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Andrew C. Perriman

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## The Rhetorical Strategy of Galatians 4:21-5:1

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*We welcome another piece from the pen of Mr Perriman (see 'His body, which is the church . . . ' Coming to Terms with Metaphor', EQ 62, 1990, 123-142). Galatians is something of a test case for Paul's use of rhetorical skills.*

Two main literary questions have exercised commentators on Paul's interpretation of the Abraham narrative in Gal. 4:21-5:1. First, are we dealing essentially with typology or with allegory? Secondly, do the allegorical elements in the passage—if there are any—correspond most nearly to Alexandrian or to Palestinian allegorization?

There appears to be a fairly broad consensus that, despite Paul's own use of the word ἀλληγορούμενα, the fundamental rationale of the passage is typological rather than allegorical, that Paul regards the covenantal aspects of the Abraham narrative as prefigurative of the present conflict between the Spirit and the law, yet that to some extent the details of the typology have been worked out allegorically. So A. T. Hanson argues, for example, that the 'allegory' of Galatians 'is kept strictly within bounds by means of typology'.<sup>1</sup> And Ellis concludes: 'Although following an allegorical form in part, its subject matter places it within the framework of Pauline typology.'<sup>2</sup> The allegorical aspect of the passage, however, raises some serious problems for students who prefer to think of Paul as a responsible and authoritative interpreter of Scripture. How, in particular, can we justify what appears, in the interpretation of Hagar as an allegorical

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<sup>1</sup> A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (London, 1974), 156; cf. F. F. Bruce, 'Abraham Had Two Sons': A Study in Pauline Hermeneutics', in H. L. Drumwright, C. Vaughan (Ed.), *New Testament Studies* (Waco, Texas, 1975), 83.

<sup>2</sup> E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the OT* (Baker, 1957), 130. Note C. H. Cosgrave, 'The Law has given Sarah no Children (Gal. 4:21-30)', *NovT* XXIX, 3, 1987, 221 n. 12: 'The correspondences drawn in vv. 24-27 are, in form, typical of allegory, while Paul's interpretation is informed by the sort of salvation-historical frame of reference that we associate with typology.' Also F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Exeter, 1982), 217: 'he has in mind that form of allegory which is commonly called typology.'

representation of the Sinaitic covenant and the present people of Israel, to be blatant contradiction of biblical history?<sup>3</sup>

Briefly, we may outline three approaches to the problem that scholars have taken. One is to shift the emphasis towards the eschatological and typological dimension, which is the line that A. T. Hanson and Ellis follow.<sup>4</sup> But this amounts to no more than a side-stepping of the problem; in the end it is still necessary to explain why the typological aspect of the historical relationship is presented in so controversial a manner. A second is to argue that although the allegorization is unconvincing to the modern mind, it is nevertheless thoroughly rabbinical and that in this respect Paul is merely a child of his times.<sup>5</sup> A third is that set out by C. K. Barrett in his essay 'The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians'. Barrett's case is founded on the assumption that in 4:21-5:1 and at a number of other points in the central part of Galatians (at least 3:6; 3:10 and 3:16) Paul's intention is to correct what he sees as false interpretations of OT passages promulgated by his opponents in their campaign to impose the law on Gentile Christians. Specifically he argues, on the one hand, that the wording of 4:22-23 (the inclusion of the article before 'slave-woman' and 'free-woman', the omission of the names Hagar and Sarah, for example) indicates that the story was already before the Galatians; and on the other, that it is not a story that Paul would have introduced of his own accord since its surface meaning manifestly supports the position of his opponents. Paul's allegorical interpretation, therefore, which Barrett suggests is at one with the rabbinical technique of *k'min homa'er*, is a product of polemic: it was evoked 'not by a personal love of fantastic exegesis but by a reasoned case which it was necessary that he should answer'.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Note Bruce (*Galatians*, 218): 'In the present "allegory" . . . there is a forcible inversion of the analogy which is unparalleled elsewhere in Paul. Whereas in other typological passages the OT account is left intact, the argument here is up against the historical fact that Isaac was the ancestor of the Jews, whereas Ishmael's descendants were Gentiles.'

<sup>4</sup> A. T. Hanson, *Studies*, 156; Ellis, *Paul's Use*, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. P. C. Hanson (*Allegory and Event* (London, 1959), 82): 'The "similar situation" typology has here been strained and distorted in an unconvincing but highly Rabbinical fashion into allegory'; see also R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, 1975), 127-129.

<sup>6</sup> C. K. Barrett, 'The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians', *Rechtfertigung, Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann* (Mohr and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1976), 13. Cf. H. St. J. Thackeray, quoted in Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis*, 128: 'the arguments by which he tried to convince his opponents of the true meaning of the O.T. as pointing forward to Christ, are those which they would themselves have employed for another purpose; and to some extent we need not doubt that they were selected for that very reason.'

The second question has proved rather less troublesome. In order to indicate the immediate historical background to NT 'allegory' a commonplace distinction needs briefly to be rehearsed between Alexandrian and Palestinian or Rabbinic allegorizing. The former is more elaborate and more extensive, drawing heavily on Greek learning; its purpose is primarily to accommodate the Scriptures to Hellenistic thought and culture. The latter is less common, less systematic, and stays closer to the literal meaning of the text, operating strictly within the single tradition of Yahwistic revelation.<sup>7</sup> The differences between Paul's allegorical method and Alexandrian practice (illustrated most appropriately by Philo's own allegorization of the Abraham-Hagar-Sarah story<sup>8</sup>) have been quite evident. R. P. C. Hanson's comment is representative: 'Paul is not here trying to emancipate the meaning of the passage from its historical content and transmute it into a moral sentiment or a philosophical truth, which is the almost invariable function of Alexandrian allegory.' In his opinion Paul drew upon a Palestinian tradition of allegory as an 'aid to typology', as a means of interpreting historical detail rather than of displacing it.<sup>9</sup>

Without wishing to pass facile judgment on such brief reconstructions of these different views, we would suggest, nevertheless, that the conclusions reached have been founded on an inadequate grasp of the literary and argumentative structure of the pericope. It is this inadequacy which accounts for the widespread discomfiture of scholarly opinion in relation to this passage—both for the persistent feeling, despite the best efforts of apologists, that Paul has done something underhand, and for the fact that it has been much easier to demonstrate a lack of affinity with Alexandrian practice than continuity with Palestinian. This is not to say, of course, that the passage has hitherto been totally misunderstood; only that one is rather left with the impression that it has been understood despite itself.

### **The structure of the text**

The 'allegory' of Abraham and his two wives stands as a clearly defined unit within the central portion of the letter to the Galatians, introduced by the appeal, 'Tell me, those of you wishing to be under

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<sup>7</sup> See F. Büchsel, ἀλληγορέω, *TDNT* 260–263; R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 11–64; A. T. Hanson, *Studies*, 159–160; Ellis, *Paul's Use*, 51–52.

<sup>8</sup> See Ellis, *Paul's Use*, 53 n. 2; Barrett, 'Allegory', 11 n. 24; G. W. H. Lampe, K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology* (London, 1957), 52f.

<sup>9</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 82–83.

the law, do you not hear the law?' The internal structure of the passage, however, and the precise manner of Paul's argument are complex, to the point of being incoherent and obscure in the view of many commentators. At the start, then, it is worth setting out the text and indicating briefly what appear to be the main logical or discursive partitions.

Tell me, those of you wishing to be under law, do you not hear the law?

A. 22 For it has been written that Abraham has two sons, one from the slave-woman and one from the free-woman. 23 But while the one from the slave-woman has been born according to the flesh, the one from the free-woman through a promise;

B. 24 which things are expressed in an allegory, for these (women) are two covenants: one from mount Sinai, giving birth into slavery, which is Hagar. 25 The Hagar-Sinai mount is in Arabia; but it stands in line with the now Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

26 The above Jerusalem is free, which is our mother; 27 for it has been written,

Rejoice, O barren one who does not give birth,  
break forth and cry, you who are not in travail;  
because the children of the desolate one will be more  
than of the one who has the husband.

28 You, brethren, like Isaac are children of a promise.

C. 29 But just as then the one born according to the flesh persecuted the one according to the Spirit, so also now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? 'Throw out the slave-woman and her son; for the son of the slave-woman shall never inherit with the son of the free-woman.' 31 So, brethren, we are not children of a slave-woman but of the free-woman. 1 For freedom Christ set us free; stand firm then, and do not be held fast again by a yoke of slavery.

A) The story is told in vv. 22–23 with conciseness and with an eye for its symmetries; unusually for Paul, it is not a direct quotation but a summary, prefaced by the less common formula γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι . . . .<sup>10</sup> It is clear, moreover, that the form of the summary has been

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rom. 3:10; 4:17; 8:36; 1 Cor. 14:21; Gal. 3:10. Betz argues that Paul is alluding to a tradition: 'Paul's text consists of quotations from LXX and Jewish Haggadic material in Greek translation; he does not make any distinction between the two'

determined not so much by the structure and development of the OT narrative as by a desire to align the two sons and their mothers antithetically. In order to achieve this precise patterning not only have a number of incidental features of the story been excluded but also two significant details have been added: first, the son of the slave-woman (παυδίσκη; cf. Gn. 16:1, 21:10 LXX) is said to have been born 'according to the flesh' (κατὰ σάρκα: the use of the term is perhaps explained by 3:3) in contrast to the child born through the promise (δι' ἐπαγγελίας; cf. Gn. 21:1; Rom. 9:9); secondly, Sarah, who is not mentioned by name, is specifically described, in contrast to the slave-woman, as a 'free-woman' (ἐλευθέρω).

B) The second section of the passage begins with a statement of rhetorical method: 'these things are allegories' (ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα); the two women are said to be two covenants. The subsequent verses, through to v. 28, are a development of the allegory and fall into two parts in line with the basic antitheses of the story: one covenant is plotted along the axis *Hagar-Sinai-the now Jerusalem* (vv. 24:25); the other, less clearly, along the parallel axis *Isaac-promise-the above Jerusalem* (vv. 26-28). Although it is more usual for v. 28 to be taken as the beginning of the next paragraph,<sup>11</sup> there are good reasons for thinking that it belongs with the two verses that precede it. First, the development of the second covenantal theme is incomplete without some indication of the basis and nature of the covenant, corresponding to the allegorical association of Hagar with the Sinaitic covenant in v. 24. The description of the Galatians as 'like Isaac . . . children of a promise' meets this need: 'promise' is here anarthrous because it is not the same promise as that given to Abraham, but it represents a covenantal continuity with it. It is explained by 3:14: it is the promise of the Spirit. We might ask, however, why it is Isaac who is named as the antithesis to Hagar and not Sarah. The most likely reason is that,

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(H. D. Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia, 1979), 239; cf. 241-242). But the antitheses are so characteristically Pauline that there appears no good reason for thinking that Paul did not construct the summary himself.

<sup>11</sup> See eg. Betz, *Galatians*, 238, where ἀλλά appears to have been transferred from v. 29 to v. 28; Bruce, *Galatians*, 214; RSV. Cosgrave argues that in Paul the address ἀδελφοί with δὲ 'signals typically a new departure' and as a result he maintains that v. 28 does not serve as the conclusion to the allegory (Cosgrave, 'The Law', 222f). The significance of this is that he draws a sharp line between the 'allegory' of vv. 22-27 and the 'typology' of vv. 28-30 and insists that as far as the allegory is concerned it is only the Hagar side that is of any real interest to Paul. However, the force of his argument is weakened if we recognize that in only two of the seventeen other instances of ἀδελφοί used as an address are the brethren (ὕμεις) the subject of the sentence (1 Thes. 2:14; 5:4). In neither case do we clearly have a new subject broached.

while it is Hagar who, within the terms of the OT narrative, is most clearly associated with slavery, it is Isaac who is the proper embodiment of the promise. Secondly, although no formal parallelism exists between the two axes, there is, on the one hand, a functional correspondence between συστοιχεί (v. 25), associating Hagar with the Jews, and κατὰ (v. 28), which relates Isaac with the Galatian believers, and on the other, a verbal connection established through the repetition of τέκνα. Thirdly, the rhetorical logic of the verse, in explicitly identifying believers with Isaac, is closer to that of the allegory than to that of the 'just as then . . . so also now . . .' argument that follows.

C) In vv. 29–30 there is a return to the original story, incorporating, however, what we may provisionally term a typological argument ('just as then . . . so also now . . .'), which provides the immediate hermeneutic basis for importing the quotation in v. 30 into the contemporary context. 4:31–5:1, recalling the terms of the allegory, concludes the passage.

### **The starting point**

The question that needs to be asked is, Can we identify the starting-point for the development of Paul's thought in this passage? At first sight it would seem natural to suppose that he began with a broad conception of the Abraham story much as it is summarized in vv. 22–23 and with a sense of its allegorical and typological possibilities, which he proceeds to expound either for his own or for polemical reasons. This, roughly speaking, is the assumption that most commentators make. There are, however, good reasons for thinking that such an approach is misleading and that it is the specific quotation in v. 30 of Gn. 21:10 that has determined the development of the argument. In the first place, the question that introduces the quotation ('But what does the Scripture say?') gives the verse considerable prominence and suggests, more importantly, that it stands as the basic answer to the question with which the pericope began: 'Do you not hear the law?' It is significant that this is the only point at which Paul quotes directly from the Abraham narrative: it is the idea on which his attention is focused.<sup>12</sup> Further, the quotation

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<sup>12</sup> The verse in the LXX reads: ἔβαλε τὴν παιδίσκην ταύτην, καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτῆς; οὐ γὰρ μὴ κληρονομήσει ὁ υἱὸς τῆς παιδίσκης ταύτης μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαάκ. Paul's most significant modification is to substitute μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἑλευθέρου μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ μου Ἰσαάκ. The main reason for doing so is that his argument requires that it should be 'Scripture' which speaks (God in effect

draws together several of the leading motifs around which Paul developed his argument in the section 3:1–4:11: the Abrahamic context (3:6–9, 11, 14, 16–18, 29); the slavery/freedom antithesis (3:23–4:11); and the idea of inheritance (3:15–18, 29–4:7). But above all, it gives succinct and dramatic expression to Paul's deepest and most anxious concern, that the Galatians should reject slavery and hold fast to freedom (cf. 5:1).

If this supposition is sound, then we need to take note of certain important corollaries. First, if we regard v. 30 as the logical-point of Paul's thought, then Barrett's argument that his allegorization is polemical, a refutation of Judaizing exegesis, is no longer appropriate because the passage is seen to be, fundamentally, not a reinterpretation of the Abraham narrative but a demonstration of its applicability to the contemporary situation. The details of this view will be set out later, though we might at this point briefly consider whether it was ever really plausible to think that the Judaizers made use of the Hagar-Sarah story. One difficulty at least is that the contrast between the two sons gives no useful basis for the Judaizing arguments in favour of imposing either circumcision or the Mosaic law on Gentile believers: on the one hand, Ishmael was circumcised as well as Isaac (Gn. 17:25–27), a fact not missed in the rabbinic writings,<sup>13</sup> and on the other, the story has no immediate connection with the giving of the law. It is, therefore, only on the basis of direct physical descent that Isaac can be associated with the Sinaitic covenant and the 'new Jerusalem', but then such a basis must perforce *exclude* Gentiles, whether they kept the law or not.

Secondly, the main point of the quotation is the exclusion of the slave-woman and her son from the inheritance: the verbs 'throw out' and 'shall never inherit' mark a clearly defined relationship between the two sides—the priority of the free over the enslaved. This is not the case with the summary of the Abraham story in vv. 22–23, where the emphasis is on the antithetical pattern and the relationship between the two sides—the dynamic of rejection is no more than implicit in the contrasts. It is because of this that the allegorical interpretation deriving from it has tended to be understood in historical terms, as a matter of *descent*, whether literal or allegorical, and it is thus that confusion has been sown.

Thirdly, vv. 22–29 must be considered in the light of this objective,

endorsed Sarah's demand: Gn. 21:12); that Isaac is referred to as the 'son of the free-woman' rather than as the son of Sarah reflect Paul's interest in the covenantal aspects of the story.

<sup>13</sup> See quotations in R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas, 1990), 202–203.

as explicating the interpretive grounds for the proper understanding of the quotation.

### **‘These things are expressed in an allegory**

The statement ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα refers back to the summary of vv. 22–23, but it is explained at the same time by the causal clause attached to it: ‘for (γάρ) these women are two covenants’. This is a simple observation, but its implications are significant. As we have seen already, the story of Abraham and his two wives has not only been summarized in vv. 22–23, it has also been rhetorically shaped in such a way as to establish a precise antithetical patterning which is only partly evident in the original narrative. The aspects of the narrative, however, to which Paul draws attention by means of this superimposed patterning are just those which we would understand as covenantal (slavery/freedom, flesh/promise); both the omission of the names of Hagar and Sarah in favour of descriptive references and the perfect tense γεγέννηται underline this shift away from the historical towards the abstract and supratemporal. In other words, the ‘allegory’, as Paul explains it, belongs not so much to the original narrative as to his restatement of it. Moreover, that ἅτινά refers back to Paul’s immediate reconstruction rather than to the more remote scriptural text might also be taken to account for the use of the present participle. For the action that lies behind it is not the original writing of the Scripture, for which a perfect or aorist would have been more appropriate, but Paul’s present *rewriting* of it.<sup>14</sup>

Up to this point, therefore, the allegorical interpretation consists reasonably in a two stage process: first, the intrinsic, but partly implicit, covenantal aspects of the two births are brought to the surface; secondly, the two women are cast as the explicit representations of these covenantal aspects. At the heart of the allegory lies a metonymic transfer, in which Hagar stands for the theological implications of the birth; and it is this which elicits the ‘under-

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<sup>14</sup> E. de Witt Burton (*The Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh, 1921), 254–256) deals at some length with the problem presented by the tense of the participle and comes to the conclusion that the apostle is speaking ‘not of what the passage meant as uttered by the original writer, but of the meaning conveyed by the passage as it stands’ (256). But such a distinction seems foreign to Paul and is in any case unnecessary. The problem, of course, lies not in the present tense alone (cf. τί λέγει ἡ γραφή in v.30) but in the fact that the participle also describes a special hermeneutical activity that goes beyond the customary impersonal ascription to Scripture.

sense'.<sup>15</sup> The question is whether what follows introduces extrinsic elements into the allegory.

If we suppose that the words 'one from Mount Sinai' (μία . . . ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ) in the second part of v. 24 refer to Hagar—on the grounds that Paul continues, 'giving birth into slavery'—then immediately the allegory is rendered more complex and puzzling.<sup>16</sup> It could as well be argued, however, that the reference is to one of the covenants and that the participle clause ('giving birth into slavery') is a metaphorical description of it.<sup>17</sup> The clause ἥτις ἐστὶν Ἀγάρ, therefore, serves not as a literal identification of one of the women but as a means of 'allegorically' associating the covenant with Hagar.

The point is not otiose. That the subject of the participle (and the referent of μία) is the covenant rather than the woman is, in fact, evident from the present tense of the participle: Hagar had only one child, but the law still gives birth into slavery. Yet it is the woman who is more properly described as 'giving birth into slavery', particularly in the context of Paul's preceding summary. What we have, therefore, is a convergence of the two ideas in the logical structure of the metaphor: while the subject is the covenant, the vehicle is a borrowing from the network of ideas associated with the woman. Hagar and Sinai are brought together through an involution of the allegory in metaphor, but all that has been added is an alignment of the specific 'covenant' that underlay Ishmael's birth with the broader idea of the Sinaitic covenant. The basis for the alignment is encapsulated with remarkable economy in the mediating metaphor: Hagar literally and the law metaphorically 'give birth into slavery'.<sup>18</sup> (Further evidence for the decisive mediatory role of the slavery motif may be found in the use of ἥτις if the pronoun here means (following M. Zerwick) 'which, as such', pointing thus to the quality expressed in the antecedent clause. The identification of Hagar with the Sinaitic covenant would then rest quite overtly on the analogy embodied in the words 'giving birth into slavery'.) Within the frame of Paul's argument this alignment is not a deduction but a presupposition. If, however, the subject of μία . . . ἀπὸ ὄρους Σινᾶ is taken to be the woman, then the participle clause no longer serves an explanatory, mediating role and we are left to find some other basis for the association—in terms of a

<sup>15</sup> The term 'undersense', a translation of Plato's word for allegory, ὑπόνοια, is Tate's ('Plato and Allegorical Interpretation' CQ XXIII, 45; cited in R. P. C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event*, 56).

<sup>16</sup> Eg. Bruce, *Galatians*, 219.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 244.

<sup>18</sup> *Biblical Greek* (Rome, 1963), §218.

historical or etymological link between Hagar and Sinai, for example.

Within the terms of Paul's theology, therefore, the association of Hagar with Sinai can be made quite intelligible: the human covenant that she represents, the contract that produced Ishmael, is continuous with the Sinaitic covenant *inasmuch as both express the principle of slavery*. This does not mean, however, that there is nothing odd in the conjunction; indeed the manner in which Paul develops his argument in v. 24 gives us some grounds for thinking that the historical contradiction lurking behind the theological continuity is neither an accident nor an embarrassment but an important aspect of his argumentative strategy. A careful reading suggests that the precise identification of the covenant is withheld until the end of the sentence in order to give it a structural emphasis, one which is accentuated further by the anticipatory hint in the participle clause ('giving birth into slavery') and by the fact that the slave-woman is now named. The best explanation for this would seem to be that the affront to biblical history, though secondary within the total context, is nevertheless intentional. Rhetorically it functions as an exegetical 'impertinence', similar to the semantic impertinence of metaphor, that gives rise to a new basis of interpretation.<sup>19</sup> Paul means the identification to be an affront and is well aware of the historical absurdity it entails: as such it stands also as a sharp retort—a poke in the eye—to the Judaizers. But by means of the absurdity he achieves both the breakdown of the old dominant set of interpretative rules based on the flesh and the construction of a new pertinence, a new set of rules, based on covenant. It is in this respect that the strategy is inspired by polemic, adapted to Judaizing opposition: we might suppose that the argument would not have been framed in this way if it were meant simply as an uncontentious statement of the principles of Christian freedom.

### **'The Hagar-Sinai mountain'**

It has usually been assumed that in v. 25 Paul is endeavouring to justify his allegorical interpretation of Hagar as the Sinaitic covenant;

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<sup>19</sup> According to Paul Ricoeur metaphor is a two-fold predicative process, consisting first of the calculated breakdown of meaning through 'semantic impertinence' (through the misattribution of a predicate), then of the construction of a new and novel sense (a 'semantic innovation') through the action of resemblance (see eg. P. Ricoeur, 'The Metaphorical Process', *Semeia* 4, 1975, 78–80; P. Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London, 1975), 151–152. Also A. C. Perriman, '“His Body, which is the Church . . .” Coming to Terms with Metaphor', *EQ*. LXII, 2, 1990, 125–126.

and he has been vilified for his pains. ‘What he offers as proof . . .,’ Betz chides, ‘has strained the credulity of the readers beyond what many people can bear.’<sup>20</sup> Is the complaint fair?

That the article in this verse is neuter when Ἀγὰρ is feminine (τὸ δὲ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Ἀραβίᾳ) is puzzling and requires explanation.<sup>21</sup> Betz notices the fact and argues that Paul has in mind specifically the name ‘Hagar’.<sup>22</sup> This, however, would either imply that Paul meant ‘Mount Sinai’ to be substitutable for ‘Hagar’, which is clearly inappropriate, or it would entail the tenuous philological argument that ‘Hagar’ corresponds to the Arabic word for ‘mountain’, an argument which does not in any case establish the link with Sinai; and there is still the problem of Hagar being identified with both the covenant, which is *from* Mount Sinai, and Mount Sinai itself. A more traditional variant of Betz’s view, according to which Ἀγὰρ with the neuter article is a quotation from the preceding verse, is open to the same objections.<sup>23</sup> (Cosgrave frankly admits that as support for the thesis of the preceding verse v. 25a is obscure.<sup>24</sup>) A further difficulty faced by any interpretation that takes Σινᾶ ὄρος as a predicate is that the word order would be exceptional. Throughout both the LXX and the NT (including the preceding verse) ὄρος comes before the name, with only some variation with regard to the article.<sup>25</sup> The inversion here suggests an unconventional construction.

We would propose instead, therefore, either that the neuter article attaches quite properly to ὄρος, or that it is used, without particular reference to the gender of ὄρος, in order to introduce a

<sup>20</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 244. He also quotes Nietzsche’s outraged ascription: ‘this unheard-of philological farce in regard to the Old Testament’.

<sup>21</sup> The variant readings that are exegetically most significant, in which the name ‘Hagar’ is omitted (τὸ δὲ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν . . . and τὸ γὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος ἐστὶν), would still be compatible with this interpretation since Σινᾶ ὄρος would be understood as a reference to the terms of the ‘allegory’. However, the longer and more difficult reading is in any case to be preferred. See Betz, *Galatians*, 244–245; Bruce, *Galatians*, 219; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 198.

<sup>22</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 244–245 and n. 65.

<sup>23</sup> See eg. W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT* (Chicago, 1958/79), s.v. ὄ 8.b; F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1961), §267(1). It is worth noting that unlike this verse the two other instances cited by Bauer (Eph. 4:9; Heb. 12:27) are both references to OT quotations.

<sup>24</sup> Cosgrave, ‘The Law’, 229.

<sup>25</sup> This appears to be a universal rule with the only exception being ὄρος τὸ ὄρος (‘Mount Hor’, eg. Nu. 20:22), accounted for by the fact that the Hebrew *har* means ‘mountain’ so that the name has a certain idiomatic oddity. Heb. 12:22 (Σιών ὄρει καὶ πόλει) is not an exception.

syntactically anomalous expression.<sup>26</sup> In either case, τὸ . . . Ἄγὰρ Σινᾶ ὄρος may be taken as a composite reference to the conceptual fusion of the allegory so that the sentence should be translated: the 'Hagar-Sinai mountain' (or perhaps 'Hagar-Mount Sinai') is in Arabia. This explains the unusual word order: Σινᾶ is not now simply the name of the mountain but part of a rhetorically more complex qualification emerging out of the allegory. A further minor benefit that arises with this reading is that we do not now feel the absence of a corresponding mountain on the other side of the antithesis since Paul is concerned with Mount Sinai only as a metonymy for the Mosaic covenant, not as a mountain in Arabia with which Hagar is allegorically identified.<sup>27</sup>

It might be claimed, of course, with Bruce that a statement of this sort would do no more than provide irrelevant geographical information.<sup>28</sup> But if we set it in relation to what follows, a more significant line of argument appears, one, moreover, which gives us further reason for thinking that the misuse of the Scriptures inherent in Paul's development of his allegory is intentional. By stressing the association of the Hagar-Sinai motif with Arabia he further undermines the obvious biblical-historical connection between the Sinaitic covenant and the people of Israel, replacing it with one of 'correspondence', expressed in the verb συστοιχεῖ in the following sentence, which mediates the contrast between the two locations.<sup>29</sup> The reason for doing so is that his argument is worked out not in terms of the historical continuity—embodied in the Mosaic covenant—between Sinai and the Jews of Paul's time (the 'impertinence' of

<sup>26</sup> Cf. C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of NT Greek* (Cambridge, 1953/59), 110: 'The neuter article provides, like inverted commas, a way of indicating that a whole clause is to be treated as a single entity—as a kind of composite noun . . .' He lists as examples of the use with verbal expressions Mk. 9:23; Gal. 6:9; Rom. 8:26; 1 Cor. 4:6, and with adverbial phrases Rom. 9:5; 12:18. However, no example of a comparable nominal expression is forthcoming, and to this extent the present argument is a purely intrinsic one.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce suggests that the Jerusalem above is seen as Mount Zion and thus the antithetical structure is completed (*Galatians*, 220). Longenecker, on the other hand, takes the lacuna in the chiasmus as evidence of a desire on Paul's part to avoid the too historical overtones that the Galatian Judaizers might have found in an explicit reference to Mount Zion (*Galatians*, 214).

<sup>28</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 219. Bruce's reading 'Hagar corresponds to Mount Sinai in Arabia' does not in fact escape the irrelevance objection. Why are we told that the mountain is in Arabia?

<sup>29</sup> It is unlikely that ἐν τῇ Ἄραβίᾳ belongs to a polemic against the idea of the promised land along the lines of Stephen's speech in Acts 7. Paul is concerned with Sinai not as a soteriological or revelatory event but as representing a covenant of slavery; it would have been contrary to his purposes but to associate it with the Gentiles.

the identification of Hagar with the Sinaitic covenant has already overturned this), but as a tactical redefinition, an enforced change of perspective.<sup>30</sup> Coming at the beginning of the sentence *ουστοιχεῖ* is emphatic and the *δὲ* should be accorded an adversative force: a contrast is intended between, on the one hand, the dissociation of Sinai and the present Jerusalem entailed quite deliberately in the assertion that Hagar-Sinai is in Arabia and, on the other, the emergence of an underlying correspondence based on the idea of slavery. V. 25 might, therefore, be paraphrased: 'This Hagar-Sinai concept, as I have constructed it, cannot of course be connected directly with the present Jerusalem, hence its symbolically appropriate association with Arabia should be underlined (indeed *both* Hagar and Sinai were in Arabia<sup>31</sup>); but there is an analogical connection nevertheless in that Jerusalem is also in slavery with her children.' Again it is the children/slavery motif that provides the common ground; and again it is merely presupposed, it is not itself an inference from the allegory.

Finally, the description of the present Jerusalem as being 'in slavery with her children' has the same double rhetorical function as the 'giving birth into slavery' clause in v. 24. Hagar is not only the allegorical representation of the Sinaitic covenant and the temporal Jerusalem that corresponds to it: she also serves as a *metaphor* for both.

### 'The Jerusalem above'

The second part of the antithesis is set out less concisely in vv. 26–28. The shift is signalled by the contrast between 'now Jerusalem', which is in slavery with her children, and the 'above Jerusalem', which is free.<sup>32</sup> The argument then works back from here towards the

<sup>30</sup> Against Betz (*Galatians*, 246): 'Because it is based upon the Sinai covenant, the "present Jerusalem" . . . can be associated with "Sinai/Hagar"'. But as far as Paul's argument is concerned, the correspondence is grounded only in the children-slavery idea. Note that the subject of *δουλεύει* is not Hagar but Jerusalem; it contrasts with the immediately following statement in v. 26 that 'the above Jerusalem is free'.

<sup>31</sup> The significance of the OT verse immediately preceding that quoted in v. 30 is not commonly noted. Gen. 21:9 reads, 'Having seen the son of Hagar *the Egyptian*, who was born to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac, Sarah said to Abraham, "Throw out . . ."'. That such a designation of Hagar is found in the text that provided the logical basis for Paul's argument here must at least partly account for the association of Hagar-Sinai with Arabia.

<sup>32</sup> That Paul does not insert an *ἀλλὰ* between v. 25 and v. 26 but allows the switch to be signalled by the parallelism alone reflects the fact that vv. 24–28 are not part of an argument as such but merely set out the respective allegories.

allegory. A couple of specific points can be noted briefly. First, although the Jerusalem above is said to be 'our mother', Sarah is not mentioned by name. More important is the simile, 'like Isaac' (κατὰ Ἰσαάκ) in v. 28, which is the functional equivalent of both the Hagar metaphor ('giving birth to slavery') and the verb συστοιχεῖ in the first part of the antithesis. Again it is paradigmatic relationships based on covenant that dominate, expressed here in the simile, not historical-exegetical relationships. Secondly, it seems likely that the value of the quotation from Is. 54:1, which in its original context referred to the former and future Jerusalems,<sup>33</sup> lies in the fact that it provides a remarkably apposite expression for the merging of the Abrahamic and Zionist themes: it mediates rhetorically, if not logically, between v. 26 (the Jerusalem above is our mother) and v. 28 (like Isaac we are children of a promise).

#### **'Throw out the slave woman and her son'**

With v. 29 the rhetorical development of the passage changes course. The purpose of Paul's argument up to this point has been to establish, by means of what he calls an 'allegory', the covenantal background to the quotation in v. 30 and the precedence, from his point of view, of that background over the historical. This allegory has consisted, on the one hand, of a metonymic association of Hagar and Isaac with the 'covenantal' circumstances of the respective births, which is what has given the appearance of allegory, and, on the other, of the assumption, embodied in the metaphor 'giving birth into slavery', that there is a *real* continuity between these particular covenants and the eschatological covenants of flesh and Spirit. In v. 29, however, Paul makes explicit the functional correspondence between the plot of the Abraham narrative and the contemporary situation. This is achieved most decisively through the analogical argument ('just as then . . . so also now'); but the introduction of the idea of 'persecution' (which should not be understood as a literal description of the relationship between Isaac and Ishmael but as a retroactive transfer of a term more appropriate to the contemporary context<sup>34</sup>) and the change from 'promise' to 'Spirit' are also important. κατὰ πνεῦμα has displaced κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν by what Burton calls 'a species of trajectory': the reference is to the birth

<sup>33</sup> See Bruce, *Galatians*, 222; also Cosgrave, 'The Law', 230f.

<sup>34</sup> The reference is presumably to the description of Ishmael παίζοντα μετὰ Ἰσαάκ in Gen. 21:9, perhaps as interpreted by rabbinical tradition (see especially Longenecker, *Galatians*, 201–202, 217; also Bruce, *Galatians*, 223–224; R. Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, 1988), 213); again it is significant that this immediately precedes the verse that is quoted in v. 30.

through promise but the terminology has been borrowed from the Christian context in order to reinforce the analogy.<sup>35</sup>

Thus Paul has demonstrated both the manner in which he intends Gn. 21: 10 to be interpreted and the grounds for applying it to the Galatian situation. The injunction to ‘throw out the slave woman and her son’ refers primarily neither to the Judaizers nor to the Jews<sup>36</sup> but, according to the terms of the allegory, to the Sinaitic covenant and its tradition of enslavement. The reason for rejecting the Sinaitic covenant is that inheritance is not through the law and the flesh but through promise and the Spirit.

### Conclusions

Exegesis of this passage has been complex and it is worth now recapitulating the general argument and drawing the necessary conclusions with regard to its rhetorical form.

We have argued that the determinative allusion to Scripture in this passage is not the paraphrase of vv. 22–23 but the quotation of v. 30. This point is crucial because it makes it clear that the ‘allegorization’ in the passage serves an argument not for descent—that believers are descendants of Sarah, Jews and Judaizers of Hagar—but for exclusion—that those who are children of a promise should reject the Sinaitic covenant and its implications. Hagar, the Sinaitic covenant, and the present Jerusalem can be lined up together not because of any historical or geographical connection but because they all in one way or another (Hagar stands at the head as being a metaphor for the others) ‘give birth into slavery’. Similarly, Isaac, the covenant of promise, and the Jerusalem above correspond not by virtue of any external relationship but because they have to do with freedom. And whatever the particular historical circumstances may be, freedom must always ‘cast out’ slavery.

The purpose of the passage leading up to v. 30, therefore, is to demonstrate i) the covenantal implications of the contrast between the enslaved woman and child and the free woman and child; and ii) what we might call the ‘typological’, or perhaps better symbolic,

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<sup>35</sup> See Burton, *Galatians*, 266. Fung has misunderstood Burton here and argues instead that *κατὰ πνεῦμα* refers to the fact that it was the Spirit that made the promise effectual (*Galatians*, 214).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, 251; Bruce, *Galatians*, 225; Longenecker (*Galatians*, 217) says that ‘here in v. 30 Paul calls for the expulsion of the Judaizers who had come into the Galatian congregations from the outside’; Barrett (‘Allegory’, 13) argues that the command is addressed to God’s angelic agents to throw out (at the judgment) those who have insisted on keeping the law.

applicability of Gn. 21:10 to the contemporary situation.<sup>37</sup> When Paul says in v. 24 ἅτινα ἐστὶν ἀλληγορούμενα, he is referring not directly to Scripture but to his summary restatement of the story of Abraham and his two wives in vv. 22–23. In this restatement the historical figures involved have already moved into the background and attention has shifted towards the underlying covenantal antithesis. Paul is aware that in order to maintain what he sees to be a continuity at this covenantal level (slavery versus freedom) between the OT situation and that of the Galatians he must perpetrate a historical solecism. But this solecism or impertinence has an important rhetorical function inasmuch as it brings about within the context of his argument the breakdown of a conventional understanding, just as the ‘semantic impertinence’ of metaphor within the context of the particular discourse abolishes conventional meaning: out of the breakdown emerges new understanding.

If this is correct, then it is clearly inappropriate to think that the logic of Paul’s argument can be explained simply by assimilating it to standard contemporary categories: it may be a useful historical judgment to associate Paul with rabbinic allegorization, but it is not of much help exegetically. He is not allegorizing after the manner of either Philo or the rabbis because the allegorical details serve only to make explicit (and of course provocative!) what has already emerged in his paraphrase of the OT story. The rhetorical strategy is complex, but once dismantled it can be seen to be both correct and startling.

### Abstract

Paul’s ‘allegorical’ treatment of the Abraham narrative in Gal. 4:21–5:1, and in particular his identification of Hagar with the Sinaitic covenant, has often caused embarrassment for commentators who like to think of him as an intelligent and responsible exegete. It is contended here that the difficulties have arisen because Paul’s argumentative strategy has been misconstrued. Whereas it has generally been supposed that he has either chosen or has had forced upon him an argument from historical descent, it is suggested that his allegory is meant only to demonstrate the covenantal applicability of the command to ‘throw out the slave woman and her son’ to the Galatian situation. The historical ‘impertinence’ that this entails is neither irresponsible nor unintelligent but a deliberate and provocative rhetorical move.

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<sup>37</sup> On the difficulties with the category ‘typology’ in the context of Paul’s letters see A. C. Perriman, ‘Typology in Paul’, *Theology* XC, May 1987.