for preaching Christ, Paul rejoiced in that Christ was being preached (Phil. 1:15-18); mentioning the opponents' eternal doom, Paul encouraged the saints to maintain an unwavering and unified stance against them (1:27-28); and Paul used them as an object lesson to encourage the community to avoid mixing the ritualistic practices of Judaism with Christianity (3:2). Thus differences in tone mitigate against identifying the opponents in Philippians with those in Galatians.

A second historical reconstruction speculates that Paul merely addressed a potential problem. It is argued that Paul, though absent at the time of his writing, prepared the Philippians for a potential conflict with Jewish Christian Judaizers.¹⁶ Yet Paul's letters usually, if not always, addressed real—not potential—problems that required immediate instruction or guidance. Thus with these and similar reconstructions many writers conclude that the opponents in Philippi were mission-minded Jews—whether propagandists, Christian, or Gnostic¹⁷—who followed Paul and sought to supplant his message.

A third historical reconstruction less frequently argued is that the opponents were "Gentile Judaizers."¹⁸ Perhaps a group of professing Christians existed in Philippi who entertained Jewish practices (e.g., circumcision), but they were Gentiles and hence were local Gentile Judaizers. This suggestion raises several questions. How could a Gentile be circumcised or observe Jewish

¹⁵ According to Garland, "the parallels between Phil. 3 and 2 Cor. 11 are by no means precise." After noting the fact that Paul was not on the defensive in Philippians and his apostleship was not in dispute as it was in 2 Corinthians, Garland points out that "there is no hint of circumcision in 2 Corinthians; nor is there any hint in Philippians that the church has fallen prey to intruders (see 2 Cor. 11:4) or that they would even be received sympathetically" (David E. Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians," *Novum Testamentum* 27 [1985]: 141–73, esp. 168, n. 94). In fact 2 Corinthians 10–13 is more of an apologetic against clear accusations. Again differences in tone mitigate against identifying the opponents in Philippi with those in Corinth.

¹⁶ Lightfoot suggests that Paul's flow of thought was "interrupted." "He is informed," Lightfoot supposes, "of some fresh attempt of the Judaizers in the metropolis to thwart and annoy him. What if they should interfere at Philippi as they were doing at Rome, and tamper with the faith and loyalty of his converts? With this thought weighing on his spirit he resumes his letter" (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 69–70). Fee argues, "There is no suggestion in the text that they (i.e., [apparently] Jewish Christians) are actually present in Philippi" (Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 9, 293).

¹⁷ Koester describes them as Jewish Christian Gnostics who preached a message of perfectionism that was part of a "radicalized spiritualistic eschatology" (Helmut Koester, "The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment," *New Testament Studies* 8 [1962]: 317–32; cf. Ralph Martin, *Philippians*, New Century Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 22–34, 124–26). Holladay agrees but refers to their eschatology as an "over-realized eschatology" (Carl R. Holladay, "Paul's Opponents in Philippians 3," *Restoration Quarterly* 12 [1969]: 77–90). Also see Joseph B. Tyson, "Paul's Opponents at Philippi," *Perspectives* 3 (1976): 82–95. For a discussion of the weaknesses of this view see O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 27–29, and Chris L. Mearns, "The Identity of Paul's Opponents at Philippi," *New Testament Studies* (1987): 194–204.

¹⁸ Grayston argues that they were "a Gentile semi-gnostic group who had adopted ritual circumcision in a manner which Paul regarded as outrageous and shameful" (Kenneth Grayston, "The Opponents in Philippians 3," *Expository Times* 97 [March 1986]: 170–72).

practices, and still be considered a Gentile? Antiquity reveals, however, that circumcision is not the sine qua non for Gentile conversion. Nor is the observance of Jewish rituals an indication of one's proselytism. If this is true, then what in antiquity differentiated a Jewish sympathizer or semi-Jew from a Jewish proselyte?

DEFINING JEWISHNESS

The pervasive influence of Judaism throughout the Mediterranean during the first century cannot be ignored easily. On the one hand Josephus lauded Judaism's influence in the Mediterranean area. "The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and [in which] many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed."¹⁹ On the other hand Seneca bemoaned Judaism's impact. "Meanwhile the customs of this accursed race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout all the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors."²⁰ Barclay points out that though they were a minority, the Jews were not powerless.²¹ The Jewish people of antiquity worked the Roman system efficaciously. Thus they practiced Judaism freely and thereby influenced many Gentiles—"God-fearers" (Acts 13:16, 48-50; 14:1; 16:14; 17:4, 17) or Gentile Judaizers. This raises the question of when a person of antiquity lost his Gentile identity and became a Jew.

As a result of his research about conversion and intermarriage in antiquity, Cohen points out that "a gentile who engaged in 'Judaizing' behavior may have been regarded as a Jew by gentiles, but as a gentile by Jews. A gentile who was accepted as a proselyte by one community may not have been so regarded by another."²² Since no two Diaspora environments were alike, Co-

¹⁹ Josephus, *Against Apion* 2. 38. 282.

²⁰ Menahem Stern, *From Herodotus to Plutarch*, vol. 1 of *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1976), 431.

²¹ John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE to 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1996), 276-81, 298-99, 318.

²² Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," *Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 13-33. A similar but converse discussion occurs in John M. G. Barclay's "Levels of Assimilation among Egyptian Jews" and "Levels of As-

hen's latter statements reveal the complexity of the issue. Nevertheless identifying behavior that defined Jewishness in antiquity is relevant to Luke's description of "God-fearers" or "worshippers of God"²³ as well as those whom Paul described in Philippians.

Cohen describes seven forms of "Judaizing" behavior by which a Gentile became less a Gentile and more a Jew.²⁴ Of the seven, the last four are of particular interest for New Testament studies. Cohen's fourth behavior is the practicing of some or many of the rituals of the Jews.²⁵ Gentiles who practiced fasting,

simulation among Diaspora Jews outside Egypt," in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 103–24, 320–35. Barclay's object of study, however, is limited to the Mediterranean Diaspora (i.e., Egypt, Cyrenaica, the province of Syria, the province of Asia, and the city of Rome).

²³ Luke used "worshippers of God" and "God-fearers" interchangeably. He described a group of Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch as "the ones who fear God" (*οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸν θεόν*, 13:16, 26) as well as "worshiping proselytes" (*σεβομένων προσηλύτων*, v. 43), and "worshiping women" (*τὰς σεβομένας γυναῖκας*, v. 50). While some of the Gentile worshippers in Antioch rejected the gospel, a portion accepted it (v. 50). In Thessalonica, however, all the "worshiping Greeks" (*τῶν σεβομένων Ἑλλήνων*, 17:4) seem to have accepted the gospel. Luke also named some individual Gentiles as worshippers of God, including Lydia of Philippi (*σεβομένη τὸν θεόν*, 16:14) and Titius Justus of Corinth (*σεβομένου τὸν θεόν*, 18:7), as well as the Roman centurion who was a "devout and God-fearing man" (*εὐσεβῆς καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν*, 10:2) and a "righteous and God-fearing man" (*ἀνὴρ δίκαιος καὶ φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν*, v. 22). Some, however, question and even deny the existence of such people. Based on the alleged lack of archaeological evidence for Diaspora Judaism, MacLennan and Kraabel "strongly doubt that there ever was a large and broadly based group of gentiles known as God-fearers" (Robert S. MacLennan and A. Thomas Kraabel, "The God-Fearers—A Literary and Theological Invention," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 [September/October 1986]: 46–53). Archaeological finds at Aphrodisia, however, seem to support the existence of God-fearers as does the overwhelming evidence cited by Feldman from classical, Talmudic, and Christian literature, from Philo to Josephus as well as from inscriptions and papyri. See Robert F. Tannenbaum, "Jews and God-fearers in the Holy City of Aphrodisia," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 (September/October 1986): 55–57; Louis Feldman, "The Omnipresence of the God-Fearers," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 (September/October 1986): 58–69; and J. Andrew Overman, "The God-Fearers: Some Neglected Features," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32 (February 1988): 17–26.

²⁴ Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," 14. For a complementary discussion see Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not: How Do You Know a Jew in Antiquity When You See One?" in *Diasporas in Antiquity*, ed. S. J. D. Cohen and E. S. Frerichs (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993): 1–45.

²⁵ The first three forms of behavior Cohen discussed are these: (1) admiring some aspect of Judaism, such as imitating Jewish unanimity, liberal charities, endurance under persecution on behalf of the Law (Josephus, *Against Apion* 2. 39. 283); (2) acknowledging the power of the God of the Jews like Heliodorus (2 Macc. 3:35–39), Alexander the Great (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 7. 4–5. 329–39); (3) benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews—pro-Jewish—like Cyrus the Great (Ezra 1:2–4), Petronius, the Syrian governor who refused to follow Caligula's instruction to erect a statue in the temple (Philo, *Legation to Gaius* 33. 245). One might also add Augustus and Agrippa (Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of*

lighting of lamps, abstention from pork, refraining from work on the Sabbath, attendance at synagogues and public ceremonies, and eating kosher food were perceived by non-Jews as behaving like a Jew.²⁶ For example during the trial of Verres—Rome's chief administrator of Sicily (73–71 B.C.) who was accused of extortion and whom Cicero defended—a public official named Caecilius who had served with Verres was believed to be Judaizing (*ιουδαίζειν*). However, since *verres* is the Roman word for “pig,” Cicero joked about the allegation by saying, “What has a Jew to do with a Verres?”²⁷ Although Cicero's pun may be apocryphal, Plutarch conveyed the notion that if a Gentile observed customs of a Jew, that person was a Judaizer. For the Jew, however, the practice of Jewish rituals merely served as an outward indication that a Gentile was behaving like a Jew.

The fifth “Judaizing” behavior by which a Gentile became less a Gentile and more a Jew was the veneration of the God of the Jews and the denial of pagan gods.²⁸ More specifically, the Gentile's religious ceremony was void of images and his worship was limited to Israel's God. For instance, when the Persian king (in the apocryphal *Bel and the Dragon*) allowed Daniel to destroy Bel, Bel's temple, and the “great dragon which the Babylonians revered,” they charged the king with becoming a Jew: “The king has become a Jew” (*Ιουδαῖος γέγονεν ὁ βασιλεύς*).²⁹ According to

the Jews and Friend of the Romans [Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996], 226–34). For further discussion and examples see Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” 15–20. These first three are not as significant as the last four because they do not imply that the Gentile is “becoming a Jew.”

²⁶ Cohen differentiates between those practices that bring a person into direct contact with the Jewish community (i.e., attendance at synagogues and public ceremonies) and the other rituals that do not (Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” 20–21).

²⁷ Stern, *From Herodotus to Plutarch*, 566. Compare Barclay's discussion in *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 287–91. A similar third-century example is evident in Dio Cassius. Mingled with his discussion of Pompey, Dio Cassius described the country of Judea and the people who had been named Jews. “I do not know how this title [*Ἰουδαῖοι*] came to be given them,” he said, “but it applies also to all the rest of mankind, although of alien race, who [are devoted to] their customs” (Manahem Stern, *From Tacitus to Simplicius*, vol. 2 of *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* [Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1980], 430).

²⁸ Cohen, “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” 21–24.

²⁹ *Bel and the Dragon*, vv. 22, 26, 28; and the Septuagint of Daniel 14:22, 26, 28. Cohen also cites two other early examples. Second Maccabees 9:17 exemplifies Antiochus Epiphanes' depiction of “being a Jew” as linked with proclaiming the power of the God of the Jews, and Josephus depicted Izates as having venerated God before converting to Judaism and practicing Jewish laws (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 20. 2. 3–20. 2. 4. 34–47). Izates' final step of conversion was circumcision.

the allegation of his Gentile subjects, the king's anti-idol behavior earned him the designation "Jew." In fact Philo argued that "the proselyte is one who circumcises not his uncircumcision but his desires and sensual pleasures and the other passions of the soul. . . . But what is the mind of the proselyte if not alienation from belief in many gods and familiarity with the one god and father of all?"³⁰ Taken in isolation, adherence to monotheism seems to have been Philo's emphasis, not the observance of the rituals of Jewish Law (such as circumcision). Although Philo maintained that circumcision was important, turning from idolatry in antiquity was a significant step in behaving less like a Gentile and more like a Jew.

Early Jewish literature emphasizes that Abraham, the archetype of one who turned from idols to worship one God, venerated God apart from observance of Jewish rituals.³¹ Thus Philo's monotheistic sentiment is reinforced. Barclay points out, however, that monotheism "obscures the significance of *cultic practice* in defining acceptable or unacceptable religion."³² What concerned the majority of Jews in the Diaspora "was not nomenclature so much as the worship of beings other than the one, invisible Deity."³³ Despite the importance of worshiping Yahweh alone, that in itself did not make a Gentile a Jew. Thus a Gentile

Josephus, however, also presented another perspective concerning Izates' conversion and circumcision (see note 30).

³⁰ Philo, *Questions and Answers on Exodus* 2.2, as translated in Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," 21. Although "the presence or absence of the foreskin was . . . a wholly superficial phenomenon," Barclay points out that "Philo knew that it counted for a lot more in the eyes of the Jewish community in Alexandria than a [Jew's] profound knowledge of Greek philosophy (*Migratione Abrahami* 89–93)." Philo's concern, however, was a Jew's claim to Judaism based solely on the absence of his foreskin (Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 91). Nevertheless Josephus echoed a comment similar to Philo's when he recorded Ananias telling King Izates that "the king could . . . worship God even without being circumcised if indeed he had fully decided to be a devoted adherent of Judaism, for it was this that counted more than circumcision" (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 20. 2. 4. 41).

³¹ Abraham was said to have destroyed his father's idols (*Jubilees* 12:1–12; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 1:1–8:6; Philo, *On the Virtues* 39. 212–18) and believed in the one true God (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 1. 7. 1. 154–57; Philo, *On the Virtues* 39. 219). Job is also described as one who destroyed his idols to worship the one true God (*Testament of Job* 2:1–5:3). Cohen also identifies rabbinic sources that say "anyone who denies idolatry is called a Jew" (b. *Megilla* 13a). Intertestamental and rabbinic literature vigorously denounces idolatry (*Wisdom of Solomon* 14:8–15:18; b. *Nedarim* 25a). See Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," 22, n. 24.

³² Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 429 (italics his).

³³ *Ibid.* Also see Philo, *Of the Decalogue* 52–65.

who denied idolatry and paid homage only to Yahweh was branded a Jew or Judaizer by Gentiles, but for Jews it merely indicated that he was behaving less like a Gentile and more like a Jew.

Joining the Jewish community without undergoing a religious conversion (i.e., "nominal conversion"), according to Cohen, was the sixth Judaizing behavior that indicated a Gentile was becoming a Jew.³⁴ Two sorts of nominal conversions seem to have existed. One form of nominal conversion occurred in the institution of slavery. When a Gentile male slave was acquired, he was circumcised, and when emancipated, he or she attained the status of a proselyte.³⁵ Although the Jewish community might not grant proselyte status to a slave until after manumission, Gentiles were inclined to view any circumcised individual (slave or free) as a Jew.

The other form of nominal conversion occurred in the institution of marriage. For instance, Genesis 41:45 records that when Pharaoh elevated Joseph to high office, Pharaoh gave Asenath, daughter of the priest of On (LXX: Heliopolis), to be Joseph's wife. That briefly mentioned marriage was "an invitation for an imaginative literary exercise in which themes from Greek romance were combined with a detailed portrayal of Asenath's conversion."³⁶ Hence *Joseph and Asenath* was written (ca. 100 B.C.—A.D. 100). Although Asenath's marriage to Joseph symbolized to Egyptian Gentiles her incorporation into Judaism, the story reveals that during her betrothal period she was merely a nominal convert, not a proselyte, until she turned from dead gods to the living God (11:8; 12:5).³⁷

A man who desired to marry a Jewess generally needed first to be circumcised. On the one hand Azizus king of Emesa was circumcised so that he might marry Drusilla,³⁸ and Polemo king of Cilicia was circumcised so that he might marry Bernice.³⁹ On

³⁴ Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," 24–26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24. Later rabbinic literature seems to emphasize that a slave who performed ritual ablution could acquire emancipation (b. *Yebamot* 46a).

³⁶ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 204.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 204–16, esp. 213 and then 209.

³⁸ Drusilla, the youngest of Herod Agrippa's daughters (Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18. 5. 4. 132; 19. 9. 1. 354), was initially promised to Epiphanes by Agrippa, but Epiphanes was unwilling to convert to Judaism. So Drusilla was given in marriage to Azizus by her brother, Agrippa II (*ibid.*, 20. 7. 1. 139). She is later mentioned in Acts 24:24 as Felix's Jewish wife.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 20. 7. 3. 145–46. Cohen points out, however, that the sincerity of these conversions can be gauged by subsequent events. For instance, when Bernice aban-

the other hand Herod the Great prevented a marriage from taking place between his sister Salome and Syllaeus because Syllaeus refused to be circumcised. Why? Richardson points out that "Syllaeus's ambitions with respect to the Nabatean throne conflicted seriously with identification as a Jew, so he refused."⁴⁰ Thus Gentiles equated circumcision in the case of marriage with being a Jew. Jewish communities, however, considered a Gentile who was willingly circumcised as merely being willing to separate himself from non-Jews and to integrate into Jewish society, practice Jewish rituals, and be involved in the exclusive worship of Yahweh. Although the act was a painfully significant indication of one's openness to becoming a Jew, it reflected a nominal commitment or nominal conversion.

The seventh step to becoming a Jew, according to Cohen, was conversion. Despite the diversity that existed between the various Diaspora communities in the Mediterranean area, Cohen's final "Judaizing" behavior of conversion involved all three of the previous forms: the practice of Jewish laws (category 4), exclusive devotion to Yahweh (category 5), and integration into the Jewish community (category 6).⁴¹ Regardless of what the non-Jewish community concluded, the Jews realized that a Gentile who practiced any one category in isolation was not a proselyte.

While gingerly identifying the behaviors that formed a cohesive identity for all Jews of the Diaspora, Barclay lists four features of the Jewish pattern of life that "marked off Diaspora Jews

done Polemo, he abandoned Judaism (Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," 25). Exceptions to requiring male circumcision before marriage existed. One biblical example may be Timothy's father who married the Jewess Eunice (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5). Many children of Jews in the Diaspora who married Gentiles were assimilated among their respective Gentile communities because Jewish parents failed to raise their children as Jews (Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 107–8).

⁴⁰ Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*, 276, cf. 44. Horace (A.D. 65–68) humorously referred to "the clipped Jews." Like Horace, Persius (A.D. 34–62), Petronius (mid-first century A.D.), and Martial (end of the first century A.D.) were poets who viewed circumcision as an indication of Jewishness. In fact, any circumcised person of Rome was assumed to be a Jew and liable to pay the Jewish tax as war reparations for the revolt of A.D. 66–70. Although circumcision was a mark of Jewishness in the west, it was not in the east because portions of Asia Minor, Syria, Arabia, and Egypt also practiced circumcision (Cohen, "Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not," 12–22). For parallel discussion see Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 310–17.

⁴¹ Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," 26–30. Although Cohen never specifically identifies the fact that he is limiting his discussion to the Mediterranean area, his examples do. As a result, Barclay's discussions closely parallel Cohen's. However, Cohen discusses what it took for a Gentile to become a Jew, whereas Barclay discusses what it took for a Jew to remain a Jew in the Mediterranean Diaspora.

from their neighbors and thus gave definition to Jewish identity.⁴² In reverse order they are (a) the practical distinctions that defined their social identity such as the worship of Yahweh void of idolatry, separatism at meals, male circumcision, Sabbath observance (Cohen's first two categories); (b) social and symbolic resources on which Diaspora Jews consistently drew such community activities, links with the temple and homeland, the Law and Moses, and Jewish Scripture; and (c) most significantly, the ethnic bond, which is the core of Diaspora Judaism (Cohen's third category).⁴³ Barclay observes that "when non-Jews adopted Judaism as proselytes, they underwent such a thorough resocialization as to acquire in effect a new 'ethnicity' in kinship and custom."⁴⁴ Although Cohen and Barclay broach the discussion from different perspectives, they basically agree. A fourth element, according to Barclay, was the social and symbolic resources that drew Diaspora Jews together. Thus if one accepts Cohen's and Barclay's corresponding definitions of Jewishness in the Mediterranean Diaspora, and if no significant Jewish population existed in Philippi, what reliable evidence exists in Philippians that the opponents Paul spoke of were ethnic Jews?

PAUL'S DESCRIPTIONS OF THE OPPONENTS

Most of Paul's references to the opponents in Philippians are vague and nondescript. Thus their identity is concealed. Nevertheless those who opposed (*τῶν ἀντικειμένων*, 1:28) the saints in Philippi may be referred to in four statements in Philippians (1:15-17; 1:27-28; 3:2-3; and 3:18-21).

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-17

One implicit reference to the opponents occurs in Philippians 1:15-17. While informing the Philippians how the gospel was spreading in Rome (assuming a Roman confinement), Paul digressed to review the contrasting motivations of two groups of preachers. He wrote, "Some people [*τινές*] repeatedly preach

⁴² Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 428.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 399-444.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 408. Barclay considers ethnicity to refer to "a combination of kinship and custom, reflecting both shared genealogy and common behavior" (*ibid.*, 403). Tacitus reflected a similar grouping of events. He said distinctive customs of the Jews included eating separately, not being involved in mixed marriages, and circumcision. Converts learned to despise the gods, shed their patristic loyalties, and treat their parents, children, and siblings as of little account (*Histories* 5. 5. 1-2). For a full quotation of Tacitus see Cohen, "Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not," 16-17.

[κηρύσσουσι] Christ out of envy and in opposition to me, but others are preaching Christ out of good will. Motivated by their love [ἐξ ἀγάπης] for me, the latter [οἱ μὲν] proclaim Christ because they know [εἰδότες] that God chose me to defend the gospel. Motivated by self-interest [ἐξ ἐριθείας], the former [οἱ δέ] proclaim Christ because they imagine [οἰόμενοι] it will cause me grief [θλίψιν ἐγγεῖρειν]" (author's paraphrase).⁴⁵

The contrasting motives of these two groups of preachers were based on their relationship with Paul. Some in both Rome and Philippi preached Christ because of their love for Paul. Since Paul viewed the saints at Philippi as "partners" in serving and suffering for the gospel (1:5, 7; 3:10; 4:14),⁴⁶ their motivation was obviously based on their love for him (1:3–7; 2:25; 4:14–18). Those who preached Christ in an attempt to grieve Paul reflected the personal opposition he was facing in Rome—perhaps not unlike the antagonism the church was facing in Philippi (1:27–28). Nevertheless the identity of this group of anti-Pauline preachers is rather nondescript. Nothing in 1:15–17 supports a reference to a group of ethnic Jewish opponents.

Yet regardless of the contrasting motivations of these preachers, whether in Rome or Philippi, Paul was pleased that Christ was being proclaimed (1:18).

PHILIPPIANS 1:27–28

While encouraging the Philippians to live Christ-honoring lives, Paul hoped to hear of their stance against those who opposed them. "Only live your lives [πολιτεύεσθε] in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that [ἵνα] whether I come and see you or I remain absent, I may hear of your circumstances—that you are unified in your stance [στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι] by struggling together for the faith of the gospel, and by not being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. Your confident and unified stance [ἤτις] is a sign to your opponents [αὐτοῖς] concerning their

⁴⁵ For a detailed look at the antithetic parallelism see O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 97–98.

⁴⁶ Although *κοινωνία* can mean participation, impartation, or fellowship, in Philippians 3:10 *κοινωνία* indicates common participation or sharing in suffering (cf. common sharing in Plato, *Republic* 1. 16. 343d; 5. 13. 466c; *Papiri Fiorentini* 1. 41. 5; 1 Cor. 10:16–17). In Philippians 1:5, 7; and 4:14 *κοινωνία*, *συγκοινωνός*, and *συγκοινωνέω* indicate a working participation or partnership for a specific goal—spreading the gospel message (cf. business relationships in Plato, *Republic* 5. 10. 462b; Lev. 6:2 [LXX]; Sirach 42:3; and *Amherst Papyri* 2. 92. 18). Paul referred to Titus as "my partner" (*κοινωνός ἐμός*, 2 Cor. 8:23). For further discussion see Fredrich Hauck, "*κοινωνός* κτλ.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 (1965): 804–9.

inevitable torment and death [*ἀπωλείας*], but for you they are a sign of your salvation, which is from God" (author's paraphrase).

Philippians 1:28 highlights that the church's confident and unified stance was a sign, on the one hand, of salvation to the saints, and, on the other hand, of everlasting torment and death (*ἀπωλεία*, lit. "destruction")⁴⁷ for those who opposed the believers in Philippi. This reference, like the one in 1:15–17, is vague and thus veils the identity of those whom Paul explicitly mentioned here in 1:28 as "those who oppose" (*τῶν ἀντικειμένων*) the saints at Philippi. Nothing in 1:27–28 supports a reference to a group of ethnic Jewish opponents. Although the sort of opposition is not specified, perhaps the conflict concerned their preaching (1:15–17). Whoever they were and whatever the conflict, they were not saints, since they would experience everlasting torment.

PHILIPPIANS 3:2–3

A third contrast occurs in Philippians 3:2–3, in which Paul gave an unmistakable and resolute charge to the church. "Continually consider [*βλέπετε*] those dogs, continually reflect on [*βλέπετε*] those evilworkers, continually give thought to [*βλέπετε*] the mutilators of the flesh. For we are the true people of God [*ἡ περιτομή*], the ones who serve in God's Spirit [*οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες*], and the ones who place their confidence [*καυχώμενοι*] in Christ Jesus and not in Jewish rituals [*οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες*]" (author's paraphrase). The threefold repetition of *βλέπετε*⁴⁸ in the present tense signals perpetual action and also serves as a point of convergence concerning those who opposed the saints at Philippi

⁴⁷ The word *ἀπωλεία* ("destruction") is typically used of those who attempt to thwart God's program (Judas, John 17:12; Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:3) or distort God's message (2 Pet. 2:3; 3:16). The destruction is an everlasting state of torment for ungodly people (2 Pet. 3:7; cf. Matt. 7:13), the Beast, and people whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Rev. 17:8, 11). Thus "destruction" seems to speak of an everlasting state of torment and death for the unregenerate. Since those who opposed the church at Philippi were doomed to destruction, the ones referred to in Philippians 1:28 and 3:19 were probably unregenerate. For other occurrences see Albrecht Oepke, "*ἀπόλλυμι, ἀπόλεια, Ἀπολλύων*," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1 (1964): 394–97.

⁴⁸ After tracing the usage of *βλέπετε* in the New Testament, apostolic fathers, and the Septuagint, Kilpatrick concludes that when *βλέπετε* is used with the accusative it has the meaning "look at" or "consider" (Mark 4:24; 1 Cor. 1:26; 10:18; 2 Cor. 10:7; Col. 4:17). "There is no example," argues Kilpatrick, "of *βλέπειν* used with the accusative demonstrably with the meaning 'beware of'" (G. D. Kilpatrick, "*ΒΛΕΠΕΤΕ*, Philippians 3:2," in *Memoriam Paul Kahle*, ed. M. Black and G. Fohrer [Berlin: Topelmann, 1968], 146–48). This rendering is of particular importance to Philippians 3:2 for two reasons. It supports, as Kilpatrick notes, a smooth connection between 3:1 and 3:2, and it supports the idea that whoever these individuals were, the Philippians were to "consider" them continually.

(1:27–28).⁴⁹ Thus Paul called on the Philippian saints to understand their opponents and thereby to avoid mixing ritualistic practices of Judaism (e.g., circumcision) with Christianity.

The appellations “those dogs” (*τοὺς κύνας*), “those evildoers” (*τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας*), and “the mutilators” (*τὴν κατατομήν*) are ascribed to a group of people who apparently claimed to be God’s people but were not (cf. 1:15–17, 27–29). These negative appellations contrast positive designations attributed to the saints in Philippi, as seen in the following lines.⁵⁰

“those dogs” (<i>τοὺς κύνας</i>)	“the true people of God” (<i>ἡμεῖς . . . ἔσμεν ἡ περιτομή</i>)
“those evilworkers” (<i>τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας</i>)	“the ones who serve in God’s Spirit” (<i>οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες</i>)
“the mutilators” (<i>τὴν κατατομήν</i>)	“the ones who place their confidence in Jesus Christ and not in Jewish rituals.” (<i>καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες</i>)

Once again Paul contrasted saints with those who opposed the church at Philippi. This passage, however, is a little more descriptive than the previous ones. The very ones who preached Christ based on self-interest (*ἐξ ἐριθείας*, 1:17) and who would suffer eternal torment (*ἀπωλεία*, 1:28) seem to have practiced at least one ritual (viz., circumcision) that is typical of a Judaizer.

⁴⁹ Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the opponents explicitly mentioned in Philippians 1:27–29 and 3:2 and implicitly referred to in 1:15–17 were the same group (cf. *τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας*). A similar perspective is held by Garland, “The Composition and Unity of Philippians,” 172–40.

⁵⁰ While addressing the unity of Philippians, Garland contends that the three insults in 3:2 are chiasmatically balanced with the three statements about saints in 3:3. The chiasmic structure below reflects this writer’s understanding of Garland’s discussion.

- | | |
|-----|--|
| A. | those dogs (<i>τοὺς κύνας</i>) |
| B. | those evilworkers (<i>τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας</i>) |
| C. | the mutilators (<i>τὴν κατατομήν</i>) |
| C.’ | the true circumcision (<i>ἡ περιτομή</i>) |
| B.’ | the ones who serve (<i>οἱ . . . λατρεύοντες</i>) |
| A.’ | the ones who boast . . . not in the flesh (<i>οἱ . . . οὐκ ἐν σαρκὶ πεποιθότες</i>). |

Although Garland makes a good case for “B” and “C,” his explanation that “confidence in the flesh” refers to obedience to food laws, works of the Law, and circumcision does not fit with his previous discussion of dogs. The chiasm seems forced (Garland, “The Composition and Unity of Philippians,” 167–70). This is not to deny the paronomasia between “the mutilators” (*τὴν κατατομήν*) and “the true circumcision” (*ἡ περιτομή*); it merely questions the chiasmic structure.

Although generally assumed to be a series of reverse insults directed at Jewish Judaizers, do the appellations in Philippians 3:2 necessarily specify Jewish ethnicity?

The first appellation to consider is "those dogs" (τοὺς κύνας). In his description of contemporary prophets, Isaiah verbally maligned Jewish prophets when he said they were "all mute dogs" and "greedy dogs" (Isa. 56:10–11). David, likewise, called his enemies "dogs" (Ps. 22:16, 20).⁵¹ First-century Jews used the term to speak disparagingly of non-Jews (Matt. 7:6; 15:26). John demeaned those who practice sorcery, sexual immorality, murder, idolatry, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood when he referred to them as "dogs" (Rev. 22:15). Josephus opprobriously said of Apion, the Alexandrian rhetorician, that he was gifted with "the impudence of a dog."⁵² Ignatius, an early church father, disdainfully referred to those who opposed the church in Ephesus as "mad dogs who bit secretly, and you must be upon your guard against them."⁵³ To be compared with a dog is an insult whether it is directed at a Jew, a Gentile, or a nonbeliever. In essence, by referring to them as dogs, Paul discredited people who claimed to be God's. Thus Paul's purpose was not to describe a group of people but to insult them.

The second appellation is "those evil workers" (τοὺς κακοῦς ἐργάτας). Although some limit ἐργάτας to performing works of the Law while others give ἐργάτας a dual meaning (i.e., workers of the Law and missionary workers),⁵⁴ the best view is that ἐργάτας refers to missionary workers. O'Brien points out that ἐργάτας in the New Testament designates not only workers generally (Matt. 20:1–2, 8; Luke 13:27; Acts 19:25; James 5:4), but also Christian

⁵¹ Dogs are portrayed in the Old Testament as fierce animals that devour dead bodies and lick spilt blood (1 Kings 21:19, 23–24; 22:37–38; Ps. 68:21–23; Jer. 15:3). In Psalm 22:16 and 20, "dogs" is a figure that implicitly compares David's enemies to a band of ravenous dogs that attack people—in this particular case, him. Similar figurative usage occurs in 1 Samuel. When Goliath saw that David was only a boy, the giant said, "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" (1 Sam. 17:43). Apparently he viewed Israel's choice of David as belittling.

⁵² Josephus, *Against Apion* 2. 7. 85.

⁵³ Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians* 7.1. Michel points out that "dogs and swine were often associated as unclean animals (2 Pt. 2:22; Hora., I, 2, 23ff.; bShab., 155b; P. Oxy., V, 840, 33). They did not refer to distinct classes of men but to men of all classes who set themselves in opposition to the Gospel" (Otto Michel, "κύων, κυνόριον," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 [1965]: 1101–4).

⁵⁴ For the limited meaning see Silva, *Philippians*, 169; and perhaps Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 295–96. For the dual meaning see Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, 829; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 125; and perhaps Homer Kent, "Philippians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:138.

missionary workers (Matt. 9:37–38, 10:10; Luke 10:2, 7).⁵⁵ “Paul styles them *κακούς*,” says O’Brien, “because of their malicious intent.”⁵⁶ The point is that these people were professing Christians on a mission to convert others. Their motivation for preaching Christ was self-oriented (1:15–17).⁵⁷ Again the phrase says nothing of their ethnic identity.

The third appellation, “the mutilators” (*τὴν κατατομήν*), is the one designation that may describe ethnic Jews. However, is this appellation from a Gentile perspective or from the perspective of a Jew of the Diaspora? Although circumcision was important to Judaism of the first century, it was not, as noted earlier, unique to being a Jew. Though Gentiles may have considered it Judaistic behavior, circumcision of itself did not make one a Jew. In addition, Barclay observes that “whenever it is commented on by non-Jews, circumcision is derided, either as a peculiar ‘mutilation’ (on par with castration, according to Hadrian’s later prescript) or, perhaps, as a ‘barbarian’ rite properly abandoned by ‘civilized’ men.”⁵⁸ The point is that whoever practiced circumcision—whether Ethiopians, Egyptians, Colchians, Syrians, Jews, Gentile Judaizers,⁵⁹ Jewish Christian Judaizers, Gentile Christian Judaizers, or Jewish Christians—the practice was derided as mutilation.

Also the verbal form of *κατατομή* in nonbiblical Greek is frequently used in ironic or malicious observations. For instance, an ironic-metaphorical usage occurs in a speech against Demosthenes when it was said that “he has hacked off [*κατατέμῃκε*] his own filthy head a thousand times.” “This ironic use may not be without significance,” according to Koester, “for an understanding of *κατατομή* in Phil. 3:2.”⁶⁰ Paul may have been using

⁵⁵ O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 355–56. Cf. Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper*, 125; Koester, “The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment,” 320–21; Collange, *L’épître de saint Paul aux Philippiens*, 110; and Martin, *Philippians*, 125.

⁵⁶ O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 355–56.

⁵⁷ Lightfoot makes a similar connection (*St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, 144).

⁵⁸ Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 438 (italics added).

⁵⁹ The existence of Gentile Judaizers before and during the growth of the early church is without question. However, since “a great number” (*πλῆθος πολὺ*) but not all “God-fearers” or Gentile Judaizers accepted Christianity in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4), it is reasonable to postulate the same results in other cities Paul visited (cf. Acts 14:5). Thus some “God-fearers” became Christians while others remained Gentile Judaizers.

⁶⁰ For other examples see Helmut Koester, “*κατατομή*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 8 (1972): 109–11.

κατατομή in an ironic play on words that might speak of either Jew or Gentile Judaizers. In fact it was Gentile Christians who incorporated Judaistic practices with Christianity whom Ignatius especially sought to combat.⁶¹ In his protest against professing Gentile Christians who mixed Judaistic practices with Christianity, Ignatius wrote, "But if anyone expounds Judaism to you do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from a man who is circumcised than Judaism from a man who is uncircumcised."⁶² "For if we continue to live until now according to Judaism we confess that we have not received grace."⁶³ Thus some Gentiles obviously intermingled Christian and Judaistic teachings. Apparently they were professing Gentile Christians who were promoting Judaistic rituals.

In his composite picture of Gentile Judaizers in Asia Minor, Wilson concludes two things from the above passages. First, Ignatius' *Letter to the Philadelphians* states that "some (if not all) of the Judaizers were Gentile in origin," and second, Ignatius' *Letter to the Magnesians* suggests that the Judaizers were "Gentiles, who formerly (and presently) lived like Jews and expounded Judaism."⁶⁴ Wilson's second conclusion is supported by Ignatius' attempt to persuade professing Christian Gentiles to abstain from practicing Judaistic rituals. Ignatius called on the church of Magnesia to "put aside the evil leaven" (τὴν κακὴν ζύμην).⁶⁵ Paul

⁶¹ Ignatius is important to this discussion because he was the second or third bishop of Antioch in Syria (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3. 22). Although he was condemned to death in Rome sometime during Trajan's reign (A.D. 98–117), he wrote seven significant letters to combat Docetism and Gentiles who mixed Judaistic practices with Christianity. While on the way to Rome to face the beasts in the amphitheater, Ignatius wrote seven letters. While in Smyrna he wrote to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome; while in Troas he wrote to the Philadelphian and Smyrnan congregations as well as to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna (Kirsopp Lake, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912], 1: 166–68).

⁶² Ignatius, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 6.1.

⁶³ Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians* 8.1.

⁶⁴ The underlying motif of Ignatius, according to Wilson, is threefold: (1) Judaizers were reproved for both expounding (i.e., belief, *Letter to the Philadelphians* 6–8) and living (i.e., practices, *Letter to the Magnesians* 8–10) according to Judaism; (2) Judaizers were part of the church rather than the synagogue community (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 7. 1; 11. 1); and (3) Judaizers blurred the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity and thus compromised the distinctive identity of the latter (*Letter to the Philadelphians* 8. 2; 9. 1–2; and *Letter to the Magnesians* 10. 2). See Stephen G. Wilson, "Gentile Judaizers," *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 605–16. For other examples of Gentile Judaizers in the early church, see *ibid.*, 610–15; and Grayston, "The Opponents in Philippians 3," 171–72.

⁶⁵ Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians* 10.1–3.

likewise referred to the practices of Judaism as leaven when he spoke of Jewish Judaizers in Galatians 5:9. Both Ignatius and Paul viewed the practices of the Judaizers as “evil” (*κακός*). Paul did so when he wrote against Jewish Christian Judaizers in Galatia, and Ignatius did so when he wrote against Gentile Judaizers in Asia Minor.

Perhaps the reason Paul spoke so disparagingly of these people (i.e., “the mutilators,” *τὴν κατατομήν*) is that circumcision was being advocated by Gentiles.⁶⁶ Could it also be that Paul emphasized his own personal Jewishness in Philippians 3:4–6 in order to contrast those who purported to know about Judaism, who preached about Judaism and Christianity, and who selectively intermingled aspects of Judaism with Christianity? Of all people Paul would know more about Judaism than a Gentile Judaizer. That seems to be the point of Ignatius’ comments in his *Letter to the Philadelphians* 6.1. Perhaps the Philippians requested Polycarp to forward Ignatius’ letters because they would have served not only to reinforce Paul’s teaching but also to provide further guidance.⁶⁷ Thus Philippians 3:2 does not necessarily support the Jewish ethnicity of those who opposed the church in Philippi.

PHILIPPIANS 3:18–21

Although Philippians 3:18–21 includes echoes of Paul’s previous statements, here he expanded the contrast to include others. For instance rather than speaking specifically of “some people” (*τινές*), and “those who oppose” (*τῶν ἀντικειμένων*), or charging the Philippian saints to “consider continually” (*βλέπετε*) their ever-present opponents, Paul expanded the contrast to include others (“many people,” *πολλοί*) who opposed the gospel message. While encouraging the saints to follow Paul’s pattern (*τύπος*, 3:17), he explained (*γάρ*) that many people lead lives that are self-destructive.

He wrote in verses 18–19, “For [*γάρ*] many people [*πολλοί*, i.e., not just those who oppose you] . . . continually live lives [*περιπατοῦσιν*] that oppose [*τοὺς ἐχθρούς*] the message of the gospel [*τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ*]. Their destiny will be an everlasting state of torment and death [*ἀπωλεία*], they are self-centered [*ὁ θεὸς ἢ κοιλία*], they are proud of their self-gratifying yet disgraceful

⁶⁶ *τὴν κατατομήν* is a *hapax legomenon*. Grayston contends that “nowhere else does Paul describe the church as ‘the circumcision’, and nowhere else does he speak disparagingly of circumcision” (“The Opponents in Philippians 3,” 170).

⁶⁷ “We send you,” Polycarp wrote, “as you asked, the letters of Ignatius, which were sent to us by him. . . . These are joined to this letter, and you will be able to benefit greatly from them” (*Letter to the Philippians* 13. 2).

behavior [*ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνη*], and their thoughts are focused on the present world [*τὰ ἐπέγεια*]” (author’s paraphrase). Like the previous statements, this description of opponents says nothing to support a reference to ethnic Jewish opponents. The description, perhaps, identifies the lifestyles of those whose unregenerate actions made them opposers (“enemies of the cross,” *τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ*).⁶⁸ The depiction of these opponents as self-centered (“god is their belly,” *ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία*), self-gratifying (“their glory is in their shame,” *ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνη*), and worldly (“who set their minds on earthly things,” *τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες*) clearly contrasts the self-denying, self-giving, self-sacrificing attitude and life of Jesus (2:6–8) as well as the lifestyles of Timothy (2:20–23), Epaphroditus (2:25–29), and Paul (3:7–16).

The description of the eternal destiny of these unregenerates (“enemies of the cross,” *τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ*) clearly contrasts with that of the saints in Philippi. The destiny of the many opposers was like that of those who presently opposed the Philippian saints—they would suffer an everlasting state of torment and death (*ἀπώλεια*; cf. 1:28; 3:19). Paul explained in 3:20–21 that the destiny of saints is heaven. “For (*γάρ*) our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly await our Lord Jesus Christ, who will change [*μετασχηματίσει*] our weak mortal bodies [*σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν*] and make them like his own glorious body by exercising the same power [*κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι*] that enables him to rule over [*ὑποτάξαι*] all things” (author’s paraphrase).

⁶⁸ Because the phrase “the enemies of the cross” (*τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ*) is unclear, the range of possibilities is large. Many suggest some group of ethnic Jews—Jewish Christian Gnostic Judaizers (Koester, “The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment,” 328; Martin, *Philippians*, 143–44), Jewish Christian missionary Judaizers (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, 857–59; Silva, *Philippians*, 209–11), or Jewish Judaizers (Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 163). Others suggest they were apostate Christians as a result of persecution (Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper*, 153) or professing Christians who denied the eschatological significance of the cross (Collange, *L’épître de saint Paul aux Philippiens*, 118–19). It seems, however, that contextually the phrase speaks directly of professing Christians like Gentile Judaizers, Jewish Judaizers, and any group who were not prepared to live the self-giving and self-sacrificing way of the cross (2:6–8). Their pattern of life reflected an inner disposition (3:18) that was a self-centered and self-gratifying lifestyle of the world (3:19; cf. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians*, 155; Kent, “Philippians,” 147; O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 453–54; and Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 367–68). Though Paul may have been speaking of professing Christians, *ἐχθρός* also fits inimical Jews and Gentiles (Luke 19:27; Acts 13:10; Rom. 5:10; 11:28; Col. 1:21; Alfred Plummer, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* [London: Roxburghe, 1919], 82; Werner Foerster, “*ἐχθρός, ἔχθρα*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2 [1964]: 811–15). Thus by the nature of the term, *ἐχθρός* might indirectly refer to any unregenerate person.

Whereas all opposers will experience destruction, all believers will experience deliverance. The comments in Philippians 3:20–21 seem to echo and build on Paul's statement in 1:28 about the future salvation of the Philippians. Thus like the previous passages Philippians 3:18–21 does not necessarily support the Jewish ethnicity of those in Philippi who were opposing the church. In fact Paul apparently broadened the discussion to speak inclusively of the many who lived in opposition to God's message.

CONCLUSION

Nothing in the four contrastive statements in Philippians 1:15–17; 1:27–28; 3:2–3; and 3:18–21 clearly supports a reference to a group of ethnic Jewish opponents. Although traditional historical reconstructions about the opposers in Philippi suggest that the Judaizers were ethnic Jews, it would be a mistake to rule out a priori the possibility that those who opposed the Christians at Philippi were Gentile Judaizers who claimed to be Christians. The paucity of evidence in Acts and Philippians obviously requires historical speculation. The numerous conversions of Jews (Acts 2:36, 41; 9:3–19; 14:1; 17:1–12; 18:8; 19:5–10),⁶⁹ Samaritans (8:14), God-fearers (8:27, 38; 10:1–2, 44–48; 16:14–15; 17:4; 18:7), and Gentiles (11:20–21; 13:7–8, 48; 14:1; 16:31–33; 17:1–12, 34 [?]; 18:8; 19:10, 18 [?]) is indisputable. In Philippi, however, one female "God-fearer" and her family (16:14–15) as well as a Gentile jailer and his family (16:31–33) were converted to Christianity.

Since the city of Philippi was predominantly Gentile, other Gentiles obviously joined the congregation (Phil. 4:2). Perhaps some Gentiles, in their eagerness to understand this new faith, misapplied Old Testament Scripture and thereby intermingled the gospel message with rituals associated with Judaism (1:15–17; 3:2). Their misguided understanding may have resulted in zealous proclamations that disrupted the church (1:27–28). They were Gentiles whose behavior was like that of Jews but were not actually Jews (3:2). They proclaimed Christ like Christian missionaries but were not Christians (1:15–17; 3:2). They were Gentile Judaizers.

⁶⁹ It is not surprising that Jewish converts abandoned aspects of their ancestral customs. Barclay points out that ethnic Jews who converted to Christianity were socially integrated into non-Jewish society. They were assimilated into Gentile society because of their association with Gentile converts and Paul's assimilationist stance on several Jewish issues (Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 326, 381–95). Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians became a new community (Eph. 2:14–18) of people who had exchanged one identity for another (Rom. 5:12–19) and thereby developed a new identity (2 Cor. 5:17–21).

Since no explicit statement in Philippians identifies these antagonists, it is difficult to know for sure who they were. On the one hand Philippians 1:15–17; 1:27–28; 3:2–3; and 3:18–22 veil the ethnicity of the opponents. On the other hand historical information about Gentile Judaizers broadens the discussion enough to say that those who opposed the church in Philippi may have been local Gentile Judaizers (1:15–17; 1:28; 3:2). Paul's comments, however, were applicable to Jews as well (*πολλοί*, 3:18), especially if Jewish Judaizers existed in Galatia, Corinth, and perhaps even roamed the Roman Empire.

Regardless of who these people were, the point is that the church always has had and always will have opponents—those who disrupt the church with their self-promoting message, those who add to God's message, those whose end will be destruction. Believers, while being mindful of such people, are to live in a manner worthy of the gospel.