

Stoicheia as a Clue to the Angelology and Christology of Paul's Opponents in Galatia

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Certain aspects of the teachings of Paul's opponents in Galatia were inferred from the suggested meanings of *stoicheia* (Gal 4:3 and 9), "angel(s)" (1:8, 3:19), and "days, months, seasons, and years" (4:10). While Paul's opponents used the term *stoicheia* in the sense of "elements," Paul gave it a figurative and ironic twist to highlight that Mosaic Law had exerted its decisive power as "fundamental principles" of the realm to and by which Jesus Christ was crucified (2:19, 6:14). Having close relations with Jerusalem, the opponents probably accepted the *kerygma* of the primitive church (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–5). It is likely that they understood the death of Jesus as Messianic atonement, and his blood as having the effects of both God's forgiveness of his people's transgressions and the renewal of the Sinaitic contract. They would have accepted that *kerygma* for the resurrection and apparition of Jesus as well. Moreover, they presumably maintained that Jesus, who ascended into heaven, had become like an angel (cf. *1 Enoch* 51:1–4, Mar 12:25). They emphasized the angels' involvement in the conferment of the Law (3:19) and possibly shared the notion of Hellenistic Judaism, according to which strife among the *stoicheia* leads to disaster or catastrophe and peace is restored by God when the high priest brings himself and the entire universe into the temple of God in Jerusalem (cf. Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 2:121–122, 133–135, *Spec. Leg.* 2:190–192). It is highly conceivable that they used these theological backings to preach their "gospel" to gentile Christians, forcing them to be circumcised and to observe special days, months, seasons, and years.