

**The 386<sup>th</sup> Meeting of  
The Chicago Society of Biblical Research  
April 23, 2022, 2:45 p.m.  
McCormick Theological Seminary**

**Abstracts**

**Genevive Dibley**, Rockford University

**“The Making and Unmaking of Jews in Second Century BCE Literature and the Implication for Interpreting Paul”**

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The primary obstacle to a *Paul within Judaism* reading of the apostle is Paul’s insistence that the gentile converts in Galatia remain uncircumcised. Having encouraged the gentile-Jesus-followers in every other aspect of their lives to act ever more Jewishly, appealing repeatedly to Torah in support of his propositions, Paul’s response to the Galatian’s intention to be circumcised likely was at the time, as it is now, perplexing. Matthew Thiessen has proposed a reading of Paul as an ethnic primordialist believing ethnicity to be an essential, irreducible element of culture as opposed to a malleable societal construct. Since the gentile-Jesus-followers could not be circumcised on the eighth day of their life as dictated by *Genesis* and *Jubilees*, he contends that in the mind of Paul, gentiles by default could not preform *Abrahamic* circumcision. According to Thiessen then, it was not that Paul thought gentile Christ followers *need not* convert to Judaism but that they quite literally *could not* convert to Judaism. Paul’s anti-circumcision position in *Galatians* was not then a negative critique of Judaism but rather a Jewish man’s literal reading of the Law vis-à-vis gentile converts to the Jesus movement.

Thiessen’s theory, however, has difficulty accounting for the vitriol of Paul’s rhetoric in *Galatians* if it was the case that gentile adult circumcision was merely ineffectual. If, as Thiessen contends, gentile circumcision didn’t work to make gentiles Jews, then it would be the case that even if the Galatians had circumcised themselves, they would still have *been* gentiles, just genitally mangled ones. This paper examines Thiessen’s thesis through the lens of Second Temple period narratives that include gentile circumcision as a story element – *I Maccabees*, *Judith*, and *Esther* in addition to *Genesis/Jubilees* – in light of Paul’s desperation to prevent the Galatian converts from circumcising. A close reading of these texts rather suggests that circumcision worked all too well in making gentiles Jews.

**Annette Bourland Huizenga**, University of Dubuque

**“Mothers and Motherhood in the Pauline Letters”**

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In recent decades, the topic of mothering/motherhood in the Roman world and thus in the New Testament has been addressed in a wide range of articles and monographs. This paper examines the Pauline letters more specifically, looking at the social realities and ideologies of mothering expressed in these texts. I also consider how one’s own experiences of mothers, as mothers, with mothers, influences the task of interpretation.

**Jeffrey Stackert**, University of Chicago

**“Relating Creation to Sanctuary Building in P: The Priority of the Priestly Story”**

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Following observations made already in the rabbinic period and buttressed by more recent ancient Near Eastern comparison, a number of scholars have argued that the creation of the world in the pentateuchal Priestly source (P) is only completed in the building of the deity’s sanctuary. Some have also made the related claim that the created world itself serves in P as the deity’s sanctuary. In this paper, I will argue that each of these interpretations is precluded for P by its story. Simply put, P *could have* told such a story, but it did not. In service of this claim, I will offer a reconstruction of the Priestly story itself as well as a literary theorization that supports prioritizing story in the analysis of a work’s component parts, including in instances where comparative evidence is available. Finally, I will show that the distinction between creation and sanctuary proves critical for understanding central aspects of P’s cultic vision—most notably, its pure/impure and sacred/profane dichotomies.