Christ or Family as the "Seed" of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16

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INTRODUCTION

IN GAL 3:16, Paul states that the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his "σπέρματι," which the apostle then interprets as a reference to "Χριστός." N. T. Wright translates 3:16 as follows, maintaining that this singular "seed" *denotes* not the Messiah but the "one family" of God that is represented by the Messiah: "The promises were made 'to Abraham and to his family'. It doesn't say 'his families', as though referring to several, but indicates one: 'and to your family'– which means the Messiah."[1] In support of this rendering, he argues,[2]

> If, as would accord with good exegetical practice, we approach the difficult passage about the "seed" in 3.16 in the light of the quite clear reference in 3.29, where (as in 3.15–18) it is found within a discussion of the Abrahamic "inheritance", we might suggest that the singularity of the "seed" in v. 16 is not the singularity of an individual person contrasted with the plurality of many human beings, but the singularity of one family contrasted with the plurality of families which would result if the Torah were to be regarded the way Paul's opponents apparently regard it.

This paper seeks to expose the unlikelihood of Wright's reading of Gal 3:16, both from the internal logic of Paul's argument in Galatians and from the Old Testament redemptive-historical trajectory that informs that logic. While Wright provides support for his reading, we believe the evidence below both counters Wright's claims and justifies our interpretation. As will be shown, Wright does not appreciate enough Paul's proper stress on the coming of Christ as Abraham's "seed" (v. 16) in order to enable Gentile individuals to be granted the same title (v. 29).

AN EVALUATION OF WRIGHT IN LIGHT OF PAUL'S ARGUMENT IN GALATIANS 3–4[3]

Wright's Reading: An Analytical Summary

From Wright's perspective, the traditional view of Gal 3:16 that sees the "seed" as a direct reference to the Messiah is flawed from a number of fronts.[4] Not only does it seem to be asking a lot from Paul to jump from singular (v. 16) to collective (v. 29) in the scope of a single chapter, the apparent parallels in Romans 4 and 9 never use σπέρμα in relation to the Messiah. Furthermore, Paul is left "on the very shaky ground of a purely semantic trick, since in the LXX σπέρμα in the singular, when referring to human offspring, is in fact almost always collective rather than singular."[5] Instead, taking his lead from the "clear reference" of the collective use of "seed" in 3:29, Wright proposes to read "seed" in 3:16 in the same way––as pointing to the one family of God.

Stephen Toulmin's model for understanding an argument will assist us in grasping and evaluating Wright's assertions. Figure 1 (below) illustrates how an argument is constructed.[6]

When crafting an argument, the move from known information ("datum") to conclusion ("claim") necessitates a supporting statement ("warrant"), which itself at times requires additional justification ("backing"). In light of this layout, Wright's argument regarding the interpretation of Gal 3:16 can be displayed as in Figure 2. (below).

An Initial Evaluation of Wright's Claim

Wright's argument bears a number of weaknesses, one of the most significant of which is that it forces the interpreter to read Paul's argument backwards from Gal 3:29 to 3:16. A natural "sequential reading" of the text does not prepare the reader for a collective understanding of "seed" in v. 16, for as observed by A. Andrew Das, it is not until v. 29 that "Christians are incorporated into the one seed."[7]

Furthermore, since the phrase "who is Christ" is in apposition to the noun "seed," one wonders how "Χριστός" is an appropriate designation for this singular "family." Because Wright himself affirms that Χριστός always "denotes Jesus of Nazareth,"[8] how can he maintain that the one "seed" refers to the one "family" and not to Christ? Wright deftly argues that Χριστός "denotes" Jesus and "connotes" the one in whom "the people of God are summed up."[9] However, this fine-toothed distinction seems

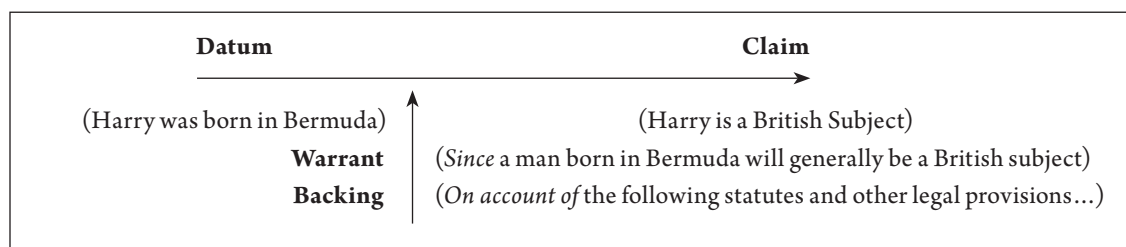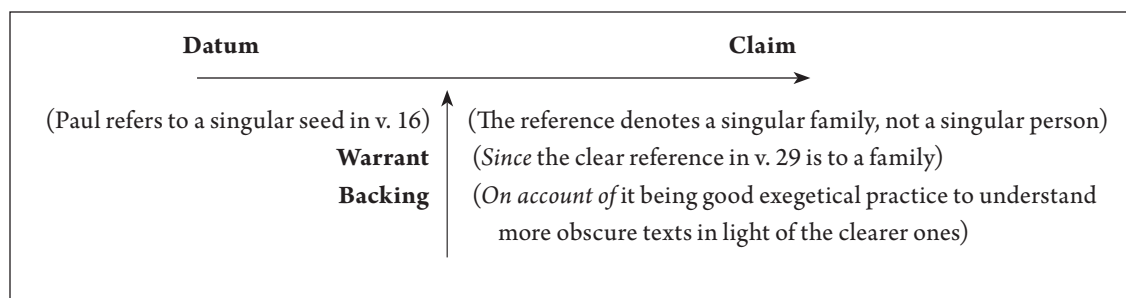**Fig. 1. Toulmin's Model for Charting an Argument**

Datum	Claim
(Harry was born in Bermuda)	(Harry is a British Subject)
Warrant	(*Since* a man born in Bermuda will generally be a British subject)
Backing	(*On account of* the following statutes and other legal provisions…)

Fig. 2. Wright's Argument for Interpreting Gal 3:16

Datum	Claim
(Paul refers to a singular seed in v. 16)	(The reference denotes a singular family, not a singular person)
Warrant	(*Since* the clear reference in v. 29 is to a family)
Backing	(*On account of* it being good exegetical practice to understand more obscure texts in light of the clearer ones)

forced and comes perilously close to special pleading. It arises in part because of a desire to justify what Wright believes to be Paul's sloppy exegetical reading of texts like Gen 13:15. Wright solves this undesirable situation by maintaining that Paul makes an "explanatory" point from Genesis, not an "exegetical" point.[10] However, this solution, though ingenious, is unnecessary.

Our deconstruction of Wright's reading will continue in two further phases. In the first phrase, we will attempt to demonstrate the legitimacy of Paul's exegesis of Genesis in Gal 3:16. In the second phase, we will argue that the parallel in Gal 3:19 prohibits Wright's reading.

Paul's Exegesis of Genesis in Gal 3:16

The reference in 3:16 to plural "promises … made to Abraham and to his offspring" immediately sends us back to Genesis and suggests the likelihood of multiple promise texts in Paul's mind. It is true that the inclusion of the conjunction in the phrase "καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου" implies that Paul is indeed *quoting* Gen 13:15; 17:8; and/or 24:7—the only texts in the LXX of Genesis that include the entire phrase and that address Abraham.[11] In our view, the most likely candidate of these three is 17:8, for the mention of Abra(ha)m becoming "the father of a multitude of nations" in the immediate literary context anticipates the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God–one of the key issues at stake in Galatians 3 (cf. the citation of Gen 17:5 in Rom 4:17). However, because each of the three texts noted above deals only with the land promise, the plural ἐπαγγελίαι in Gal 3:16 means that Paul expected his interpreters to read the text(s) he cites in relation to the other "seed" promises in Genesis.[12]

In the part of Genesis directly associated with the patriarchs, the "seed" of promise is/are

- To be the recipient(s) of the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 22:17; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 48:4);[13]

- To become very numerous (13:16; 15:5; 22:17a; 26:4, 24; 28:14; 32:12; 48:4, 19);[14]
- To possess the gate of his enemies (22:17b; 24:60);
- To be a channel of blessing to all families, *nations*, or tribes of the earth (12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).[15]

Already in Gal 3:8 the apostle had cited the promise to the patriarch that "in you shall all the nations be blessed," so certainly this promise is included among those referred to in Gal 3:16.[16]

What is significant about this last point is that Genesis itself teaches that the curse of Adam would be eradicated and blessing would be enjoyed on a universal scale not simply through Abraham but specifically by means of the work of an *individual, male "seed"* descending from the patriarch. This development is made clear in three texts (Gen 3:15; 22:17b–18; 24:60) and affirmed by later biblical interpretation. The first passage does not address Abraham specifically, but lays the foundation for the pledges God would later make to him.[17]

Before over-viewing these texts, it is important to recognize that the Hebrew term "זֶרַע" is a collective singular noun, which means it is morphologically singular but may have singular or plural co-referents. While the vast majority of instances in Genesis are collective,[18] the singular concept is also expressed.[19] How do we determine if a given usage of the term "seed" refers to a collective group or an individual? C. John Collin's morpho-syntactic study of זֶרַע suggests that, while most occurrences are grammatically ambiguous and thus demand semantic clues in the context, the inclusion of plural pronouns (independent, object, and suffixes) makes זֶרַע denote posterity, whereas the inclusion of singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns makes it denote a specific descendant.[20] For example, the third person masculine plural personal pronoun "their" in Gen 17:9 makes the use of "seed" explicitly collective: "And God said to Abraham, 'As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring (וְזַרְעֲךָ) after you throughout

their generations (לְדֹרֹתָם).”[21]

In light of Collins' study, we now turn to Gen 3:14–15, which includes what is often referred to as the *protoevangelium* ("first gospel"). In it, God declares to the serpent: "Cursed are you more than all cattle and more than every beast of the field; on your belly shall you go and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you (הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ) on the head, and you shall bruise him (תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ) on the heel."[22] Drawing attention to the explicit use of pronouns, Collins comments,[23]

> On the syntactical level, the singular pronoun *hû'* in Genesis 3:15 is quite consistent with the pattern where a single individual is in view. In fact, since the subject pronouns are not normally necessary for the meaning, we might wonder if the singular *hû'* in Genesis 3:15 is used precisely in order to make it plain that an individual is being promised, who will win a victory over the snake at cost to himself.

Genesis 3:15 provides a "seed-bed" of Messianic hope. This interpretation is confirmed by Eve's response to the births of Cain and Seth in chapter 4.[24] At the birth of the former, Eve expresses what appears to be hope that this son may be the fulfillment of God's promise to crush the serpent's head: "I have gotten a man with Yahweh" (4:1). However, when Cain murders his brother Abel, he undeniably proves that he is not the awaited "seed," and later biblical interpretation considers Cain among the offspring of the serpent (1 John 3:8–12; cf. John 8:33, 44). Following Abel's death, Eve reaffirmed her hope in the promised "seed" when Seth was born: "God has apportioned for me another offspring (זֶרַע) in place of Abel, because Cain killed him" (Gen 4:25). Seth's life signaled a shift back to Yahweh (4:26), imaged his own father Adam's sonship to God (5:1–3), and initiated the two, ten-member genealogies (Genesis 5 and 11) by which the narrator of Genesis distinguished the

line of promise from the line of destruction and heightened his reader's anticipation for the ultimate conquering "seed."[25]

The next text is found in Gen 22:17–18, which is one of the passages that most likely stands behind Paul's recollection in Gal 3:8 of God's promise to Abraham that "in you shall all the nations be blessed." At this point in the narrative, the reader has tracked the offspring promise from "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20) through two, ten-member genealogies climaxing in Abra(ha)m, in whom "all the families of earth shall be blessed" (12:3). When the patriarch questioned his lack of "offspring" (זֶרַע) (Gen 15:3), the Lord promised (15:4) and then granted him and Sarah a son, declaring, "Through Isaac shall your offspring (זֶרַע) be named" (21:12). This seed-generated context provided the backdrop for Yahweh's amazing "test" in which he called Abraham to sacrifice his son of promise. Genesis 22:17–18 records Yahweh's pledge to fulfill the "descendants, land, and divine blessing" promises to Abraham in light of his dependent, fear-filled obedience.[26]

Three times in Gen 22:17–18 the word זֶרַע occurs, but as has been persuasively argued by T. Desmond Alexander, within the span of two verses the form denotes both a group and an individual.[27] Specifically, building off Collins's study, Alexander has rightly observed that the third-person masculine singular pronominal suffix in the form אֹיְבָיו ("his enemies") of 22:17 suggests that, while the "seed" that will be a numerous "as the stars of heaven" is plural (v. 17a), the "seed" that will possess the enemies' gates (v. 17b) and serve as a channel of blessing to the world (v. 18) is a male *individual*.[28] Collins's rule also suggests that Gen 24:60 contains a similar contrast between the many and the one, wherein upon Rebekah's departure from Mesopotamia, her family blesses her, calling God not only to grant her a flourishing womb but also to cause her offspring to "possess the gate of those who hate *him*."[29]

Significantly, because each of the other Genesis texts that refers to the "seed" as mediator of blessing

are ambiguous syntactically according to Collins's rules (Gen 26:4; 28:14; cf. 12:3; 18:18), it is possible that these too should be understood as pointing to an individual.[30] Regardless, the three texts just mentioned appear to set a trajectory for other biblical authors who interpret these Genesis "seed" texts as referring to a single, Messianic deliverer (e.g., Gen 49:8, 10; Num 24:17–19; 2 Sam 7:12–13; Ps 72:4, 9, 17; Luke 1:68–79; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 13–14). Because James M. Hamilton Jr. has already provided a thorough overview of these passages, minimal comment is necessary here.[31]

Building off the Davidic promises in 2 Sam 7:12–13, Psalm 72 applies to Israel's king both the promise of an enemy-destroying offspring (Ps 72:4; cf. Gen 3:15 and 22:17b) and the promise of a blessing-mediating offspring (Ps 72:17; cf. Gen 22:18)[32]: "May [the king] defend the cause of the poor of the people … and crush the oppressor! … May people be blessed in him, and all nations call him blessed!" The background of the promises in Gen 3:15 and 22:17b–18 is unmistakable.

Luke highlighted this same connection with direct reference to Jesus, when he recorded Zechariah's prophecy in Luke 1:68–79: "[God] raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies … to remember the his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham … [and] to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:69–71, 73, 79). What is striking here is that God's work of deliverance and salvation through the Davidic Messiah was specifically related to "the oath that he swore to … Abraham." This link is further highlighted in Acts 3:25–26, where Peter declared, "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning everyone of you from your wickedness." Jesus is here clearly identified with the "offspring" through whom blessing would come.

The final text to be highlighted is Gal 3:8, 13–14, which provides the very context for our verse in question. Paul writes in 3:8, "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, 'In you shall all the nations be blessed.'" The apostle returns to this theme in vv. 13–14, when he states, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law … so that *in Christ Jesus* the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles." With Luke, Paul appears to have interpreted the Genesis promises as finding their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, the one through whom God's blessing reaches the nations.

זֶרַע occurs some fifty-nine times in Genesis and highlights a key aspect of the book's message, bearing theological significance that is linked not only to Abraham but also to the earliest stages of God's dealing with fallen mankind. The term is used with Genesis's תּוֹלְדוֹת structure to highlight one single family line stemming from Adam (and Eve) through Seth and continuing through Abraham and his descendants. Not only this, promise of global influence finds focus in at least three contexts where it is an individual male offspring of this line who will destroy the enemy strongholds (Gen 3:15; 22:17b; 24:60) and mediate blessing to the world (22:18).[33] We suggest that these texts set a trajectory climaxing in the person of Christ Jesus and that Paul's assertion that the "seed … is Christ" in Gal 3:16 is recognition of this fact. The apostle's reading of Genesis is not "hyperliteral,"[34] "a purely semantic trick,"[35] or a mere "explanatory note"[36] but is in fact an exegetically grounded interpretation of Gen 17:8 (and/or 13:15; 24:7) within its broader literary context, especially 3:15 and 22:17–18.[37]

The Prohibitive Parallel of Gal 3:19

Our deconstruction of Wright's argument now continues with some observations related to Gal 3:19, which includes the next occurrence of the "seed" in Galatians 3. Because of his collective interpretation of verse 16, Wright translates verse 19 to read as follows: "Why then the law? It was

added because of transgressions until the family should come to whom it had been promised."[38] This wording accentuates the awkwardness of Wright's interpretation, because the actual flow of Paul's thought prohibits such a translation. Take a moment to recall the layout of Wright's original argument in Figure 2 above. By way of contrast, we can incorporate Gal 3:19 in a counter argument that can be charted as Figure 3 (below).

In order to defend this argument, it is imperative to produce the exegetical data that justifies the above warrant.[39] Specifically, we contend that the "seed" in verse 19 can only be a reference to Jesus of Nazareth. This conclusion finds its support by the parallel structure of thought in Gal 3:23–26 and 4:1–7. We will consider these passages one at a time.

In Gal 3:23–26, the Law is compared to a "παιδαγωγός." The "guardian" (ESV) is given authority over a child for a specific duration of time (usually until adulthood).[40] The key event for Paul is the coming of "faith" (v. 25). The dawning of this age brings the age of the guardian to an end. "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian." The word "faith" clearly refers to a salvation-historical epoch, not a subjective experience. If no one exercised faith until after the coming of Christ, then Abraham also did not exercise faith. And if Abraham did not exercise faith, then Paul's whole argument in 3:6–9 comes crashing down. Rather, Paul refers to the new era inaugurated by the coming of Christ, not a "family." Now that Christ has come, the promises have been fulfilled. Thus, the establishment of the new covenant and the reception of the promised Spirit (v. 14) introduce an age where the distinguishing mark of God's people becomes faith in the revealed Messiah, not adherence to circumcision and the Law.

The same temporal structure occurs again in Gal 4:1–7. An heir is "under stewards and managers until the date set by the father" (v. 2). Once this specific time period arrives, the "stewards and managers" no longer have authority over the heir. Paul spells out the significance of this analogy in verses 3 and 4. We, while children, were held under the "elemental things of the world."[41] But now the date "set by the father" has come. What is this date? Verse four clearly shows that it is the coming of God's Son, Jesus, not the arrival of a "family." "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth his Son" (4:4).

Figure 4 (below) highlights the parallel structure of thought that is evident in these passages. Clearly, Paul focuses the shift of redemptive history

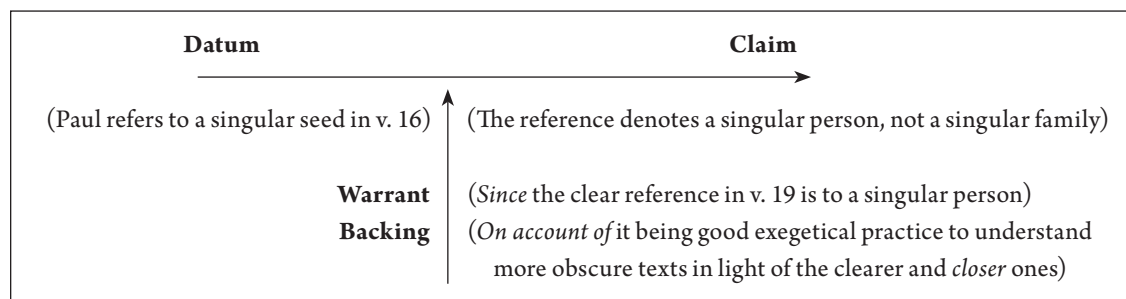**Fig. 3. A Better Argument for Interpreting Gal 3:16**

Datum	Claim
(Paul refers to a singular seed in v. 16)	(The reference denotes a singular person, not a singular family)
Warrant	(*Since* the clear reference in v. 19 is to a singular person)
Backing	(*On account of* it being good exegetical practice to understand more obscure texts in light of the clearer and *closer* ones)

Fig. 4. Paul's Parallel Through Regarding the Redemptive Historical Shift

3:19	When the "seed" comes, the authority of the Law comes to an end.
3:23-24	When the "faith" era comes, the authority of the guardian comes to an end.[42]
4:1-2	When the time set by the Father comes, the authority of the stewards and managers comes to an end.
4:3-4	When God sent forth his Son in the fullness of time, the age of bondage comes to an end.

on Jesus, not on the inclusion of the Gentiles into a single people of God. The latter is made possible only by faith in Jesus, who is the offspring of Abraham (3:16) and channel of blessing to the world (3:14).

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Readers that have compared and contrasted Wright's approach to the one advocated in this article may now justifiably ask: "So what? What is at stake in properly interpreting Gal 3:16?" Two answers are in order. First, it should be obvious, but it always bears repeating, that Scripture is God's word, and as such it demands reverence and respect from God's children. "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and *trembles at my word*" (Isa 66:2; emphasis added). God's word should be handled not only *reverently*, but also *accurately*. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, *rightly handling the word of truth*" (2 Tim 2:15; emphasis added). A concern for the reverent and accurate interpretation of God's word functions simultaneously as both a necessary speed bump that keeps us from running roughshod over the text and a guard rail protecting us from veering off into the ugly ditch of academic gamesmanship.

Second, there is a vital connection between one's individual exegetical decisions and one's collective interpretive framework. In other words, one's handling of specific texts has direct influence in the shaping of one's overall interpretive grid, and one's interpretive grid can have determinative effects on one's individual interpretations. We are not questioning the viability of operating with an interpretive framework; such a grid can help orient seemingly obscure texts within the grand narrative of Scripture. This interplay need not be a vicious circle, as long as the reader intentionally allows the details of each text to exercise a healthy amount of hermeneutical control that can either further confirm the framework or critique it and challenge it. However, one must stringently avoid imposing one's overall framework (i.e., eisegesis) upon the text so that the details of the text are conveniently muted or minimized. Interpretive grids wreak hermeneutical havoc when they blind the interpreter from seeing what is really there in each individual text (i.e., exegesis).

In light of the above, it is noteworthy that Wright's reading of Gal 3:16 bears a striking resemblance to his reading of other texts in Paul that have come to form the essence of his overall interpretive framework. This grid, which fits the broad contours of the so-called New Perspective on Paul, tends to place stress upon the ecclesiological aspects of Paul's thought, while minimizing many traditional soteriological readings of texts in Paul.

This same dynamic is certainly operative in the text under consideration. Wright's reading assumes that the "family" has been on center stage in Paul's discussion of redemptive history in all three "seed" texts: Gal 3:16, 19, and 29. Our reading maintains that *Christ* takes center stage as the promised "seed" in both 3:16 and 19. The family of faith comes into clear view in 3:29 only *through Christ* as the promised singular "seed" of Abraham. In other words, Jesus' appearance in 3:16 and 19 is what allows the "family" to come into the picture in verse 29.

The grammar of verse 29 reinforces this reading with a first-class conditional statement: "And *if* (εἰ) you are Christ's, *then* (ἄρα) you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise." Paul stresses the dependent nature of the family's existence upon the prior work of Christ, which took center stage in the preceding discussion. In other words, Wright is dangerously close to locating the climax of redemptive history in the coming of "the family" rather than in the coming of the Messiah. Wright's reading brings the "family" to the center of the stage in Gal 3:16, 19, and 29.

This slight shift of focus from the coming of Christ to the coming of the "family" risks a departure from the stabilizing and balancing effect that comes from insisting upon the centrality of *Christ*. This issue is one of emphasis. Wright and the present authors agree that the incorporation of the

Gentiles into the family of faith is a key point in Galatians. However, this interpretive agreement does not necessarily dictate where Paul himself places the most stress. Wright stresses the "family" of faith in all three texts (Gal 3:16, 19, 29), but our reading sees Paul stressing the centrality of Christ as Abraham's promised "seed" (3:16, 19) so that by faith in Christ the Gentiles could become Abraham's "seed" (3:29) without becoming Jews. This reading also brings Gal 3:16 into better alignment with Paul's emphatic declaration elsewhere that Christ is the one in whom all the promises find their "Yes" of fulfillment (2 Cor 1:20).

Though the shift present in Wright's reading may be slight, the potential long-term results of this shift are not slight or small. Though sounded years ago, D. A. Carson's warning is still apropos: "I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry."[43]

We believe that our reading takes better account of the context of Galatians 3 and 4 and thus achieves a higher degree of collective coherence. We respectfully submit that Wright's reading, though possible, is far less plausible than the one presented in this article. Furthermore, the reading of the text expounded here rests on a firmer foundation: the centrality of Christ in redemptive history. Maintaining our stress on the centrality of Christ, the "seed" of Abraham, will certainly have long-term consequences for the health of the church as it pursues the glory of God in all things for the good of all peoples through Jesus.

ENDNOTES

[1]N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 35.

[2]N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 163. Like our English words "seed" and "offspring," זֶרַע

in Hebrew and σπέρμα in Greek are collective nouns, which means they are morphologically singular but may have singular or plural co-referents (E. J. Revell, "Logic of Concord with Collectives in Biblical Narrative," *MAARAV* 9 [2002]: 61). An OT example of the contrast is noted in Ishmael's designation as the "seed" of Abraham (Gen 21:3) and Jacob's "offspring" being compared to "the dust of the earth" (28:14). In the NT, the "seed" can point to all participants in God's covenant family (Rom 9:7; Gal 3:29), or it can refer to an individual, the Servant / Messiah Jesus (Acts 3:25).

[3]An abbreviated version of some of this material is found in Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology 6; Nashville: B&H, 2009), 144–46; 171–73.

[4]Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 158–59. For a helpful survey of the different approaches to this verse, see C. John Collins, "Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no. 1 (2003): 75–79.

[5]Ibid., 158.

[6]Stephen E. Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1958), 94–113, example from 105. In Toulmin's system, most arguments will have four explicit or implicit components: (1) a Datum, (2) a Warrant, (3) a Backing, and (4) a Claim. "Datum" refers to known information—that is, the raw material used in constructing an argument. An argument takes the raw materials (data) and uses them to build a "claim." The claim is the inference or the conclusion drawn from the data. However, the move from "datum" to "claim" requires a basis that supports or justifies the move. This basis is called the "warrant." The warrant authorizes the step from "datum" to the "claim." However, it is possible to challenge the appropriateness of a warrant. In these cases, the warrant itself requires additional support known as "backing." The "backing" of a warrant provides the information necessary to justify the legitimacy of the warrant in the particular case under consideration. Toulmin's example actually includes two more features called "modal qualifiers" and "conditions of exception," but we have omitted these elements for the sake of simplicity. For an explanation of modal qualifiers and conditions of excep-

tion, see *The Uses of Argument*, 101. To see Toulmin's method elucidated, see Nancey C. Murphy, *Reasoning and Rhetoric in Religion* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity, 1994).

[7]A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 72–73, n. 9. We came to this conclusion before reading Das. We will incorporate this particular insight into a larger argument, which is developed below.

[8]Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 165. He does nuance this statement by pointing out that 2 Cor 5:16 is a possible exception.

[9]Ibid., 174. Wright argues that this reading is justified by other similar occurrences in Paul. "This family is none other, in incorporative language, than the Χριστός, the Messiah-and-his-people" (133).

[10]Ibid., 166.

[11]Cf. the land promise to Isaac in 26:3 and those to Jacob in 28:4, 13; 35:12; and 48:4. Nearly every interpreter since J. B. Lightfoot (*St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993; orig. published 1865], 142) has viewed Gen 13:15 or 17:8 as the background to Gal 3:16; for a thorough bibliography, see Collins, "What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?", 82 n. 17. In contrast, Collins downplays the presence of καί in Paul's citation and suggests that Paul is only alluding to, not quoting, a text from Genesis and that one need only locate a text with the dative σπέρματι (83 n. 22). He posits that Gen 22:18 is the most likely candidate. For a similar approach, see A. M. Buscemi, "Gal 3,8–14: La Genti benedette in Abramo per la fede," *Antonianum* 74, no. 2 (1999): 195–225.

[12]This observation minimizes any dilemma suggested by the fact that "the reference to the land … plays no part in the argument of Galatians" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* [New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerd-

mans, 1982], 172). Furthermore, for Paul, the land promises were viewed as typological anticipations of more universal realities (e.g., Rom. 4:13) Collins is one who recognizes the significance of the plural "promises" ("What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" 83).

[13]Cf. Exod 32:13; 33:1; Num 14:24; Deut 1:8; 4:37; 10:15; 11:9; 34:4; Neh 9:8.

[14]Cf. Gen 16:10; 17:20; Exod 32:13; Jer. 32:22, 26.

[15]In Gen 12:3; 18:18; and 28:14 the verb of blessing is in the Niphal stem (נִבְרְכוּ), whereas in 22:18 and 26:4 it is in the Hithpael (הִתְבָּרֲכוּ). Scholars have long questioned whether the forms are synonymous and whether they should be translated as passives ("they will be blessed"); middles ("the will find blessing"); or reflexives ("they will bless themselves"). (For an overview of the various positions, see M. Daniel Carroll R., "Blessing the Nations: Toward a Biblical Theology of Mission from Genesis," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10, no. 1 [2000]: 23–24; cf. John H. Walton, *Genesis* [NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 393–94). Following the arguments of Chee-Chiew Lee ("נים [*sic*] in Genesis 35:11 and the Abrahamic Promise of Blessing for the Nations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52, no. 3 [2009]: 471–72), we take the Niphal to be passive ("they shall be blessed") and the Hithpael to be estimative-declarative reflexive ("they shall declare themselves as blessed") (on the latter, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], §26.2f). The use of the passive for all forms in the LXX, Targum Onkelos, and the Vulgate, suggests they were read as synonymous, but the fact that the NT quotations of the blessing formula are passive (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:8) means only that they were following the LXX or that they were pointing to the fact that the

passive was used in the foundational Gen 12:3, which informs all the rest. See also Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context* (BZAW 332; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003).

[16]Some like F. F. Bruce have argued that Paul's citation in Gal 3:8 was limited to a conflation of Gen 12:3 and 18:18 (*Epistle to the Galatians*, 156). However, Paul's stress that "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham … [has] come to the Gentiles" suggests that Paul may also be pointing to Gen 22:18; 26:4; and 28:14, all of which explicitly note the means by which the nations will enjoy blessing in Abraham—namely, *through* the promised "seed." Collins persuasively argues this point with respect to Gal 3:8 ("What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" 80–81), but he fails to see that, along with the blessing promises in these texts, the land promise in Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7 stands in the background of Paul's thought in Gal 3:16.

[17]N. T. Wright affirms the concept of corporate solidarity, wherein Messiah Jesus represents the remnant of both Israel and all humanity in his person and work (see *The Climax of the Covenant*, 18–40). He fails, however, to see how Genesis itself anticipates this reality through its use of "seed" language.

[18]See the collective meaning in Genesis for the following: The seed of Noah (Gen 9:9), Abraham (12:7; 13:15, 16; 15:5, 13, 18; 17:8, 9, 10, 19; 21:12; 22:17; 24:7), Rebekah (24:60), Isaac (26:3, 4, 24), Jacob (28:4, 13, 14; 32:12; 35:12; 46:6, 7; 48:4) and Ephraim (48:19).

[19]See Seth (Gen 4:25), Abraham's anticipated child (15:3) and Ishmael (21:13), and the child of Onan (38:8, 9).

[20]C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 140 (1997): 142–44. Collins further notes that the pattern of the LXX translator is identical, and when the "seed" is an individual, the pronoun will be masculine (or at least, not clearly neuter), even though the Greek word σπέρμα is neuter (cf. 1 Sam 1:11; 2 Sam 7:12–14).

[21]Walton is not convinced by Collins's study (*Genesis*, 225 n. 3), but his rebuttal bears no substance. With this, Walton holds the highly questionable view that

OT Messianic expectation grew up only in relation to the promises given to David and so "it is difficult to have much of a messianic hope prior to David" (234). However, apart from the three texts about to be addressed (Gen 3:14; 22:17–18; 24:60), a Messianic hope is stressed through the anticipation of a king (Gen 17:6, 16) from Judah who deserves the obedience of the nations (49:8, 10) and who will defeat enemies and exercise vast dominion (Num 24:17–19); he will be a man of God's *torah* (Deut 17:18–20) who will provide the answer to Israel's chaos (Judg 17:6; 21:5) and stand in the strength of Yahweh (1 Sam 2:10)—all this before David is on the scene. Walton also asserts that the OT includes "no hint of an Israelite messianic expectation that includes the concept of bringing an end to evil in the world" (234–35). Beyond the texts just noted, most of which specifically address eradicating evil, one need only point to the numerous texts that speak of Yahweh's king establishing global justice, peace, and salvation in order see that Walton's claim is not justified (e.g., Jer 23:5–6; 33:15–16; Isa 42:4; 49:6; 52:10; Mic 5:4–5; Zech 9:9–10; Mal 3:1–5; Pss 2:7–9; 72:1–4, 14; cf. Acts 3:25–26; 1 Cor 15:24; Gal 3:8, 13–14; Eph 2:16; Col 2:15). Moreover, the NT asserts that in the salvation brought about by the Davidic Messiah God was accomplishing just what "he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies" (Luke 1:70–71). For more on the Messianic trajectory of the Old Testament as a whole, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham, eds., *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); T. Desmond Alexander, "Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings: Their Importance for Biblical Theology," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 191–212; idem, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of Messiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); John H. Sailhamer, "The Messiah and the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (2001): 5–23; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003); Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House, eds.,

Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

[22]For an insightful survey of the inner-biblical, Messianic interpretation of Gen 3:15, see James Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–54; cf. W. Wilfall, "Gen. 3:15—A Protoevangelium?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974): 361–65. For a survey of the history of interpretation of this verse, see Jack P. Lewis, "The Woman's Seed (Gen 3:15)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 3 (1991): 299–319.

[23]Collins, "A Syntactical Note," 145. The LXX rendered the Hebrew זֶרַע with the neuter noun σπέρμα but used the masculine αὐτος "he" in place of the Hebrew הוא. The mismatch of gender between the pronoun and the antecedent may very well suggest that the translators understood the syntax to point to an individual, perhaps even the Messiah. This is all the more likely when one considers that this is the only instance out of more than 100 uses of הוא in Genesis where the LXX translator used the masculine singular and not the neuter pronoun (cf. R. A. Martin, "The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 [1965]: 425–27; Jack P. Lewis, "The Woman's Seed," 300–01; Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 37–42).

[24]For a similar interpretation, see Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 71; James Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 255–58; John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 1:96, 104–05.

[25]T. Desmond Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1993): 255–70, esp. 259; cf. Richard S. Hess, "The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature," *Biblica* 70 (1989): 248; David C. Hopkins, "The First Stories of Genesis and the Rhythm of the Generations," in *The Echoes of Many Texts: Reflections on Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Lou H. Silberman, et al.; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 40–41. In the aforementioned essay, Alexander observed that the primary line of descent (i.e., the line through which the promised offspring will come) is marked by linear genealogies (A gave birth to B, B gave birth to C, C gave birth to D, etc.; cf. Gen 5:1–32; 11:10–26), whereas the secondary group of antagonists (the "seed of the serpent") is signaled by segmented genealogies (A gave birth to B, C, and D; B gave birth to E, F, and G; C gave birth to H, I, and J; D gave birth to K, L, and M; cf. 10:1; 2:12; 36:1, 9). That the serpent's offspring refers not to slithering snakes but to a line of reprobate humans who are distanced from God is clear from at least two angles: (1) The literary and biblical context of Genesis 3 makes clear that the serpent is a personification (but not a literary fabrication!) of the power of sin, death, and hostility against God. The curse and promise of defeat is not given to snakes per se but to the demonic power that elsewhere is in the Scriptures is spearheaded by the Deceiver, the devil (cf. Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9; 20:2; Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman," 30–54). (2) The genealogical structure in Genesis highlights the line of promise in contrast to the line of destruction. In light of this evidence, it is clear that the "seed of the woman" is not *all* her biological offspring but a "spiritual" remnant within it. For a helpful visual that depicts the line of promise, see T. Desmond Alexander, "From Adam to Judah: The Significance of the Family Tree in Genesis," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989): 7. For more on the use of the תּוֹלְדוֹת formula in Genesis see M. H. Woudstra, "The תּוֹלְדוֹת of the Book of Genesis and Their Redemptive-historical Significance," *Calvin Theological Journal* 5 (1970): 184–89; Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 91–106; Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 55–56.

[26]For the view that all the Abrahamic promises are summed up as descendants, land, and divine blessing, see T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 98–99; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 1987), 258.

[27]Wright's proposed difficulty with Paul shifting from the singular (Gal 3:16) to collective (3:29) usage of "seed" in the span of a single chapter is, therefore,

unwarranted.

28T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 363–67; so too idem, "Seed," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 769; Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 69 n.26. Alexander sees the use of a *weyiqtol* form rather than *weqatal* at the head of Gen 22:17b (וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ "and your seed shall possess . . .") as a substantiation of his view that the זֶרַע referred to in Gen. 22:17b should be read in a way distinct from the זֶרַע in v. 17a ("Further Observations on the Terms 'Seed' in Genesis," 365). Interestingly, in Gen. 22:17b, the LXX did not translate the third-person masculine singular Hebrew pronominal suffix on the substantive אוֹיֵב in the phrase וְיִרַשׁ זַרְעֲךָ אֵת שַׁעַר אֹיְבָיו ("and your seed will possess the gate of his enemies"). As such it is impossible to tell whether the translator understood the phrase to refer to a singular "seed."

29While the Leningrad Codex includes שֹׂנְאָיו ("those hating him"), the Targum, two other Hebrew Mss, and the Samaritan Pentateuch read איביו ("his enemies"), in alignment with Gen 22:17b.

30Support for this claim is suggested by the foundational role that Gen 22:15–18 plays in the rest of the Genesis narrative. Here Yahweh declares on oath that the patriarch will receive the fulfillment of the "descendants, land, and divine blessing" promises because he passed the "test" (22:1), obeying God's voice regarding the sacrifice of Isaac (22:16, 18). This very obedience is then recalled after the restatement of the promise to Isaac in 26:4. God would fulfill the promise to Isaac "because Abraham obeyed" (26:5).

31Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," 261–72.

32See ibid., 269–70. While the verb rendered "to crush" in Ps 72:4 (piel דכא) is not the same as the verb in Gen 3:15 (qal שׁוּף), Hamilton persuasively argues for the link with Genesis in light of (1) the clear echo of the blessing promise in Ps 72:17; (2) the imprecation in Ps 72:9 that "his enemies lick the dust"; and (3) the fact that the piel דכא is used in Ps 89:10[11] for the crushing of "Rahab," who elsewhere is identified with the evil Leviathan (Ps 74:14) and the dragon (Isa 51:9).

33We fully concur with Alexander that "the book of Genesis in its final form anticipates the coming of a king through whom God's blessing will be mediated to all the nations of the earth" ("Royal Expectations in Genesis to Kings", 204). This fact does not deny that Genesis also anticipates the ultimate agent of blessing to the whole world by portraying that God blesses others in less universal ways (e.g., Laban [30:27], Potiphar [39:5], Pharaoh [47:7]) through Abraham and his sons (plural).

34So Tom Thatcher, "The Plot of Gal 3:1–18," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 3 (1997): 410.

35So Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, 159.

36Ibid., 166.

37Cf., with some differences, Collins, "What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" 75–86. Richard B. Hays argues that Paul's argument is "less perverse than it might appear," but he states this not on the basis of seeing an individual "seed" promised in Genesis but in positing a "catch-word" connection between the Abrahamic promises and the Messianic promises made to David in 2 Sam 7:12–14 (*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* [New Haven: Yale University, 1989], 85). However, if indeed the Messianic promises of 2 Samuel are connected to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant (and thus to Paul's exegesis in Galatians 3), it is by means of a progressive flow of redemptive history that is grounded in Gen 3:15 and 22:17b–18, both passages of which anticipate the ruler from the line of Judah (Gen 49:8, 10).

38Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians*, 35.

39On the chart, while the backing for the warrant is a hermeneutical principle, the warrant itself can be defended with exegetical data.

40See the full discussion in Richard N. Longenecker, "The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19–4:7," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 1 (1982): 53–62.

41A reference to the old order of things, which includes the Law. See Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 171, n. 188; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 401.

[42]A babysitter is an imperfect, yet helpful, modern illustration of a child under the authority of another for a limited duration. Another example is our modern notion of the need to abide by parental rules until the "legal" age of eighteen or "as long as you live under my roof."

[43]D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 26.